

Athirat, Asherah, Ashratu,
A Reassessment According to the Textual Sources

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation was undertaken partially in response to previous studies on the goddess Asherah. These studies have tended to gather together information from the various cultures in which 'Asherah' appears, and the information is generally presented as a portrait of the goddess. This dissertation approaches the problem from a different perspective. The primary issue addressed is: did the goddess 'Asherah' develop in the same way in all the cultures in which she appears? In order to answer this question, this study considers the evidence as contained in the written records of the first two millennia B.C.E.

The mythology preserved in the tablets written by Elimelek in ancient Ugarit is the primary source of information on the goddess Athirat. After considering this mythology, it should be possible to examine Athirat's role in other mythologies, and to attempt to distil her essential characteristics and nature.

Within the Ugaritic mythology of Elimelek, she appears most active in the 'Palace of Baal' episode in the Baal Cycle. In this culture Athirat appears primarily in relationship to other gods. She is the consort of El, the head of the pantheon. In the Elimelek tablets her title is *rbt atrt ym*. This title indicates an unspecified relationship with the sea. She is the mother of the gods but does not, however, appear as an amorphous 'mother goddess'. Her role as a mother is limited to divine children and royal children. She appears to be the *rabîtu*, the 'queen mother'. Although Athirat is associated with the head of the pantheon, she maintains a connection with mortal women. This may account for her emblem, which is a spindle.

In the Ugaritic tablets without a colophon by Elimelek, Athirat also appears. She is mentioned in the myth Shachar and Shalim, in text 114, and in ritual texts. Her small role in these texts adds no substantial characteristics to what may be discerned in the Elimelek tablets.

A goddess Asherah may appear in the Old Testament. Certain passages seem to require a goddess interpretation for the word *asherah*. In other texts *asherah* designates a cultic object. If Asherah does appear as a goddess in the Old Testament, her characteristics are difficult to discern. She does not, however, appear as the consort of Baal or as a fertility goddess.

Ashratu appears in Mesopotamian sources. The information within these texts are our oldest records of the goddess, and point to her Amorite origins. She is the consort of Amurru and she is connected with the steppe. That she had a temple and active cultus is amply attested in the materials. Ashratu is also attested in a Hittite version of a Canaanite myth. She is known from a number of Epigraphic South Arabian inscriptions. These inscriptions may point to a solar nature in that culture.

The Khirbet el-Qôm and Kuntillet 'Ajrûd inscriptions may refer to a goddess Asherah, but more likely they denote a cultic object. Their interpretation is uncertain since they cannot be explained adequately with our present knowledge of Hebrew grammar.

Conclusions are drawn on the basis of the information available from these individual cultures, each within its own context.

To Kay

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My first debt of gratitude belongs to my wife, Kay Stephenson. Not only did she put aside her own academic ambitions so that I could pursue mine, she enthusiastically agreed to move abroad for these three years after only four months of marriage. She has supported me financially and intellectually during the course of my work, listened whilst I rambled on about my dissertation, and even proofread the manuscript. Her help in translating French materials made a difficult task enjoyable. It is to her that I dedicate this work; my debt to her is greater than I am able to reflect here.

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I composed the thesis here presented. The Hebrew Text upon which the translations are based is that of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Ugaritic texts are cited according to the numbering of *KTU*, unless no such numbering is yet available. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

All that was common-place -- all that belonged to the every-day world -- was melted away and obliterated in those dreams of imagination, which only remembered with advantage the points of grace and dignity that distinguished Flora from the generality of her sex, not the particulars which she held in common with them. Edward was, in short, in the fair way of creating a goddess out of a high-spirited, accomplished, and beautiful young woman. . .

- Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley*

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	v
Chapter One: Preliminary Considerations and Review of Previous Scholarship	1
1.A. Introduction	1
1.B. Method	4
1.C. The Primacy of the Ugaritic Information on Athirat	6
1.D. Review of the State of Scholarship	10
1.D.i. M. B. Brink	13
1.D.ii. W. Louie	18
1.D.iii. V. L. Piper	20
1.D.iv. J. M. Hadley	22
1.D.v. M. S. Smith	24
1.E. Iconography	27
Chapter Two: Athirat in the Elimelek Tablets of Ugarit	29
2.A. Keret (<i>KTU</i> 1.14-1.16)	29
2.B. The Baal Cycle (<i>KTU</i> 1.1-6)	39
2.B.i. Baal and Yam	40
2.B.ii. The Palace of Baal	50
2.B.iii. Baal and Mot	88
2.C. Conclusions	98
Chapter Three: Other Ugaritic Texts Referring to Athirat	101
3.A. Shachar and Shalim and Mythological Fragments	102
3.A.i. Shachar and Shalim (<i>KTU</i> 1.23)	102
3.A.ii. <i>KTU</i> 1.8	109
3.A.iii. <i>KTU</i> 1.12	110
3.A.iv. <i>KTU</i> 1.114	112
3.A.v. RIH 78/20	115
3.B. Texts associated with Ritual	117
3.B.i. <i>KTU</i> 1.39	117
3.B.ii. <i>KTU</i> 1.41 and 1.87	118
3.B.iii. <i>KTU</i> 1.46 and 1.65	120
3.B.iv. <i>KTU</i> 1.49	122
3.B.v. <i>KTU</i> 1.112	122
3.B.vi. <i>KTU</i> 1.47, 1.118 and 1.148	123
3.C. Conclusions	124
Chapter Four: Old Testament Asherah	125
4. Preliminary Considerations	125
4.A. The Pentateuch	135
4.A.i. Exodus 34.13	135
4.A.ii. Deuteronomy 7.5	136
4.A.iii. Deuteronomy 12.3	137
4.A.iv. Deuteronomy 16.21	139
4.B. The Deuteronomistic History: Judges	142
4.B.i. Judges 3.7	142
4.B.ii. Judges 6.25-30	143
4.C. The Deuteronomistic History: Kings	148
4.C.i. 1 Kings 14.15	149

4.C.ii.	1 Kings 14.23	151
4.C.iii.	1 Kings 15.13// 2 Chronicles 15.16	151
4.C.iv.	1 Kings 16.33	154
4.C.v.	1 Kings 18.19	154
4.C.vi.	2 Kings 13.6	157
4.C.vii.	2 Kings 17.10	158
4.C.viii.	2 Kings 17.16	158
4.C.ix.	2 Kings 18.4	159
4.C.x.	2 Kings 21.3	161
4.C.xi.	2 Kings 21.7	162
4.D.	Josiah's Reform: 2 Kings 23.4-15	164
4.E.	Summary of the Deuteronomistic References	168
4.F.	The Chronicler's References	170
4.F.i.	2 Chronicles 14.2 (Eng. 3)	171
4.F.ii.	2 Chronicles 15.16	172
4.F.iii.	2 Chronicles 17.6	173
4.F.iv.	2 Chronicles 19.3	173
4.F.v.	2 Chronicles 24.18	174
4.F.vi.	2 Chronicles 31.1	174
4.F.vii.	2 Chronicles 33.3	175
4.F.viii.	2 Chronicles 33.19	176
4.F.ix.	2 Chronicles 34.3, 4 and 7	177
4.G.	The Prophetic References	179
4.G.i.	Isaiah 17.8	179
4.G.ii.	Isaiah 27.9	180
4.G.iii.	Jeremiah 17.2	181
4.G.iv.	Micah 5.13 (Eng. 14)	182
4.H.	Rabbinic Sources	183
4.I.	Conclusions	185
Chapter Five: Mesopotamian, Hittite and South Arabian Evidence		188
5.A.	Sumero-Akkadian Evidence	189
5.A.i.	Sumerian Votive Inscription	193
5.A.ii.	God Lists	198
5.A.ii.a	AN = <i>Anum</i>	198
5.A.ii.b.	The Weidner List	199
5.A.ii.c.	Nippur God List (CBS 13889)	201
5.A.iii.	The Series Tintir = Bābilu	202
5.A.iv.	Cylinder Seals	203
5.A.v.	Ritual Texts	204
5.A.v.a.	The Uruk Temple Ritual	205
5.A.v.b.	The Reisner Texts	206
5.A.vi.	Mystical Text (B.M. 34035)	207
5.A.vii.	Theophoric Names	210
5.A.viii.	The Marriage of Martu	211
5.A.ix	The Taanach Letter	212
5.A.x.	Conclusions from the Sumero-Akkadian Materials	213
5.B.	The Hittite Evidence: The Myth of Elkunirsa	216
5.C.	Epigraphic South Arabian Sources	220
5.C.i.	<i>RÉS</i> 856	222
5.C.ii.	<i>RÉS</i> 2886	223
5.C.iii.	<i>RÉS</i> 3306	224
5.C.iv.	<i>RÉS</i> 3534B and <i>RÉS</i> 3550	225
5.C.v.	<i>RÉS</i> 3534 bis	227
5.C.vi.	<i>RÉS</i> 3689	227
5.C.vii.	<i>RÉS</i> 3691 and <i>RÉS</i> 3692	228

5.C.viii. <i>RÉS</i> 3902, pl. XIII, fig. 5, 1	228
5.C.ix. <i>RÉS</i> 4203	229
5.C.x. <i>RÉS</i> 4274	230
5.C.xi. <i>RÉS</i> 4330	230
5.C.xii. Jamme 852	231
5.C.xiii. Theophoric Names	233
5.C.xiv. Conclusions from the Ancient South Arabian Evidence	234
5.D Conclusions to the Chapter	235
Chapter Six: Hebrew, Phoenician and Aramaic Epigraphic Evidence	237
6.A. Khirbet el-Qôḿ	238
6.B. Kuntillet ‘Ajrûd	246
6.C. Tel Mique	261
6.D. Arslan Tash (<i>TSSI</i> 3, no. 23 = <i>KAI</i> 27)	262
6.E. Phoenician Inscriptions Mentioning ʔšrt	265
6.F. Tema (<i>TSSI</i> 2, no.30 = <i>KAI</i> 228)	267
6.G. Sefire I,B	268
6.H. Conclusions	269
CONCLUSIONS	271
Etymology	276
List of Abbreviations	279
Bibliography	284

Chapter One

Preliminary Considerations and Review of Previous Scholarship

1.A. Introduction

An examination of recent literature on ancient Near Eastern religion reveals a plethora of dissertations, books and articles pertaining to Asherah. In the light of this recent proliferation of secondary material, the writing of another dissertation concerning Asherah appears to require some justification. Much of the recently discovered archaeological material has already been discussed in great detail. Textual references from Ugarit, Mesopotamia and the various epigraphic sources have already been added to the Old Testament material on Asherah. In many of the recent works, we are presented with a large, and still expanding, portrait of the goddess. Her commonly accepted iconographic features add even further detail to this picture.¹ To all appearances, Asherah is the most fully documented goddess in West Semitic pantheons: is another dissertation on her necessary? I think it is, but I believe such a dissertation must look at the issue from firmly set parameters.

As the title of this dissertation implies, the following is a reassessment of the ancient Near Eastern textual materials concerning the goddess, or goddesses, Athirat, Asherah and Ashratu. In order to emphasize the different cultures in which these goddesses appear, I shall use the form of her name as it is found in the relevant sources in the respective sections. Most recent scholarly studies have presupposed that the same

¹I have considered some of these iconographic associations in 'The Myth of Asherah: Lion Lady and Serpent Goddess', a paper to be presented to the 1992 Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, San Francisco; now forthcoming in *U&A*.

goddess was delineated in the various texts from different cultures in the ancient Near East. The link connecting chronological and geographical distances is the common name 'Asherah', often noted as also occurring in the forms 'Athirat' and 'Ashratu'. Fairly early in the history of the study of this character, however, K.-H. Bernhardt expressed doubts that Ugaritic Athirat and Old Testament Asherah had anything at all in common:

dann wäre dazu zu bemerken, daß eine Verwandlung der älteren Meeresgöttin Ascherat in die jüngere Baumgöttin Aschera niemals stattgefunden hat. Die beiden Göttinnen haben nichts miteinander zu tun.²

His early study of the issue provides a question to be kept in mind throughout this dissertation: is Asherah to be identified as the same goddess in all of the cultures in which she appears?

Most scholars since Bernhardt, however, have not been detained by doubts of Asherah's identification with Athirat, and on the whole I agree with them. Too much caution would stifle any hopes of discerning the nature of this fascinating goddess. What I am presenting here is a contextual approach which relies heavily upon the Ugaritic material, but which also seeks evidence for common characteristics between this goddess and those of the same name in different cultures. At the outset it must be emphasized that, outside of Ugarit, the information pertaining to Athirat is scanty. A goddess with the name Ashratu appears in ancient Mesopotamian sources beginning in the Old Babylonian period (references begin in the early centuries of the second millennium). References continue into the time of the realm of Qataban (one of the four ancient South Arabian regions united in the fourth century C.E.). If a goddess of the same nature

²'Aschera in Ugarit und im Alten Testament' *MIO* 13 (1967): 174. See also K. Koch, 'Aschera als Himmelskönigin in Jerusalem' *UF* 20 (1988): 106-107.

and character is present in the 'Asherahs' of other cultures, this should become evident when she is viewed in the light of Ugaritic Athirat.

As assumed in past scholarship, the common name of 'Asherah' provides a link between these various figures. Since Mesopotamian Ashratu appears to be a West Semitic goddess in origin, there is no reason to doubt that she developed from the same original character as Athirat. The Old Testament refers to a cultic object (and possibly a goddess) called the asherah. The proximity in geographical space and in time³ between the end of the Ugaritic civilisation and the early Old Testament literature allows for a possible connection here as well. The question is: did these deities develop in the same manner? To date, we possess no written mythology from the Amorites in West Semitic regions which refers to Athirat. We may attempt to discern the original characteristics of this goddess, but without the written evidence from the earliest sources, our proposals must remain hypothetical. What we may observe, however, is how she developed in each of the cultures where she appears. Past studies have attempted to gather the diverse evidence and produce a larger picture of the goddess. I am approaching the issue from a different perspective. 'Asherah' developed differently in different cultures. By observing her characteristics in each context, we may be able to determine her essential nature.

³See P. James, I. J. Thorpe, N. Kokkinos, R. Morkot and J. Frankish, *Centuries of Darkness, a Challenge to the Conventional Chronology of Old World Archaeology*, London, 1991. If their theory is correct, the difference in time between Ugarit and the Old Testament would be considerably shortened.

1.B. Method

I begin from the assumption that the primary locus of information pertaining to the character of Athirat is the corpus of Ugaritic tablets. Chapters two and three of this dissertation are based on a thorough examination of the Ugaritic material which refers to Athirat. Chapter two will determine the essential nature and characteristics of Athirat by a close examination of the mythological texts of Elimelek.⁴ In order to facilitate a more complete understanding of the Ugaritic materials, chapter three will take into consideration the tablets not ascribed to Elimelek, including mythological-ritual texts, fragments and lists. These chapters are followed by investigations of other written sources which refer to Asherah, Ashratu, Asher[†]u, and Asherat,⁵ in the Old Testament, Mesopotamian, Hittite and inscriptional sources respectively. In these chapters I shall attempt to discern the character and nature of the goddesses mentioned, according to the individual sources. The Old Testament contains the word אֲשֶׁרָה forty times. In chapter four, I shall examine each reference separately, considering textual difficulties and re-examining the deuteronomistic impact on these verses.⁶ The question of the existence of a goddess Asherah in the Old Testament will be addressed. Primarily the Old Testament speaks of a cultic object, which I shall designate as 'the asherah'.

⁴When I vocalise proper names in the Ugaritic chapters I shall follow the vocalisations as found in J. C. L. Gibson's *CML*², unless otherwise noted.

⁵Even within these categories the name of the goddess is found with variant spellings; this is true of the Old Testament, Mesopotamian and Hittite references, on which see below.

⁶The works of T. Yamashita (*The Goddess Asherah*, Ph. D. dissertation, Yale University, 1963) and S. M. Olyan (*Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel* (SBLMS 34), Atlanta, 1988) stress the deuteronomistic influence on all of the Old Testament references.

The references to a goddess (designated as 'Asherah') are not straightforward, but they appear nevertheless. Chapter five is concerned with further textual references to goddesses with names that are possible equivalents to Athirat according to normal phonetic rules.⁷ These include a summary of published Sumerian and Akkadian documents which refer to Ashratu, a brief exploration of the Hittite version of the Canaanite Elkunirsa⁸ myth, and a reconsideration of the epigraphic South Arabian materials. In each of these sections the question of the goddess's relationship to Ugaritic Athirat will be explored. Chapter six considers the remaining ancient Near Eastern epigraphic references to Asherat. I have intentionally left the Khirbet el-Qôm and Kuntillet 'Ajrûd inscriptions until the other substantial sources concerning the goddess have been considered. The primary reason for this organisation is the ambiguity of these and the other published inscriptions. In most cases it is debatable whether or not a goddess is intended in these inscriptions. When this process of contextual examination is completed, we shall be better able to observe the similarities and differences between these goddesses.

⁷The studies of each of the cultures represented in chapter five have occupied many scholars for many years, thus a full sketch of any of them is beyond the scope of this study. Although the material concerning Mesopotamian Ashratu, 'Hittite' Asher^{tu} and South Arabian Athirat is sparse, I believe it is necessary to explore it for a more complete record of the goddesses under study. Lacking specialisation in these disciplines, I have relied more heavily upon the opinions of recognised specialists in these fields in chapter five.

⁸In the section on the Hittite version of this myth, I will vocalise the proper names as found in H. A. Hoffner's 'The Elkunirsa Myth Reconsidered' *RHA* 76 (1965): 5-16.

1.C. The Primacy of the Ugaritic Information on Athirat

Since the discovery of Ugarit, many diverse interpretations of the mythological tablets found there have appeared. In some attempts to explain the stories, the nature and character of mythology have been overlooked. The various interpretations are perhaps encouraged by the fragmented state of many of the texts, which may support more than one theory. Some attempts at mythological interpretations reveal that Ugaritic characters are at times understood as if they were the amplification of the worst aspects of human nature.⁹ These difficulties are perhaps the result of a basic misunderstanding of mythology. An examination of the Ugaritic mythology reveals characters with various consistent traits which distinguish them from other characters. It is the nature of myths to convey messages through stories. Strict adherence to logical story lines throughout the corpus is not a criterion of the medium of mythology. There are indeed characters with recognisable attributes, but there are also scenarios between myths which may contradict each other. Mythology does not disparage such inconsistencies; the avoidance of them is a modern problem. When a twentieth century reader attempts to force the texts into a consistent story line, he or she is following the method of a modern historian or novelist, not that of an ancient storyteller. A reasoned approach to ancient religious texts, however, may avoid uncharacteristic, and perhaps uncharitable, interpretations of their mythology.

⁹See, for example U. Oldenburg, *The Conflict between El and Ba'al in Canaanite Religion* (Supplementa ad Numen), Leiden, 1969: xi; and L. Bronner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha as Polemics against Baal Worship* (Pretoria Oriental Series 6), Leiden, 1968: 2.

Much damage has been done in the past by gathering small pieces of information from various myths in different cultures, and putting them together to clarify an ambiguous mythological situation. The elements of genre and context are violated by such methods. In order to determine the meaning of a myth, we need first to determine the contexts in which we shall search for evidence. In the case of Athirat, it is essential to realise that the primary source of information concerning her nature and character is the mythology of Ugarit. Only in Ugarit does Athirat appear as an active character in a large body of ancient literature. All other sources provide fragmentary information which needs to be considered in the light of the Ugaritic material.

Initially I shall examine the role of Athirat in the myths in which she participates. Even among these passages, we should not expect to find strict, cross-mythical continuity. My first basic division of the Ugaritic texts will be the myths written by Elimelek. Even within the context of the Elimelek's Ugaritic mythology, it is necessary to determine smaller contexts. Within the Elimelek material, Athirat's primary activity occurs in the Baal Cycle (*KTU* 1.1-6). She also plays a significant role in the story of Keret (*KTU* 1.14-16). She does not appear in Aqhat. In the myths not written by Elimelek, her name is mentioned in Shachar and Shalim (*KTU* 1.23). These smaller units will be individually considered in the course of this investigation.

Of primary importance will be Athirat's character within the story lines of the individual myths. The name of a particular deity must have carried some connotations of the character of that specific divinity to an ancient listener.¹⁰ My method of isolating the various mythological

¹⁰This idea also applies to the iconography of various deities, as noted by R. D. Barnett, "The object of priests and kings must surely have been to ensure that the

stories from each other should facilitate the determination of some of the essential characteristics of Athirat. Once the essential characteristics of Athirat have been distilled from each of the myths in which she appears, it may then be possible to determine which elements of her divine nature cohere throughout.

My study also works with another presupposition; namely, that it is more important to discern the ideology of mythological texts than to attempt to uncover their logic. In this sense it may be possible to find a 'theology' in the ancient mythological texts.¹¹

Mythology tends to reflect aspects of reality. Is the reality behind the myth political reality, or an aspect of nature, or even the essence of an abstract idea? These are the kinds of question which reflect the nature of ancient Near Eastern myths. Although the answers to such questions are often beyond our grasp, they emphasize that a proper starting point requires the asking of the right questions. Right questions are those which take the nature of mythology into account. By way of example, a common hypothesis reflecting an un-mythological question is that Athirat and El lived apart because of El's alleged impotence.¹² If the texts required this interpretation it presumably would have had some importance for

better educated worshipper would usually recognise the gods whom they were worshipping; and this could only be by their dress and appearance, (indicating sex, age and status), insignia and emblems (indicating powers and function) - much as European mediaeval art does for the Christian saints.' ('The Earliest Representation of 'Anath' *EI* 14 (H. L. Ginsberg Volume, 1978): 28*.)

¹¹For an examination of what he calls the theology of the Baal cycle, see J. C. L. Gibson, 'The Theology of the Ugaritic Baal Cycle' *Orientalia* 53 (N.S. 1984): 202-219. See S. B. Parker, 'The Historical Composition of KRT and the cult of El' *ZAW* 89 (1977): 161-175) for an example of a literary approach to an Ugaritic myth which maintains the integrity of the text.

¹²See especially M. B. Brink, *A Philological Study of Texts in Connection with Atirat and Athirat in the Ugaritic Language*, D. Litt. dissertation, University of Stellenbosch, 1977: 339.

Ugaritic religion. Instead, if we trace the individual elements which are used to support this hypothesis to their origins, the actual nature of the mythology appears. The evidence comes from three separate aspects of Ugaritic myths: 1) El lives at 'the source of the rivers, in the midst of the confluence of the two deeps' (*KTU* 1.4.IV.21-22) whilst Athirat does not, 2) El lives so far from Athirat that she must ride an ass a considerable distance to see him (*KTU* 1.4.IV.1-19), and 3) that in text 23 two women supposedly participate in a ritual to overcome El's alleged impotence. When these three separate elements are added together they produce the wrong kind of question (does Athirat live apart from El on account of his impotence?). Considered individually in the context of their mythological episodes they may be appropriately analysed as follows: 1) El lives at 'the source of the rivers, in the midst of the confluence of the two deeps' as a sign of his primordial nature. This is an essential characteristic of the head of the pantheon: he is from the most ancient times; 2) Athirat rides a donkey as a sign of her status; Anat, when she accompanies Athirat, walks. El's distance is characteristic of his greatness; 3) The interpretation of the scenario on the reverse of Shachar and Shalim is not certain. It is not even certain that El is impotent, as both women in the text are impregnated by him (*KTU* 1.23.51-52). Surely the correct method to interpret these scenes is to observe them in their own contexts. When such factors are analysed with an awareness of the ideology rather than a modern logic, they may be properly interpreted.

The essential nature of the characters will appear when these two principles are observed. The context and the ideology provide a reliable indication of the character and nature of the mythological figures.

1.D. Review of the State of Scholarship

Much has been written on many aspects of the subject of 'Asherah'. The first study after the discovery of Ugarit was a monograph written by W. Reed.¹³ Reed's monograph was a revision of his 1942 dissertation, and its main area of concern was to determine the characteristics of the asherah in the Old Testament. The next major study to appear was that of T. Yamashita.¹⁴ Yamashita explored further the Ugaritic texts, as well as providing thorough chapters on the Mesopotamian and other extrabiblical evidence.

During the 1970's, a number of substantial works began to appear which delved into the questions of 'Asherah'. Many of the volumes were at least partially triggered by the discovery of the Kuntillet 'Ajrūd inscriptions by Z. Meshel in 1975-76. The voluminous 1977 dissertation by M. B. Brink, written more than a decade after that of Yamashita, was solely concerned with the Ugaritic material pertaining to Athirat and Aḥtart.¹⁵ A. L. Perlman's dissertation was completed in the following year and also focused on the Ugaritic material concerning Athirat and Aḥtart.¹⁶ Her work, however, also included substantial conclusions concerning the asherah in the Old Testament. The following year a dissertation was completed by J. R. Engle.¹⁷ Engle's primary concern was to determine the

¹³*The Asherah in the Old Testament*, Fort Worth, 1949.

¹⁴*The Goddess Asherah*.

¹⁵*A Philological Study of Texts in Connection with Aḥtart and Aḥirat*.

¹⁶*Asherah and Astarte in the Old Testament and Ugaritic Literature*, Ph. D. dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, 1978.

¹⁷*Pillar Figurines of Iron Age Israel and Asherah/Asherim*, Ph. D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1979.

relationship of pillar figurines to the asherah mentioned in the Old Testament, although he also considered the extrabiblical materials.

The 1980's witnessed an even further increase in the secondary literature on the subject. W. A. Maier's 1984 dissertation on Asherah was later published as a monograph.¹⁸ Rather than re-examine the issue of the asherah in the Old Testament, Maier explored the Ugaritic materials as well as various sources on other goddesses considered to be equivalents of Asherah in the ancient Near East. His work also took into account various iconographic representations and epithets believed to have been associated with her. The following year S. M. Olyan completed his dissertation; and his chapter on Asherah was subsequently published as a monograph.¹⁹ Olyan's primary concern was with the Old Testament understanding of Asherah in the light of its Canaanite background. A dissertation by R. J. Pettey appeared in the same year as that of Olyan.²⁰ Pettey was primarily concerned with determining a basic formula for the Old Testament references to Asherah, although he did include notes about other ancient Near Eastern sources. His dissertation has been recently published as a monograph.²¹ W. Louie was the next scholar to produce a dissertation on Asherah.²² In it he set out to determine the meaning of the word 'asherah', which took him through an overview of the Old Testament, rabbinic, epigraphic and literary sources. Louie also took an interest in the origin and role of Asherah in the various sources. In 1989

¹⁸ *ʾAšerah: Extrabiblical Evidence* (HSM 37), Atlanta, 1986.

¹⁹ *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh*.

²⁰ *Asherah: Goddess of Israel?*, Ph. D. dissertation, Marquette University, 1985.

²¹ R. J. Pettey, *Asherah, Goddess of Israel* (American University Studies Series VII, Theology and Religion volume 74), New York, 1990.

²² *The Meaning, Characteristics and Role of Asherah in Old Testament Idolatry in Light of Extra-Biblical Evidence*, Th. D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1988.

V. L. Piper submitted a dissertation on the phenomenon of tree worship.²³ Her thesis draws on information concerning Asherah, but only minimally touches upon ancient Near Eastern materials. J. M. Hadley has recently added a dissertation on the subject of Asherah to the increasing list of studies.²⁴ Hadley's dissertation gives an informed review of the Old Testament references, but her forte is her thorough study of the Khirbet el-Qôm and Kuntillet 'Ajrûd inscriptions.

In the current decade, M. S. Smith's *The Early History of God* has been published.²⁵ In this book, Smith considers the question of Asherah with a specific interest in Old Testament and Canaanite religion. Although his work is not completely dedicated to the problem of Asherah, it must be considered as an important resource and, therefore, it will be reviewed as well.

The most up-to-date dissertation available on the material with which I am concerned is that of Hadley. In her first chapter Hadley offers a critical review of the works by Reed, Yamashita, Perlman, Engle, Olyan, Pettey, and Maier listed above.²⁶ A further critical review of these works here would be largely repetitious; therefore, I shall focus my following remarks on the studies not considered by Hadley.

²³*Uprooting Traditional Interpretation: a Consideration of Tree Worship in the Migrations of Abraham*, Ph. D. dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1989.

²⁴*Yahweh's Asherah in the Light of Recent Discovery*, Ph. D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 1989. This dissertation is forthcoming in Cambridge University Press, Oriental Publications Series.

²⁵*The Early History of God, Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, San Francisco, 1990.

²⁶Hadley, *Yahweh's Asherah*: 24-55. Hadley also discusses the iconographic studies of Holland, Winter and Schroer (on which see below).

1.D.i. M. B. Brink

The earliest work to be reviewed here, Brink's 1977 University of Stellenbosch D. Litt. thesis, is a large work of 916 pages. The sheer volume of this work alone demands attention, and I shall begin my review of the relevant material with an examination of his approach to the Ugaritic material on Athirat.

Initially it must be noted that, because of the date of Brink's thesis, the valuable tools of Gibson's *CML*² and G. del Olmo Lete's *MLC* were not available to him. At the outset, Brink declares that context will be the determining factor in his translation of the Ugaritic texts.²⁷ Since his work deals specifically with the goddesses Athtart and Athirat, he undertakes to translate all texts with any mention of these two goddesses. Unfortunately, his arrangement of the texts seems to follow no set order, often jumping from a coherent unit (such as the Baal Cycle) to various fragmented texts, and back again. One major weakness of his approach is that his translations seem to be based not so much on the context as on the opinions of other scholars. His method of presenting a transliteration of the text, followed by his own translation, is given little credence when, for the justification of his translation, he refers almost exclusively to the opinions of other scholars and gives no philological explanation as to why one translation is better than any other. Initially, he explores each passage word by word until enough of the vocabulary is present to hone down the amount of space spent on each pericope. This adds much material to his thesis which is not entirely relevant. The results of his method are

²⁷*Philological Study*: 8.

often confusing translations which make little sense. By way of example, his translation of *KTU* 1.114.14-23 reads:

El sits near Aṭirat.
 El sits in his community house.
 El drinks wine until he is sated,
 sweet wine until he is drunk
 El goes to his house, he enters the court.
 He is supported by (a)brother(s), *Ṭknm* and *Snm*^v
 and they approach stinker with horns on top and a
 rear which (he) pollutes/contaminates with
 excrement
 and urine.
 El, the god, falls like those who are made to descend
 in the netherworld.
 Anat and Aṭtart stay prone with malicious intent.²⁸

In addition to the difficulty in translating in run-on sentences which barely hint at parallelism, Brink introduces a confused theme based on a questionable translation, to which he returns for conclusions (namely, Anat and Aṭtart staying prone, with malicious intent). If more attention had been paid to the context of the poem, Anat and Aṭtart would not have been left lying on the ground planning evil - a conclusion not supported by the remainder of the text (which Brink does not translate).

Based on his interpretation of *ʾṭrt ym*, Brink supposes that Athirat was originally a primordial sea dragon.²⁹ Although there is no evidence that Athirat had dragon-like characteristics, he maintains his view and thus translates *KTU* 1.4.IV.23-26 as:

She flooded a life-giving power on El and he entered
 The place of separation of the king, Father of the two.
 At El's feet she did homage and fell down
 She bowed down and honoured him.³⁰

²⁸*Philological Study*: 231-232.

²⁹*Philological Study*: 314.

³⁰*Philological Study*: 362.

Brink suggests that the 'possibility that the flooding of Aṭirat (through her breasts? as may be derived of *šd. šd* in CTA 23,13...)' was an ancient way of understanding the tides.³¹ He bases further conclusions on this interpretation of Athirat flooding El by her breasts, although he argues some pages earlier that *šd* must be translated 'field' because Ugaritic already has the use of *dd* for 'breast'. As his interpretations continue, he paints a picture of Athirat as a goddess of extraordinary sexual prowess, thus causing rivalry between El and Baal for her favours. The difficulty with his translations, besides their awkward nature, is that they seem to be slanted towards his theories about the text, rather than his theories being substantiated by the texts. For example, to sustain his conclusion that Athirat is the true head of the pantheon,³² he interprets the giving of the gifts made by Kothar-and-Khasis in *KTU* 1.4.I.23-43 as indicating that Athirat occupies the 'position of El', thus:

The dais, throne and especially the footstool, (as is shown from the episode with Aṭtar,) the canopy and resting-place all point to reverence for Aṭirat and new power for the goddess. She is endowed with the position of El. The serpents show recognition of her fecundity...The vase probably depicts her 'new' position in which it is shown that the wild bulls are at her (sexual) mercy.³³

He does not explain how it is in the power of Kothar-and-Khasis to endow whomever he may choose with the position of El, simply by forging gifts for them.

³¹*Philological Study*: 379.

³²*Philological Study*: 825-826.

³³*Philological Study*: 282.

After 725 pages of this analysis, Brink moves on to draw up a chart, based on the technique of Van Zijl's book, *A Study of Texts in Connection with Baal in the Ugaritic Epics*. Brink, to determine the character and role of the two goddesses, analyses the texts which he translated according to genre (myth, saga, god lists, rituals, incantations, offering lists, and profane texts), depending upon whether the goddess in question appears alone or with one of her epithets. These he places on a chart according to the following categories for the verbs: military, fighting, movement, speech and senses, moods, theophany, royal, banquet, weather and seasons, building activities, legal, curse themes, sexual intercourse, mortuary rites, mental activities, acts of direct influence on persons, sacrifice, cultic, and childbearing. All of these elements are then divided according to whether they are first, second or third person. The results reflect the ideas presented in his translations of the texts. Thus he finds that Baal is associated with weather more than any other god, and that Athirat is the most sexually active of the set Athtart, Athirat and Baal.³⁴ His chart leads him to conclude that:

Baal features with verbs 171 times, Athtart 46 times and Athirat 73 times. From this one may deduce that Athirat was nearly twice as active as Athtart, especially in the earlier stages of the UT myths, but not nearly as active as Baal, especially in the later stages.³⁵

The difficulties with this kind of interpretation are legion. First of all, it assumes that we have a representative portion of the activities of all the gods in all the texts of Ugarit, found and not found. The vicissitudes of archaeology are a witness against this assumption. This method also

³⁴*Philological Study*: 750-762.

³⁵*Philological Study*: 763.

betrays a confusion between grammatical phenomena (verbs and the action they may indicate) and mythological elements (what the gods may be doing in lacunæ or even in the minds of the hearers who knew the 'whole story', as it were). Given the circumstances, we should be cautious about using superlatives or about interpreting statistics too literally. Such a method could possibly demonstrate that in the surviving texts Baal appears as a very active deity, but we cannot say that he is the most active. This is one of the limitations of our research given the nature of the texts. Finally, this method illustrates a literalistic approach to the texts which cannot be supported in the light of the ideology of the texts. Baal is active in the Baal Cycle, but he barely appears in Keret or Aqhat. Rather than draw sharp lines of distinction between myth and legend, or any other category, each myth should be analysed according to its context.

Brink's dissertation does a service in drawing together many fragmented texts which mention Athtart and Athirat with those more well known. His conclusions seem to dominate his research and translations, however, and they must be approached with caution.

1.D.ii. W. Louie

Louie's 1988 Th. D. thesis attempts to take a broad view of the materials pertaining to Asherah. After a brief review of previous scholarship, Louie justifies his study by noting that the sources which he reviewed were biased by their supposition that all Old Testament references to Asherah are 'deuteronomic'. Thus he writes, 'There is a need for a study that presupposes the historicity of the OT...Furthermore, the role of Asherah in the idolatrous system of the OT needs to be evaluated in the light of the above findings.'³⁶ He begins his study by examining the 'meaning of Asherah'. His first chapter is dedicated to exploring the non-goddess interpretations which include a cultic object, a wooden cultic object, an image and a shrine. In his second chapter Louie considers the goddess interpretations, and here he observes various cognate names for Asherah throughout the ancient Near East. This leads him to a summary of the characteristics of Asherah 'as a supreme goddess' and 'as a fertility goddess' at Ugarit and in the Bible. Louie's next chapter looks at the origin of Asherah and her worship, particularly her worship in the Bible. His final chapter is dedicated to the role of Asherah in the Bible. Although Louie comes to no firm conclusion on whether Asherah was considered to be the spouse of Yahweh, he does remain convinced that Asherah, Anat and Atthart eventually merged into one goddess. In keeping with his presupposition of the historicity of the Old Testament account, Louie understands all mentions of Asherah as violations of the original Israelite monotheism.

³⁶*Meaning, Characteristics and Role of Asherah: 5.*

Louie's study provides a valuable overview of the material which mentions Asherah; however, it is not without difficulties. Louie does not violate his stated attempt to understand the biblical material as historically accurate. Unfortunately, this leads to a compilation of evidence from all the biblical sources with no regard for text-critical studies. In discussing Deut. 12.3 he writes:

Moses told the Israelites to destroy all the places where the nations served their gods as well as the idolatrous objects that are in them. One of these items is Asherim [*sic*] which Moses commanded them to burn.³⁷

This approach, although internally consistent, enters into no dialogue with the text-critical understanding of the materials. In this way all previous scholarship on the understanding of Old Testament Asherah is effectively ignored.

Another difficulty results from Louie's use of sources which pre-date the discovery of Ugarit. In treating the subject of Asherah in the Old Testament, he utilises commentaries which could not have been aware of Ugarit. This in and of itself is not a faulty method; however, Louie places these works in his text without noting that the Ugaritic discoveries may have modified the views of the authors. By way of example, in his discussion on 2 Kgs. 21.3 // 2 Chron. 33.3, after discussing the interpretations of Montgomery (1951) and Robinson (1976), Louie introduces the interpretation of Curtis and Madsen (1910). Not surprisingly, Curtis and Madsen 'suggest a symbolic post representing the goddess Astarte',³⁸ This method does not allow Curtis and Madsen the benefit of the doubt concerning the nature of the asherah in the light of

³⁷*Meaning, Characteristics and Role of Asherah*: 39-40.

³⁸*Meaning, Characteristics and Role of Asherah*: 32, n. 2.

Ugarit. Louie also fails to distinguish extrabiblical material on the basis of its date. All sources are compared as if no time had separated them (an exception being his discussion of the origin of Asherah).

In general, Louie does not enter into discussion on points raised by previous scholars. He does not question the alleged merger of Asherah with Athtart and Anat, nor does he question the assumptions of Asherah's character as a 'supreme goddess' and a 'fertility goddess'. This lack of critical inquiry renders Louie unable to move beyond a recitation of previous opinions and the addition of his own. This having been noted, Louie's compilation of extrabiblical sources is the strong point of his work. His dissertation is a useful resource for finding some less obvious references to Asherah.

1.D.iii. V. L. Piper

Piper's dissertation, although not specifically a study of Asherah, contains some information on the goddess in the context of tree worship. Initially Piper considers modern scholarship on sacred trees; unfortunately none of her modern sources post-date the Second World War.³⁹ Her discussion ranges over most of the world, and includes ancient Near Eastern information as well as myths from Scandinavia and Uganda. She ends her introduction by noting that tree worship is indicative of the takeover of goddess worship by male gods. Tree worship is all that remains as evidence of the former goddess worship. In her second chapter Piper sets out to demonstrate that the sacred tree represented the goddess in earlier forms of religion. She notes that figurines of women (which she

³⁹*Uprooting Traditional Interpretation: 7-47.* Piper cites especially Frazer's *Golden Bough*, W. R. Smith's *Religion of the Semites*, and articles by Sir Arthur Evans.

understands as goddesses) date to the paleolithic era. After establishing the antiquity of goddess worship, Piper utilises various sources from ancient Greece, Sumer and Egypt to prove that goddesses were associated with trees.

Piper's third chapter forms the main part of her thesis on the uprooting of traditional interpretation. She begins with a consideration of symbolism in the creation story where, she notes, audiences would have understood the tree of life as Asherah.⁴⁰ She then discusses tree worship in the Abraham cycle. She cites R. Graves as noting that groves of terebinth were associated with Asherah, and she cites S. Teubal's suggestion that Isaac was divinely conceived in a hieros gamos in the shrine of terebinths at Mamre.⁴¹ Piper next considers the tree symbolism in other ancient Near Eastern cultures, and finally moves on to explore Asherah. She notes that Asherah caused trouble for traditional interpretation because she was Yahweh's consort. Citing various anthropological scholars, Piper demonstrates Asherah's associations with palm trees, pillars, and the sea, and shows her characteristics as progenitress of the gods and as a neolithic goddess. Briefly considering Lemaire's translation of the Khirbet el-Qôm and Kuntillet 'Ajrûd inscriptions, she finds evidence of Asherah's status as Yahweh's consort. She concludes:

This investigation has attempted to utilize just such a broad cultural perspective. As a product of this project, the ethnocentric bias of scholarly and traditional interpretation became apparent. And these culturally biased perspectives produced arid interpretation. By respecting cultural integrity, insofar as it is knowable, interpretation can

⁴⁰*Uprooting Traditional Interpretation*: 104.

⁴¹*Uprooting Traditional Interpretation*: 110-111.

replenish an arid environment with the revitalizing energy of very ancient roots.⁴²

Piper's dissertation suffers from attempting to cover too wide an area of investigation. Although her primary area of interest appears to be the Abraham cycle, she spends much of her investigation in pursuit of evidence in cultures far removed from that of the Old Testament. She dwells on Taliesin's 'Battle of Trees' and the Irish Tree Alphabet at length.⁴³ As with Louie's dissertation, Piper does not discuss the opinions of other scholars, and she seldom expresses her own. The true weakness of this study appears in its bibliography. Although the dissertation was not completed until 1989, Piper does not appear to have been aware of the recent major works on Asherah or Old Testament studies in general.⁴⁴ Piper's work gives the impression that the conclusions were drawn from anthropological arguments without a thorough consideration of more recent biblical scholarship.

1.D.iv. J. M. Hadley

Hadley's dissertation gives a full investigation of the Levantine material concerning Asherah. She begins with an informed discussion on issues pertaining to Asherah and presents a critical review of the previous scholarship. Although Hadley does not translate the relevant Ugaritic texts, she provides an overview of the Ugaritic information on Athirat. She also briefly considers the origin and etymology of Athirat. In her chapter on the biblical references, Hadley begins with a breakdown of the

⁴²*Uprooting Traditional Interpretation*: 144.

⁴³*Uprooting Traditional Interpretation*: 29-45.

⁴⁴She does not cite Maier, Olyan, Reed or even Cross.

distribution of the term, and discusses the verbs used in conjunction with the asherah. She discusses the deuteronomistic influence on the asherah passages in the Old Testament and this leads her to ask questions about the dating of the deuteronomistic source. This is followed by a consideration of Josiah's reform. Observing the affixes which occur with asherah in the Old Testament as well as its use with the definite article, she proposes the theory that:

what may be happening is that the term 'asherah' is in the process of losing its identification with the goddess, and becoming merely the wooden object. While Asherah was still worshipped as a goddess during the monarchy period, perhaps by the time of Dtr himself, and certainly the Chronicler, the term had ceased to be used with any knowledge of the goddess whom it had originally represented, and from which it received its name.⁴⁵

She then discusses the passages which may refer to the goddess in the Old Testament and finally concludes that the goddess Asherah may have degenerated into a mere cultic object.

It is here that the forte of Hadley's dissertation appears. Her investigation of the Khirbet el-Qôm and Kuntillet 'Ajrûd inscriptions is the most thorough to date.⁴⁶ Having observed the Khirbet el-Qôm inscription personally, she presents a review of past attempts at its decipherment and offers an explanation for its grammatical conundrums. Hadley also explores the issues of and difficulties with the Kuntillet 'Ajrûd inscriptions. Further, she provides a critique of the assumed connection between the drawings on pithos A and its inscription. Her next chapter surveys the archaeological finds from Lachish, Pella and Taanach which

⁴⁵*Yahweh's Asherah*: 92.

⁴⁶These chapters followed her previously published articles on these inscriptions: 'The Khirbet el-Qom Inscription' *VT* 37 (1987): 50-62; and 'Some Drawings and Inscriptions on Two Pithoi from Kuntillet 'Ajrud' *VT* 37 (1987): 180-213.

may pertain to Asherah. A brief consideration of female figurines precedes her conclusions.

Hadley's dissertation is undoubtedly a substantial work in the field of studies on Asherah. The main weakness that appears in her treatment is that she does not attempt to re-examine the Ugaritic materials on Athirat. Hadley's method of utilising the Elkunirša myth to explain the relationship between Athirat and Baal should also signal caution.⁴⁷ Other than a brief consideration of the importance of the Ugaritic texts, she limits herself to Palestinian texts and finds. This scope adequately accounts for the evidence which is relevant to the inscriptions which form the primary area of her study.

1.D.v. M. S. Smith

Smith's copiously annotated study of the religion of early Israel is presented within the framework of 'convergence' and 'differentiation' with Canaanite religion.⁴⁸ In this context, Smith discusses various deities in Israel at the time of the judges, and provides individual chapters on Yahweh and Baal and Yahweh and Asherah. It is with the latter chapter that this study takes its interest. Smith begins this chapter by considering the asherah in Israel and the distinction between the feminine singular 'asherah' and the masculine plural 'asherim'. Noting that the 'asherah was a wooden object symbolizing a tree',⁴⁹ Smith reviews arguments concerning the morphology of the cultic object. In his discussion of the inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrūd he decides against disregarding the

⁴⁷*Yahweh's Asherah*: 113.

⁴⁸*Early History*: xxiii-xxiv.

⁴⁹*Early History*: 81.

grammatical rule and reading ʾšrth as a proper name (see below). This leads to the central question of the chapter: is Asherah an Israelite goddess?

In the course of his investigation of this question, Smith discounts the biblical references adduced to support a goddess interpretation of 'asherah' in the Old Testament. Noting the possible exception of 1 Kgs. 18.19, Smith states 'The other biblical references used to support this reconstruction are susceptible to other interpretations, which would vitiate the view of Asherah as a goddess'.⁵⁰ This conclusion leads to the questions of the historical development of this situation and why the deuteronomists so strongly condemned the asherah as a cultic object. Noting the speculative nature of his answers, Smith suggests that the asherah symbol may have outlived recollection of Asherah as a goddess. It may have been rejected because of secondary associations with Atthart, or because of associations of the asherah with healing and fertility. This situation supposes that Asherah did not continue as the goddess represented by the cultic symbol bearing her name.⁵¹

Smith then discusses various associations of the imagery of Asherah, including the figure of Wisdom, Wellhausen's emendation of Hos. 14.9, the Song of Songs, and Jer. 2.27 in comparison with Deut. 32.18. The chapter ends with an *excursus* on gender language used in connection with Yahweh.

The main strength of Smith's study is his close attention to the limitations of our knowledge of Asherah, particularly outside of Ugarit. He demonstrates that the 'majority view' of Asherah as a goddess in Israel is problematic.⁵² The difficulty with his approach is the speculative nature

⁵⁰*Early History*: 93.

⁵¹*Early History*: 94.

⁵²*Early History*: 89-94.

of his solutions to the problems that his proposed absence of Asherah in the Old Testament raises. After demonstrating that the Old Testament references are uncertain in their evidence for a goddess Asherah, he suggests that the asherah may have been a representation of Athtart.⁵³ The difficulty with the explanation is that confusion between Asherah and Athtart is supported by only a minimum of evidence.⁵⁴ Smith writes:

There is other negative evidence that might support the reconstruction that Asherah was not a goddess in Israel; this sort of evidence is, however, based on the argument from silence, and it has merit only in conjunction with the positive evidence presented above.⁵⁵

The evidence to which he refers, however, is also based on 'negative evidence', namely, that the Old Testament does not attest the existence of Asherah. Since the cultic object bears the name of a goddess, positive evidence needs to be provided that the asherah was to be associated with some other goddess.

This brief consideration of recent scholarship on the questions surrounding the character of Athirat demonstrates that questions still remain. With the many recent books, dissertations and articles considered, we have much assistance in dealing with the question of Athirat's position at Ugarit. My approach will be based on a contextual consideration of the primary source material. My working presupposition is that the Ugaritic tablets provide our most complete record of the nature and character of Athirat.

⁵³*Early History*: 89, 92-93. This idea was also suggested by W. R. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, new edition, London, 1894: 189, n. 1.

⁵⁴Judg. 3.7 may point to a late confusion of the two.

⁵⁵*Early History*: 93.

1.E. Iconography

A note must be included on the issue of the iconography of Athirat. In this study I limit myself to the textual resources concerning Athirat. The reason for not exploring the iconography stems from two basic considerations. The first is the uncertainty involved in iconographic representations of goddesses. No female figurine or relief has come to light which has been explicitly identified by an inscription to be Athirat. Some of the images used in considerations of Athirat's iconography may represent her; however, my intention here is to begin from what may be known with a measure of certainty concerning the goddess. This information is gleaned from written records which explicitly name her.

My second reason is pragmatic. Many studies on the interpretation of ancient Near Eastern iconography have already discussed the

associations of Athirat.⁵⁶ This field itself requires a full-length study, and space does not permit such an exercise here.⁵⁷

In the following chapter I shall approach the references to Athirat in the Elimelek material; first in the Keret texts, followed by those in the Baal Cycle. It is here that the most sustained image of the goddess is presented.

⁵⁶U. Winter, *Frau und Göttin. Exegetische und ikonographische Studien zum weiblichen Gottesbild im Alten Israel und in dessen Umwelt* (OBO 53), Freiburg and Göttingen, 1983; S. Schroer, *In Israel gab es Bilder, Nachrichten von darstellender Kunst im Alten Testament* (OBO 74), Freiburg and Göttingen, 1987; see also her articles 'Zur Deutung der Hand unter der Grabinschrift von Chirbet el Qôm' *UF* 15 (1983): 191-199, and 'Die Zweiggöttin in Palästina/Israel. Von der Mittelbronze II B-Zeit bis zu Jesus Sirach' in *Jerusalem. Texte-Bilder-Steine* (Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus 6), M. Küchler and C. Uehlinger, eds., Freiburg and Göttingen, 1987: 201-225; W. Zwickel, 'Die Kesselwagen im Salomonischen Tempel' *UF* 18 (1986): 459-461; R. Hestrin, 'The Cult Stand from Ta'anach and its Religious Background' in *Studia Phoenicia V: Phoenicia and the East Mediterranean in the First Millennium B.C. Proceedings of the Conference held in Leuven 14-16 November 1988* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 22), E. Lipiński, ed., Louvain, 1987: 61-77; also 'The Lachisch Ewer and the ᵑAsherah' *IEJ* 37 (1987): 212-223; and 'A Note on the "Lion Bowls" and the Asherah' *IMJ* 7 (1988): 115-118; G. del Olmo Lete, 'Figuras femeninas en la mitología y la épica del Antiguo Oriente' in *La dona en l'antiguitat*, Sabadell, 1987: 7-25; E. Lipiński, 'The Syro-Phoenician Iconography of Woman and Goddess (Review Article)' *IEJ* 36 (1986): 87-96; and J. G. Taylor, 'The Two Earliest Known Representations of Yahweh' in *Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie* (JSOTS 67), L. Eslinger and G. Taylor, eds., Sheffield, 1988: 557-566.

⁵⁷I offer some preliminary remarks on the difficulties of such iconographic associations in 'The Myth of Asherah: Lion Lady and Serpent Goddess'.

Chapter Two

Athirat in the Elimelek Tablets of Ugarit

2.A. Keret (KTU 1.14-1.16)

The interpretation of Keret is a matter of debate. The basic story line appears to be simple; however, breaks in the text, particularly within and at the end of text 15, leave room for considerable doubt about details. Within this context, although the role of Athirat is small in the preserved columns, it forms a coherent picture in which her role is seen to be quite important.¹ As Parker has demonstrated, the recognition of the genre of a text is essential to understanding it.² This is a principle which assists in determining the ideology of the myths with which we are dealing. Context and genre are essential elements to our understanding of a text. This provides a further reason for not lumping all Ugaritic texts together and drawing out a composite picture of Athirat's activities. What is important is her character. From the various separate myths, we can perhaps piece together the common characteristics of Athirat, and thus derive an accurate portrait. The Keret story may well be considered a myth,³ yet it does display a more obviously earthly colour than does the Baal Cycle. This has led many scholars to attempt to find a definition other than 'myth' for Keret. The activity of the gods in Keret is a mythological feature; however many scholars find the designation 'epic' less objectionable. This

¹A. Merrill, ('The House of Keret, a study of the Keret Legend' *SEÅ* 33 (1968): 10) states that the wrath of Asherah is the 'basis for the addition of other "narratives"' in the Keret epic. This will be further explored below.

²S. B. Parker, 'Some Methodological Principles in Ugaritic Philology' *Maarav* 2 (1979-80): 7-41.

³See J. C. L. Gibson 'Myth, Legend and Folk-lore in the Ugaritic Keret and Aqhat Texts' *Congress Volume Edinburgh 1974* (SVT 28), Leiden, 1975: 60-68.

divergent labelling is not necessary if we keep the genre and context of the myth in mind as we examine it.

Athirat first appears in the narrative as Keret was making his way to Udm, according to the instruction of El (*KTU* 1.14.IV.31-43). The text reads:

<i>tlkn</i> 32 <i>ym .w tñ .</i>	they went a day, and a second,
<i>aħr</i> 33 <i>šp šm .b tlt</i>	after sunset ⁴ the third (day)
34 <i>y m[gy.] l qdš</i> 35 <i>a t[r]t.šrm</i>	he came to the sanctuary of Athirat of the two Tyres, ⁵
<i>w l ilt</i> 36 <i>šd [y] nm.</i>	even to (the sanctuary of) ⁶ the goddess of the Sidonians,
<i>tm</i> 37 <i>yd r[.] krt. t ˆ 38 iit.</i>	there noble Keret vowed a gift, ⁷

⁴See the discussion of J. C. de Moor and K. Spronk, 'Problematical Passages in the Legend of Kirtu (I)' *UF* 14 (1982): 165. They present convincing arguments for the interpretation of 'sunset' over 'sunrise' for *špšm*.

⁵There is some dispute about the correctness of Tyre as the place name here indicated. M. Astour ('Place Names' in *Ras Shamra Parallels II*, 1975: 251f.) has argued for a possible North Mesopotamian location. I prefer to see Tyre and Sidon mentioned here, especially as Athirat appears to be a West Semitic goddess (see below, on the Mesopotamian material). Gray had proposed 'Atherat of Deposits / Goddess of Oracles' ('Texts from Ras Shamra' in *Documents from Old Testament Times* (edited by D. Winton Thomas), London, 1958: 119) but later changed his mind to that of Tyre and Sidon (*The Krt Text in the Literature of Ras Shamra*, second edition, Leiden, 1964: 16, 55). De Moor also reads Tyre and Sidon (*Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit*, vol. 1, (hereafter *ARTU*), Leiden, 1987: 200), as do del Olmo Lete (*Mitos y Leyendas de Canaan*, (hereafter *MLC*), Madrid, 1981: 298), Gordon ('Poetic Legends and Myths from Ugarit' *Berytus* 25 (1977; hereafter *PLMU*): 44), and Gibson (*CML*²: 87). As far as the structure of the couplet is concerned, I take *šrm* to be a dual, reflecting Tyre as a 'twin city' (de Moor and Spronk, 'Problematical Passages': 170, and Gibson, *CML*²: 87). Gibson understands the dual *šrm* as referring to the island and mainland sections of Tyre. *šdynm* can be understood as a gentilic.

⁶The lamed requires an object. Since the sanctuary is mentioned in line 34, it should be taken as doing double duty for this, its parallel line.

⁷The context of this passage, as Parker ('Some Methodological Principles': 24-28) has demonstrated, requires that *iit* is to be understood as the object of *ndr*, with the initial aleph as a case of dittography. Parker . . . shows that the correct genre of lines 38-43 to be that of the vow formula. By comparative evidence in ancient Near Eastern vows, the actual vow begins with the divine name, here Athirat in line 38. See also his further discussion of the vow formulae in *The Pre-Biblical Narrative Tradition* (SBL Resources for Biblical Study 24), Atlanta, 1989: 70-87. I understand 'there noble Keret vowed a gift' (lines 36-38) as a monocolon, followed by the bicolon invoking Athirat. The difficulty with this interpretation is the lack of a convincing etymology for *iit*. My translation of these lines is therefore tentative.

atrt.šr m

39 *w ilt. šdynm*

40 *hm.ḥ ry.bty 41iqḥ .*

aš ʿrb . ḡlmt 42 ḥzry.

tnh.wspm⁹ 43 atn.

w.iltḥ. ḥršm

'O Athirat of the two Tyres,

and goddess of the Sidonians,

If to my house Huray I take,



cause the maiden to enter⁸ my court,

twice her (weight) of silver I will give,

and thrice her (weight) of gold.¹⁰

The genre of Keret seems to be that of an epic tale centred on questions surrounding the institution of kingship. More specifically, the genre seems to be a study in response to the social dangers incurred when a dynasty ends (that is, when there is no heir to the throne). In order to secure further the continuity of his dynasty, Keret interrupts his journey to acquire a wife in order to make a vow to Athirat. El had not commanded him to do this. Besides the retaliation of Athirat later in the myth when Keret's vow to her is unfulfilled (see below), perhaps a message about obedience is included. In the larger context of the epic, Keret added a precautionary vow to Athirat to the instructions of El, and in the final analysis, he is brought back to the crisis with which the story begins (see below). The interests of the same genre continue with the issue of the implications of a king's illness (and possible death). When Keret finally recovers, the monarchical problem of an heir apparent being cursed comes to the fore. Within this genre, how are we to understand Keret's vow? If a question of obedience is present, this should become clear as our exploration unfolds.

⁸First person singular shaphel form of ʿrb, 'cause to enter', or 'introduce' (Gibson, *CML*²: 87).

⁹Understanding the initial *w*,  as an error for *k*, , a difference of only one wedge, since silver is the required word-pair component for gold (line 44).

¹⁰This passage (lines 21-25) employs a poetic delaying device for a dramatic effect. See W. G. E. Watson, 'Delaying Devices in Ugaritic Verse' *SEL* 5 (1988): 210, 214.

Perhaps the best way to understand this incident and its place in the text is to recognise that it is an account of an unfulfilled vow. S. Parker proposed in 1977 that Keret consists of three separate episodes (Keret's loss of his family and acquisition of another, an account of his illness, and the usurpation narrative).¹¹ What is of special interest to this investigation is the suggested second story, namely, that of a man who is ill and who is then healed.¹² The vow enters into the plot during this episode. Albright recognised the section 14.IV.38-43 as a vow, but he did not enter into a prolonged discussion of it.¹³ In a more recent discussion, Parker has drawn out some comparisons between the vow in Keret and other ancient Near Eastern vows.¹⁴ Besides a simple recognition that the actual occurrence of Athirat in this pericope is in the context of a vow, what possible understanding can be gleaned from this fact? The answer lies within the context of the whole of the myth. For this, we should first examine Parker's study more closely.

Using exegetical techniques often applied to Old Testament research, Parker explores the text of Keret from a literary angle. In the course of his study, he notes that the action of Keret's family being eliminated, his supplication, the vision of El, and the restoration of his fortune form a traditional ancient Near Eastern story line (designated as 'A').¹⁵ In so doing, Parker utilises both external literary and internal textual evidence which form a solid case. Parker also examines the illness episode (designated 'B'), and then explores the implications of the usurpation story

¹¹S. B. Parker, 'The Historical Composition of KRT and the Cult of El' *ZAW* 89 (1977): 161-175. This argument was followed by that for a possible historical setting for the Keret epic by N. Wyatt, 'A Suggested Historical Context for the Keret Story' *UF* 15 (1983): 316-318.

¹²Parker, 'Historical Composition of KRT': 167-170.

¹³W. F. Albright, 'A Vow to Asherah in the Keret Epic' *BASOR* 94 (1944): 30-31.

¹⁴Parker, *The Pre-Biblical Narrative Tradition*: 70-87.

¹⁵Parker, 'Historical Composition of KRT': 163-167.

('C'), which was apparently added on to the cycle of the family restoration and illness narrative.¹⁶ The question of the important addition of the vow to the first (A) story of Keret's loss of family and restoration is of special interest to this study.

Keret is presented as seeking an heir for his throne, and although El provided for him the details of his journey, the story was lengthened by the addition of Keret's vow to Athirat. Ginsberg notes that this initial vow to Athirat is for securing a wife, and not progeny,¹⁷ a distinction which pales when placed next to the fact that a wife was indeed needed to produce an heir. In other words, Keret's vow to Athirat was a vow used to secure the production of children. In Keret's dream (14.I and II), it was El who came to him, and instructed him in how to procure progeny. Keret asked for children (I.4), El instructed him on how to secure a wife, and with a wife would come a family (III.48-9). Thus, when Keret paused to make a vow to Athirat, he was doing so with the knowledge that El had already provided instructions to this end. This fact lends credence to the idea that the vow episode was later added to the action of the story which otherwise follows the epic repetition of El's command. Without the benefit of Parker's article, Merrill also noted the importance of Keret's stop at Athirat's sanctuary:

Because of the introduction of the vow to Asherah on the way to ʾUdm, in the parallel version to the dream, we are now suddenly confronted with the understanding that the vow has apparently not been fulfilled. So the wrath of Asherah becomes the basis for the addition of the other 'narratives' which are woven around the central concern for the 'house of Keret' and find their sub-themes in the three areas of fertility, salubrity, and sovereignty. Further the wrath of Asherah, expressed in a 'curse-motif', helps to frame this

¹⁶Historical Composition of KRT': 169-170.

¹⁷H. Ginsberg, *The Legend of King Keret, a Canaanite Epic of the Bronze Age* (BASORSS 2-3), New Haven, 1946: 41.

additional material for it concludes with a 'curse' - the curse of *Yšb* by Keret.¹⁸

Parker, asking why the vow episode was inserted, concurs with Merrill that it is necessary for the later narrative, but adds that it is 'insignificant for the present part.'¹⁹ This is because, according to Parker's analysis, the sickness episode required the vow as a foreshadowing of the actual illness.

It may seem excessive to spend much time on the actual structure of the story of Keret, when the role of Athirat is our central concern. The establishment of the context, however, is very important in understanding her role, both here and elsewhere. In the analyses of Merrill and Parker, we can see that the interpretation of Keret's vow holds an essential place in the narrative. What does this tell us about Athirat? It seems to demonstrate that she was influential in the context of the bearing of royal children. Although the Myth of Keret does indeed form a thematic unity,²⁰ the addition of the B section would have served to emphasize this particular aspect of Athirat. This characteristic of Athirat's concern with royal children will reappear in the examination of the remaining Ugaritic texts where she also has a role.

This episode leads to the further activity of Athirat in the myth of Keret. *KTU* 1.15.III.25-30 states:

w tšs s.aṛt26ndrh.

wilt.[]

27w tšū.gh.w[tsh]

and Athirat remembered his vow,²¹

and the goddess []

and she lifted her voice and [called out]

¹⁸'The House of Keret': 10.

¹⁹'Historical Composition of KRT': 164.

²⁰Gibson, 'Myth, Legend and Folk-lore': 64.

²¹There is no reason to see this vow as plural (thus de Moor and Spronk, 'Problematical Passages': 177).

28	<i>ph m ʿ .ap.k</i> [rt]	Look, I beg you, has Keret then [<i>broken(?)</i>]
29	<i>uṭn.nd</i> r[]	or has [(?)] ²² changed ²³ [his] vow?
30	<i>apr. i. . .</i>	I will break ²⁴ ...

Unfortunately, text 15 is not well preserved, and column III breaks off just as Athirat was beginning to speak. What we can infer from the context is that, if we accept that the vow pronounced by Keret was an addition to the text, then this short section is also a part of an inserted story. This pericope would seem to fit in Parker's scheme as part of Keret B. What follows is an account of Keret's illness, which is generally supposed to be the punishment of Athirat for Keret's failure to fulfil his promise. In the light of the following factors, however, perhaps we ought to see Keret's sickness as an instrumental punishment used in order to lead to the ironic *coup de grâce* of Athirat - the cursing of Keret's heir, the very reason for his initial request, by the king himself. The illness should be considered as part of the punishment of Athirat, coming as it does so shortly after her remembrance of the unfulfilled vow. The further element of the curse on Yaṣṣib, however, should be seen in the light of a more complete understanding of the punishment.

The first factor which would make it unlikely that the illness itself was the final punishment of Athirat, is that in 16.V, El himself takes the responsibility for curing Keret of his illness. This in itself does not negate the possibility that Athirat had instituted the sickness, but it does limit its punitive effect. If the illness is her final punishment, she has been

²²Perhaps the lacuna contained an appellative for Keret, but as the text is broken, I would not venture to guess what it might have been.

²³This is understanding *ṭn* as a G, third person singular, cognate with Hebrew *šnh*, root I (BDB: 1039b), 'to change'.

²⁴Taking *apr* to be from the root *pwr*, 'to break', with Gibson, *CML*²: 156.

overruled by El, the king of the gods. If, on the other hand, the cursing of Yaššib is the ultimate end of Athirat's punishment, Keret is left without an heir, the breaking of Athirat's end of the bargain in 14.IV.

Another factor which would seem to indicate that the cursing of Yaššib is part of Athirat's punishment, is that her role is concerned with the progeny of the king. This is supported by the fact that Yaššib is described as the one sucking the milk of Athirat in 15.II.26. Thus *KTU* 1.15.II.26-28 reads:

26ynq. ḥlb .a[<u>t</u>]rt	he [Yaššib] will suck the milk of Athirat,
27mšš .t d.btl[^c nt]	drain the breasts of the virgin [Anat]
28mšn q[]	wetnurse(s)[] ²⁵

Yaššib is the gift of Athirat to Keret, and Keret's illness does not remove the benefit of his vow, for he now has a beneficiary. Keret's cursing of his firstborn, Yaššib, is tantamount to putting him back in the same position he found himself in at the beginning of the myth.²⁶ His hope for a successor is lost. His first choice, the son blessed by the nursing of Athirat, is cursed. Although different words are used in the curses of Athirat (15.III.30) and Keret (16.VI.55-56), the action in both is described as 'breaking' (*apr* in 15.III.30, *yibr* in 16.VI.55-56). Who or what does Athirat threaten to break? De Moor and Spronk have noted that *pr* is the word

²⁵F. Løkkegaard ('The Canaanite Divine Wetnurses' *StTh* 10 (1956): 60-61) argues that the characters of Athirat (whom he equates with Athirat) and Anat would make poor wetnurses. He instead proposes to emend *art* to *kirt*, 'the Kotharat', and to fill the lacuna with Miqat (one of the Kotharat) instead of Anat. Unfortunately, the photograph in *CTA2* is hopelessly illegible at this point (plate XXII). The difficulty is compounded by the fact that *mšnq* 'wetnurse(s)' does not occur elsewhere in the mythological tablets, and therefore we have no other referent. Despite Løkkegaard's objection, *btl* is the usual epithet for Anat, and we nowhere find Anat paralleled by the Kotharat. N. Wyatt ('The Stela of the Seated God from Ugarit' *UF* 15 (1983): 273) suggests that Shapash should fill the lacuna. His comparative evidence is compelling; however, there is no evidence that Shapash was ever given the title *btl*.

²⁶I am indebted to Dr. N. Wyatt for this suggestion.

used specifically for the breaking of treaties and vows.²⁷ Thus we may have a glimpse of the fury of Athirat realised, in the retributive withdrawal of her side of the vow, since Keret did not keep his part.

Does this analysis not provide difficulty for an acceptance of Parker's division of the text into three historical sources? I would understand the addition of the vow to Keret A as a skilfully placed episode which foreshadows Keret B.²⁸ Keret B in turn was the necessary bridge for the cursing of Yaşşib in Keret C. The sickness of Keret provided the opportunity to introduce the usurpation attempt of Yaşşib, and finally to his cursing by Keret. Parker sees 15.III.16 ('I will give the youngest of them first-born status') as the only line anticipatory to section C.²⁹ Following Parker's general division of the text I would argue, however, that Athirat's curse also anticipates a further punishment following the illness of Keret. This analysis points to a carefully constructed whole which incorporates three familiar themes from the ancient Near East. Keret's illness, even in the light of the structure of the epic as we now have it, would not seem to be the end of the story. The dénouement of Athirat cancelling her portion of the vow should result in the cancelling of Keret's request, and that request was not for long life, but for an heir to his throne. If Athirat's curse is to have any effect, it cannot stop with the death of Keret alone: it must touch his heirs.

These three pericopes contain the only references to Athirat in the story of Keret. Despite de Moor's reconstruction of *KTU* 1.16.V.6-9 as:

²⁷'Problematical Passages': 177.

²⁸Parker ('Historical Composition of KRT': 169) notes that Keret B was 'rather neatly grafted onto A'.

²⁹'Historical Composition of KRT': 169.

y ʾat̪r[t]	O Athiratu.....
bdk.b[]	in your hand.....
tnnth [.kspm. ʾatn]	Twice her (weight) in silver I will give
l̪l̪th [. hr̪sm]	thrice her (weight) in gold ³⁰

we need not see another reference to Athirat here. The context of these lines is the search for a cure for Keret. Why should someone be discussing with Athirat 'twice her weight in silver' and 'thrice her weight in gold' at this point? This portion of the tablet is damaged, and other scholars have translated the lines without finding the reference to Athirat in them. It would seem that perhaps we would find here a reference to someone attempting to cure Keret by doing something two, then three times (so Gibson). With such a fragmentary section we do not have enough context to offer a meaningful translation.³¹ Any suggestions for the translation of this text must remain tentative.

The summary of our investigation into the character of Athirat in Keret is that she is associated with the procuring of a royal heir. It is specifically Athirat who was implored, although El appeared to Keret in a dream and gave him the instructions which he needed to attain an heir. It may be that that Elimelek knew of a shrine of Athirat in the region of the setting of his story. However, it is more likely that he chose Athirat as his character because the issue involved was that of royal childbearing. This aspect of Athirat's character will show up elsewhere in the Ugaritic texts. She is (apparently) paired with Anat in 1.15.II.26-27 as a wetnurse of the gods. The Myth of Keret informs us that the character of Athirat is that of a goddess who could be approached with the request for a royal heir.

³⁰Problematical Passages': 189.

³¹The lines in question follow approximately thirty mostly or completely missing lines. What follows is apparently El's search for a god to cure Keret's illness.

2.B. The Baal Cycle (*KTU* 1.1-6)³²

In the surviving Ugaritic myths, Athirat appears most active in the Baal Cycle. Her role comes to the fore in two particular instances: when Baal requests a palace, and when he has died and a new monarch of the gods is needed. She is described essentially in terms of her dealings with her consort El. This leads to the obvious question of the role of women in the ancient world,³³ as well as to the question of what phenomenon Athirat 'represents'. Both of these questions will be addressed in the course of this exploration. In keeping with the stated method of using sound exegetical principles with the text, a pericope must be established. In this matter I follow the direction of J. C. L. Gibson in dividing the Baal Cycle into: Baal and Yam (*KTU* 1.1-2), the Palace of Baal (*KTU* 1.3-4), and Baal and Mot (*KTU* 1.5-6).³⁴ These divisions provide a useful outline for study of the myth;³⁵ within these episodes we may reasonably assume some continuity of theme and story line. All three stories revolve round the exploits of Baal, his striving to achieve and maintain kingship among the gods. It would also seem that these three episodes form a coherent 'cycle', and the cycle ends with text 6, as indicated by the extended colophon at the end of the tablet. Athirat's role in the cycle, although limited, demonstrates the important

³²For general discussions of the Baal Cycle, see D. Kinet, 'Theologische Reflexion im ugaritischen Ba'al Zyklus' *BZ* 22 (N.F. 1978): 236-244; M. S. Smith, 'Interpreting the Baal Cycle' *UF* 18 (1986): 313-339 and N. Wyatt, 'The AB Cycle and Kingship in Ugaritic Thought' *Cosmos* 2 (1986): 136-142. For a structuralist approach using the Baal Cycle, see D. Petersen and M. Woodward, 'Northwest Semitic Religion: A Study of Relational Structures' *UF* 9 (1977): 233-248.

³³In respect to our contexts, see especially P. A. H. de Boer, *Fatherhood and Motherhood in Israelite and Judean Piety*, Leiden, 1974; and A. van Selms, *Marriage and Family Life in Ugaritic Literature* (POS 1), London, 1954.

³⁴*CML*²: 2-19.

³⁵These divisions do not strictly delimit where in the story Yam and Mot appear. Mot's name, for example, makes an appearance in the final column of text 4, and Yam's name also appears after he has been vanquished, in text 4. A coherence of all three episodes thus does pervade the texts.

role which she played in the Ugaritic pantheon. This will become apparent as we examine the texts.

To divide the texts further into columns and lines for separate examination will be necessary throughout this chapter. I will delimit smaller units as I come to them. Since the issue of the order of the tablets is far larger than the scope of a study of just one character who appears only occasionally, I shall simply follow the *KTU* and *CTA* order of 1-6.³⁶ Although a variant order has been proposed,³⁷ such an order should not affect my conclusions, unless so noted. With these preliminary notes, we move on to the texts themselves.

2.B.i. Baal and Yam

In the section 'Baal and Yam', Athirat seems to appear once, under the general title *ilt* 'Goddess'. This appearance is actually in the middle of the difficult text *KTU* 1.1.IV. Despite the fragmentary nature of this text, we stand to learn quite a bit about the Baal Cycle from it. In the smaller context of 'Baal and Yam', it may be the only place where we can discover anything about Athirat (if she does indeed appear here). As her epithet *rbt airt ym* seems to include some aspect of the sea, we might be able to discern some relationship between Athirat and Yam in this text concerned with Yam's 'coronation'. Thus it behooves us to look at column IV in its entirety.³⁸

[]m. š/yt/pr[] []

³⁶See G. del Olmo Lete, 'Aṭiratu's Entreaty and the Order of the Ugaritic Tablets *KTU* 1.3/4', *AuOr* 1 (1983): 67-71.

³⁷de Moor, *ARTU*: 1-108.

³⁸Due to the great amount of missing material, instead of arranging this passage according to stichometry, I have presented it according to the line numbers of *KTU*.

<i>gm. ṣḥ.l q</i> [rbm ³⁹]	. . . Cry aloud to the [near ones]
<i>l rhqm.l p</i> [tr ⁴⁰]	to the distant ones, to [the separated ones]
<i>ṣḥ.il.yṭb.b</i> m[rzḥ]	cry out, 'El sits in [the Mrzḥ]
<i>5 bṭt. ʿllmn.x</i> []	the shame of caprice ⁴¹ []
<i>ilm.bt.b ʿlk.</i> []	the gods, the house of your lord[]
<i>d l.ylkn.ḥṣ̣̣.b</i> a[rṣ]	who indeed walks quickly on the ea[rth]
<i>b ʿpr.ḥbl ṭtm.</i> []	in the dust acts of corruption ⁴² . . . []
<i>ṣ̣̣qy.rṭ a.tnmy.yt</i> n[ks.b yd]	A drink of curdled milk was. . .he put [a cup into hand,]
<i>10krpn.b klat yd.</i> []	a carafe ⁴³ into both hands ⁴⁴ []
<i>k mll.k ḥṣ̣̣.tus</i> p []	like wheat, ⁴⁵ like sheaves ⁴⁶ were gathered []

³⁹I understand the initial section of this passage to be an invocation, or perhaps an invitation of the gods, both near and far, to the event about to be celebrated. The context seems to support this reconstruction, although it must necessarily remain hypothetical. Many scholars restore *q* [rbm] in the lacuna, thus rendering 'to those near by' and the following line, as a merismus, including all those near, far, and inbetween. *CML*²: 39; *MLC*: 158. Compare the use of far/near as a word pair, W. G. E. Watson 'Some Additional Word Pairs' in *Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie* (JSOTS 67), L. Eslinger and G. Taylor, eds., Sheffield, 1988: 189.

⁴⁰I restore *pṭr*, as cognate with the Hebrew *pṭr*, 'separate, remove, set free' (BDB: 809b).

⁴¹This is to understand ʿllmn as being from the root ʿll. The form *ta ʿlūlīm*, meaning 'wanton, caprice' occurs in Isa. 3.4; 66.4.

⁴²I take *ḥbl* as cognate with the Akkadian *ḥabalum*, 'to commit a misdeed, harm'. The choice of this word is not arbitrary; indeed, the context is broken and uncertain, but it seems that the 'shame of caprice' is mentioned in line 5, and an act of corruption does parallel this.

⁴³Suggestion was made in an Ugaritic class that *krpn* may be related to the modern English word 'carafe'. Upon checking the etymology of carafe in the Oxford English Dictionary, I found two possibilities offered: Arabic *gharafah* and Persian *qarabah*. As the word is apparently Semitic, although the actual form of a carafe may be a modern phenomenon, I believe the use of the word is not inappropriate in this instance. I would like to acknowledge the astute observation on the part of Mrs. C. Butler at this point.

⁴⁴The bicolon, literally 'he gave a cup in hand, a carafe into both hands' is also found at *KTU* 1.3.I.10. The rendering into English is awkward as the subject of the giving is unknown.

⁴⁵This is to understand *mll* as cognate with Hebrew *mll*, 'to rub, scrape'. The form *meʿlloṣ* occurs in Deut. 23.26 meaning 'ear of wheat'. Caquot, Szyner, and Herdner (*TO* : 308, note j) point to the Mishnaic Hebrew word of the same meaning.

⁴⁶De Moor (*ARTU*: 25) suggests 'gravel', probably on the basis of Hebrew *ḥṣṣ*, which can have that connotation. I take *ḥṣ* as cognate with the Semitic root (BDB: 300b) *ḥwṣ* II, meaning 'bound, sewn together', or 'compressed'. Thus 'sheaves' would provide a fitting parallel to 'wheat' in the same line. Although the readings 'wheat' and 'sheaves' are both hypothetical, they do (despite any seasonal implications which

<i>tgr.il.bnh.tr</i> []	they sojourn ⁴⁷ <i>with</i> El, his son to the bull[]
<i>w y 'n.ltpn.il.d</i> p[id]	and the Benevolent ⁴⁸ El the Compassionate spoke[]
<i>šm.bny.yw.il</i> t []	'the name of my son is Yaw, o Goddess ⁴⁹ []
15wp 'r.šm.yw [.wilt.w]] even proclaim a name for Yam' [And Goddess ⁵⁰ and]
<i>t 'nyn.l zntn</i> [.ym]	answered, 'For our sustenance ⁵¹ []
<i>at.adn.tp</i> ' r[]	you have indeed proclaimed him lord[]
<i>ank.ltpn.il</i> [.dpid]	I, Benevolent El [the Compassionate]
'l.ydm.p 'r t[]	on the hands, I have proclaimed []
20 <i>šmk.mdd.i</i> [1]	your name is beloved of El[]
<i>bt.kspy.d</i> t[]	my house of silver which[]
<i>bd.aliyn</i> b[' l]	from (?) the hand of Mighty Baal[]
<i>kd.ynašn</i> []	as they who spurn[]
<i>gršnn.l</i> k[si.mlkh.lnht]	drive him out from the s[eat of his kingship
l kht] ⁵²	from the rest on the throne of]
25 <i>drkth.š</i> x[]	of his dominion[]
<i>whm.ap.l</i> []	And if then . . . []
<i>ymḥšk.k</i> []	he will smite you like[]
<i>il.dbḥ.</i> []	El , . . . sacrifice[]

could be read into such a context) have the connotations of being 'gathered in', just as the guests are apparently being gathered in to the event which the text describes.

⁴⁷Perhaps *tgr* is related to the Hebrew *gwr*, 'to sojourn'; this would continue the description of the assembling of the gods described in the previous lines.

⁴⁸This is de Moor's rendering of *ltpn*, *ARTU*: throughout.

⁴⁹N. Wyatt ("Jedidiah" and Cognate Forms as a Title of Royal Legitimation' *Biblica* 66 (1985): 121) offers the possibility "The name of my son is Lord of the god[s], supposing *ilm* rather than *ilt*. This difference in interpretation points to the difficulties of dealing with such a fragmentary text. The photograph in *CTA* 2 is not clear at this point. I have viewed Dr. Wyatt's close-up slide of this section of text one. The slide clearly shows 𐤎 , which may either be *t* or the first stroke of *m*. This line is the crux for Athirat's possible mention in Baal and Yam. See the following discussion.

⁵⁰Gibson (*CML*²: 39) restores *.wilt.w* in the lacuna, de Moor (*ARTU*: 25) supplies 'Lady Athiratu'. Whichever restoration is chosen, the context may allow such an interpretation. I have followed Gibson's restoration, although its use for the following discussion is minimal. It would be too tenuous to supply the missing subjects, although *bnh*, 'her sons' is a common element to follow *art*, but perhaps not *ilt*. In any case, the following verb seems to indicate that a plural subject is understood. I shall draw no conclusions on the basis of this hypothetical restoration.

⁵¹With Gibson (*CML*²: 39), who cites Arabic *zāna* as cognate; see also N. Wyatt, "Jedidiah": 121.

⁵²Restored (as in *KTU*) on the basis of 3.IV.2-3.

p [‘]*r.b* n[h] he proclaimed [his] s[on king(?)]
 30 *ṭbh.alp* [m.ap.šin.šql] Slaughter catt[le, also fell sheep]
ṭrm.w [mri.ilm.‘ glm.dt bulls and [fatted rams, yearling calves]
 šnt]
imr.[qmš.llim] lambs [strangle⁵³ and kids]

At the outset it must be said that any hypotheses based on this text must remain tentative. The information contained in this broken column may confirm some of the characteristics of Athirat which appear elsewhere in the Baal Cycle; however, of this we cannot be certain. My reason for exploring this text is this: it has been suggested that *ilt*, elsewhere an epithet of Athirat, occurs here. If it does, then the text may be compared to other references to Athirat.

This scene appears to portray an important event, with the first lines being an invitation (or perhaps an invocation?) to the gods. De Moor understands the opening of this text as being a complaint of Athirat to El.⁵⁴ This suggestion is difficult to substantiate, but as Athirat may be present we should not rule out the possibility that she may be speaking as the text begins. If Athirat is indeed present at this event, de Moor can do no more than appeal to plausibility on the point of who is speaking. I do not have any suggestion for the speaker at the broken beginning of this section.

The event portrayed occurs, it would seem from line 6, in 'the house of your lord'. Both Gibson and Wyatt suggest that the lord here referred to is Yam;⁵⁵ de Moor suggests Baal and therefore places this tablet after text

⁵³With Coogan (*Stories from Ancient Canaan*, Philadelphia, 1978 [hereafter cited as SAC]: 104), who follows Driver (*CML*: 77) who takes *qmš* from the same root in Hebrew 'to grasp' (*CML*: 144).

⁵⁴*ARTU*: 24.

⁵⁵Gibson, *CML*²: 39; Wyatt, ("Jedidiah": 121) suggests that 'lord' in this passage is part of Yam's fivefold titulary.

3.⁵⁶ I see no reason to change the order of the tablets on the basis of *b 'lk* 'your lord' alone. Throughout the Baal Cycle various gods are given, or seize for themselves, dominion over the others.⁵⁷ The understanding of the sequence of events in ordering the tablets 1-6 need not be rearranged on the broken context of text 1. If the ceremony portrayed here is the renaming (or coronation) of Yam, it would be reasonable to suppose that he is the lord indicated.

Phrases with the nuance of corruption (lines 5 and 8) remain enigmatic, but the point seems to be that the gods are being gathered together, like wheat or sheaves (line 11). What follows appears to be a renaming of Yam, or perhaps his coronation.

A crucial point for the discussion of Athirat in the text is the understanding of lines 14 and 15: *šm.bny.yw.il† []/wp 'r.šm.ym*. Gibson reads them as "the name of my son is Yaw, o Elat [and] / so do you proclaim a (new) name for Yam", thus it is rendered as a phrase addressed to Elat.⁵⁸ This implies that Athirat is being given an active role in the renaming of Yam. Driver suggests "The name of my son is Yaw god.../And he did proclaim the name of Yaw [to be Yaw]".⁵⁹ El is on such an approach

⁵⁶*ARTU*: 25 for his reading Baal; the arrangement of the texts is evident in his table of contents and his remarks at the beginning of each tablet.

⁵⁷For example, Yam (text 2), Baal (throughout), Mot (texts 5 and 6), Athtar (text 6). I raise this point without wishing to enter the debate of the position of El in the pantheon, versus that of Baal. Kapelrud (*Baal in the Ras Shamra Texts*, Copenhagen, 1952: 73-109); Pope (*El in the Ugaritic Texts* (SVT 2), Leiden, 1955, and 'The Status of El at Ugarit' *UF* 19 (1987): throughout); and Oldenburg (*The Conflict Between El and Ba 'al* : 70-155, and throughout) have argued strongly for a conflict between the two deities, whilst Gibson ('The Theology of the Ugaritic Baal Cycle': 206-210); C. E. L'Heureux, *Rank Among the Canaanite Gods, El, Ba 'al , and the Repha 'im* (HSM 21), Missoula, 1979: 18-49; and Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh* : 38-61 soundly refute this view. This is evident in the Baal Cycle: it is necessary for Baal to have El's permission to build his palace (texts 3-4); that El invites Athirat to name a successor to Baal (text 6); and that Mot surrenders his struggle with Baal because of El's threat to uproot his dominion (6.VI).

⁵⁸*CML*²: 39.

⁵⁹*CML*: 75.

tautologically proclaiming Yaw's name to be Yaw, and the Goddess is absent. Gordon likewise supposes the absence of the Goddess, and adds the *ilt* to the name Yaw, thus: 'The name of my son is Yaw-El(at)?[] /And he proclaims the name of *Yamm* []'.⁶⁰ Both Driver and Gordon understand the lines as referring to El, and do not see a goddess present at all. De Moor stresses the presence of Athirat, but translates the lines as "'My son [shall not be called] by the name of Yawwu, o goddess, [but Yammu shall be his name]!" So he proclaimed the name of Yammu.'⁶¹ The question is therefore, who is declaring the name of Yam? It is also important to ask what evidence we have for Athirat being present at all. Del Olmo Lete understands this perplexing passage as saying '["De seguro proclamaré] el nombre de mi hijo *Yawu* ; / diosa, [su nombre es: 'Amado de *Ilu* "]./Y proclamó el nombre de *Yammu* '.⁶² This translation assumes the presence of a goddess. Caquot, Sznycer, and Herdner translate the troublesome lines as "'Le nom de mon fils (est) Yaw, /Elat [] et proclamez le nom de Yam []'"⁶³ They understand that a goddess Elat is present, and she is asked to name Yaw in line 15 (they translate *p'ar* as an imperative). It is obvious that no consensus has been reached on this difficult passage. In attempting to divide the passage into poetic cola, one is met by the difficulty of half lines being preserved: this makes any reconstruction of the versification tenuous. The question becomes one of understanding the verb and the appearance of *ilt* at the end of the existing line. The form of *p'ar* allows for its interpretation as either an imperative, or as a third person masculine singular form of the suffixing conjugation. Either, as

⁶⁰PLMU : 88.

⁶¹ARTU: 25.

⁶²MLC: 159.

⁶³TO: 309-310.

demonstrated by the examples above, makes sense of the text. Are there any factors to help determine what is meant?

Since Yam is generally construed as a masculine deity,⁶⁴ it would seem that Gordon's rendering of Yaw-El(at) is unlikely. We have no reason to suspect that Yam would be named 'Yaw-Goddess'. Line 15 could read, however, 'And he proclaims the name of *Yamm*' (with Gordon). Driver's explanation is possible, but it does multiply the number of 'Yaw's in the text, followed by the giving of a new name. Should El be stressing the old name of Yaw more than the new one to be assigned?

I have closely examined the photograph of this section of the tablet by N. Wyatt.⁶⁵ The photograph clearly shows D at the broken end of the tablet in line 14. It is possible that the first stroke of a *m* (D) is intended here, but the line breaks off just at the end of the horizontal wedge. Thus, the tablet would be able to support either reading. I would simply note here that Caquot, Szynger, and Herdner, Gibson, del Olmo Lete, and de Moor read the word represented at the end of line 14 as *ilt*. I shall now consider what information the text would provide, if the word in question were to be read as *ilt*. Any conclusions are tentative, and I shall use them only for the purposes of comparison with the attributes of Athirat as more solidly supported elsewhere in the Baal Cycle.

Although we may read *ilt* at the broken end of line 14, this suggestion does not clarify what is happening in the story. Is Athirat being asked to rename Yaw (Gibson), or is El simply addressing an unspecified goddess (del Olmo Lete)? The interpretation depends on the understanding of the verb *p 'r* in line 15. The usual narrative 'tense' in

⁶⁴The finite verbs used of Yam in 2.IV are masculine.

⁶⁵I am indebted to Dr. Wyatt for offering me the use of his close-up slides of the tablets.

Ugaritic mythology seems to be the 'prefixing conjugation' (roughly similar to the Hebrew imperfect). We should note that both prefixing and suffixing conjugations are used with this verb in the following lines.⁶⁶ The amount of assistance the verb form may lend is limited in this instance. We could appeal to another factor which supports the presence of a group of deities in the form of *tʿnyn* 'they answered' in line 16. In the paradigms given by Gordon, this form could be interpreted in a number of ways.⁶⁷ The prefixed *t* and suffixed *n* could point to a second or third person dual form of either gender, as well as a second or third person plural of either gender. The verb could even be a third feminine singular with an energetic *n*, or a second person singular of either gender. This practically rules out only third masculine singulars and first person verbs. The appeal to context depends on who is present, thus causing circular arguments. The verb form, therefore, does not necessarily indicate the presence of a goddess, nor does it demonstrate any role which a goddess may be playing in the text.

It may seem that I have spent an excessive amount of time on an obscure text. A point of interest is the possibility that Athirat may be mentioned here together with Yam. Her title *rbt atrt ym* has attracted much speculation. Without entering into the question of etymology here,⁶⁸ we must note that to explore the evidence for Athirat being associated with Yam or with the sea we must pause wherever we may possibly find such evidence. Athirat and Yam appear to be mentioned together in the context of *KTU* 1.4.II. Again the text is broken, but we may,

⁶⁶The prefixing conjugation *tp ʿr* occurs in line 17, the suffixing conjugation *p ʿrt* occurs in line 19. Both have been partially restored.

⁶⁷*UT*: 154.

⁶⁸I shall address this issue in my conclusions, after the relevant material has been examined.

by examining the pieces, be able to distil some information on this relationship indicated in Athirat's epithet.

The obvious event being portrayed in 1.IV is the renaming of Yam. His titles *zbl* and *tpt* are an indication of some kind of sovereignty. It is also apparent from *KTU* 1.2.III (also badly broken) that Yam has been chosen for some special purpose by El, a purpose which includes having a palace built. For Baal, the building of a palace is a sign of his kingship among the gods. It would therefore seem reasonable to suppose that this is also the case for Yam. I have noted that Athirat may be present, but this is a point which I cannot consider proven.

Why might Athirat have been present in this text? Firstly, because she is the mother of Yam (as she is the mother of all the gods), she would naturally appear in a ceremony (?) honouring her son. Secondly, El may have asked Athirat to proclaim a new name for Yam, indicating that she may have had an important role in the scene.⁶⁹ Here, El asking Athirat to rename Yam, would perhaps anticipate his later request of her to name a successor to Baal (6.I). The evidence in the latter passage points to this as a functional role of Athirat, although its specific nature cannot be declared with any certainty here. Gordon has suggested that Ugaritic *rbt* should be understood as the 'queen mother', and therefore, the one supposed to name the successor to the throne.⁷⁰ Although this theory would provide some answers to the situation as it is presented in *KTU* 1.1.IV, we cannot be certain of it in this context. I shall consider further the office of the *rabttu* below. The fragmentary state of this text only allows us to determine that

⁶⁹The phenomenon of renaming a person (here a divinity) at a new stage of life is familiar from the Old Testament. One need only recall the accounts of Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 17), and Jacob (Gen. 32.28), or even the New Testament account of Simon Peter (Matt.16.18) to consider its prevalence.

⁷⁰C. Gordon, 'Ugaritic *rbt* /*rabttu*' in *Ascribe to the Lord*: 127-132.

Athirat may have been present, and that her word may have been requested by El. Also, we must note, if this reconstruction of the scenario is correct, that Athirat declined the offer to rename her son, and the honour is given to El. This could reflect a formality of court life at Ugarit, but we have no records to substantiate this idea. It is interesting to note that, if the texts do follow in their commonly assigned order, this could be the first mention of Athirat we have in the Baal Cycle, and consequently it would come before the title *rbt airt ym* is used of her.

Perhaps as an accident of the state of the texts, this is the only instance in our sub-division of Baal and Yam where Athirat may appear. We may learn from it that she is given a special status in the renaming of Yam, possibly reflecting her status as queen mother. Also of interest in this instance is that if Athirat is mentioned, it is in association with El, not on her own. This pattern is reflected elsewhere in the Baal Cycle, as we shall see.⁷¹

⁷¹The assumption is made that Elat is an epithet for Athirat. Her name appears in parallel with this title in *KTU* 1.14.IV.34-36, and as the consort of the head of the pantheon, the title 'Goddess' is just as appropriate for her in this mythological cycle as 'El' is for her consort.

2.B.ii. The Palace of Baal

In the 'Palace of Baal' section of the Baal Cycle, Athirat appears in a larger role. Her name appears in formulaic expressions, and as a character she appears in active situations. The first mention of her in the surviving texts is in *KTU* 1.3.I.15. The text is in a good state of preservation here, but the content is open to interpretation. The scene is that of a banquet, apparently celebrating Baal's victory over Yam, as it occurs shortly after their combat scene. Lines 10-17 read:

10ytn.ks.bdh	he put a cup into his hand,
11krpnm.b klat.ydh	a carafe in both of his hands,
12bk rb. ʿzm.	a great jar mighty to behold,
ridn 13mt.šmm.	a tankard ⁷² of the men of heaven,
ks. qdš 14l tp hnh.att.	a cup of holiness (which) no woman could see,
krpn 15l t ʿn.atrt.	a carafe (which) Athirat might not regard.
alp 16kd.yqh. b hmr	A thousand jars he took from the wine vat, ⁷³
17rbt.ymsk. b mskh	a myriad he mixed in his mixture.

The story of a divine banquet is being told, and the particular vessel from which Baal is drinking is described with considerable mythological detail. As in the Norse tales of Thor who could drink great quantities of mead, Baal is pictured here drinking an enormous amount of wine. The tantalising reference to a woman (*att*) in line 14 is paralleled by *atrt* in line

⁷²The word *ridn* is uncertain, but the parallelism seems to demand a general synonym for cup (*ks*), carafe (*krpnm*), and 'jar' (?) (*bk*). In this context, a tankard, as a large drinking vessel, would be suitable.

⁷³I have followed the suggestion of N. Wyatt for *hmr* = 'wine vat' here, on the basis of context.

15. The difficulty is to interpret what this reference means. If administrative records point to a patriarchal society, then we may assume that women were excluded from certain events, but why from a victory feast? The goddesses are clearly present at the meeting of the gods when Yam's embassy arrives (2.I), since Anat and Athtart prevent Baal's harming of the messengers. When celebrating the building of his palace, Baal invites the gods and goddesses (*ilht*) to a feast (4.VI.45-54). Why, then, is it mentioned that no woman could see the cup from which Baal is portrayed as drinking in text 3.I? Why is 'woman' paralleled by Athirat? The question of why no woman could see the cup is lost to us in the lack of our knowledge of Ugaritian social customs, but a hint may exist in 4.III.17-22 (see below). As the text stands, however, the *l*s in lines 14-15 could be asseverative as well as negative particles. The cup may have been one which 'women indeed saw', and which 'Athirat indeed regarded'. This difference in perspective still does not illuminate the social situation in which women are referred to in relation to goblets.

One factor is conspicuous; *atrt* is the 'B word' paralleled with *att* as the 'A word'. In the light of this, the translation of the *atrt* as Athirat could be questioned.⁷⁴ Margalit has recently argued that the word *atrt* here does not refer to the goddess but is a generic word for 'woman'.⁷⁵ He bases his hypothesis on the parallelism, concerning which he argues, 'Nowhere in Ugaritic poetry does the divine name *atrt* stand as a B-word parallel to an epithet'.⁷⁶ I would suggest, however, that *att* is not to be understood as an epithet here. Also, Margalit cannot provide any evidence for an Ugaritic common noun *atrt* meaning 'woman' except this instance. Indeed, this

⁷⁴Indeed, Gibson (*CML*²: 46) translates the word as 'goddess', suggesting that it is a generic term. Driver (*CML*: 83) generalises even further to 'deity'.

⁷⁵B. Margalit, 'The Meaning and Significance of Asherah' *VT* 40 (1990):271-274.

⁷⁶'Meaning and Significance of Asherah': 273.



yṣḥ.aṯrt 37w *bnh.* he cries to Athirat and her children,
*ilt.w ṣbrt.arḥh*⁷⁸ to the goddess and the gathering of her
 company,
38wn.in.bt [.] *l b ʿl.km.ilm* 'Now there is no house for Baal like the gods,
39ḥzr.k b[n.] aṯrt. (nor) a court⁷⁹ like the children of Athirat,
mṯb.il the dwelling of El
40mzll.b [nh. is the residence of [his] so[n],
m]ṯb.rbt.aṯrt 41y m. the dwelling of Lady Athirat of the Sea
mṯb.[pdr]y.bt.ar is the dwelling of [Pdr]y, daughter of mist,
42[mzll.] ṯl y[.bt.] rb [the residence of] ṯly [daughter of] rain,
mṯb 43[arṣy.bt.y ʿbdr.] the dwelling of [Arṣy daughter of ?]
mṯb 44[klt.knyt]⁸⁰ . . . the dwelling of the perfect brides. . .

Parts of this pericope are repeated to the extent that they may be regarded as formulas. In the context of the poetry, however, this repetition should not be considered unusual. We do stand to gain some knowledge of Athirat from it, as her name appears three times within it. The first observation to be made is that the text supports an alternative interpretation. Since the expected preposition *l* is absent before the objects of Baal's supplication, it could be assumed that the gods are the ones speaking. Thus de Moor's rendering:

The Bull Ilu, his father, groaned (and) cried out,
 Ilu, the King who had created him,

context of making a person in the womb (BDB: 466b, cf. Job 31.15, Ps. 119.73). Thus we could perhaps render the phrase as 'the king who begot him'. This would seem to be the line of understanding which Gordon takes (PLMU: 89).

⁷⁸Taken as *aryh* on the basis of the parallel passages. Since *ḥ* (𐎧) and *y* (𐎣) are very similar in cuneiform, this reconstruction is plausible. The difficulty with this is the translation of this word. Gibson (*CML*²: 142) has suggested a possible cognate in the Egyptian *iry*, 'companion'. Aistleitner (*WUS*:35) has essentially the same translation, based on Arabic *ʿarā*. In any case, the parallelism gives a clear enough meaning in this context.

⁷⁹Understanding Ugaritic *ḥzr* as cognate with Hebrew *ḥṣr* I 'enclosure, court' (BDB: 346b). Another possibility is a relationship to *ḥdr*, 'chamber, room' (BDB: 293b).

⁸⁰Restored on the basis of 4.I.14-15.

Athiratu and her sons cried out,
the Goddess and the troop of her kin⁸¹

The verb *ṣwh*, however, is commonly found with and without the preposition *l*.⁸² The only method of deciding between the two interpretations is according to context. It would be reasonable to suppose that since the message is given to Anat, Athirat, and El, all included among the suppliants, they are actually being addressed by Baal's prayer rather than pleading for him. Indeed, to whom would El cry out if Baal had no house, as he is the chief god? The most obvious answer to this reasoning is that the language is stereotypical poetic language. As the initial occurrence of the lines in question seems to be presented by Baal to Anat (as indicated by the feminine singular *wt 'n* in 3.IV.47) it has the flavour of a supplication on the part of Baal. It is to the gods that Baal appeals for a house, and he cannot build it until he has the permission of El. Given the fact that the language is poetic, and thus allows for repetitions of prayers even in the mouths of the ones being prayed to, what is being sought ultimately is the permission of El. Since El is primary in the list of those being invoked, it can be understood that Baal is praying to the other gods. The complaint is, after all, Baal's.

It is important to note that Athirat appears in parallel to El, thus demonstrating their similar roles as the parents of the gods. Athirat is here pictured in her role as mother of the gods, and the second mention of her name is precisely in that setting. She and her children are being approached for the sake of Baal. We should note that *atrt* occurs in parallel with *ilt* here, thus demonstrating her connection with this title. Neither *ilt* nor *rbt* seem to be unique titles of Athirat, as they can be found in

⁸¹*ARTU*: 18.

⁸²I am indebted to Prof. J. C. L. Gibson for pointing this out to me.

connection with other goddesses in other contexts. *llt*, however, in connection with El, or in parallelism with *atrt*, does seem to indicate Athirat, as it does here and possibly in 1.IV.14.

Further, it is possible to discern that Athirat has a dwelling. This point should not be pressed too far. The point of this poetic expression (hyperbole?) is that all of the gods have dwellings, except Baal and thus his daughters. The passage does not state that El and Athirat live apart, and the parallelism of their names would rather indicate the opposite. The residence of El and Athirat is also the residence of Baal and his daughters; that is to say, the main point is especially emphasized: Baal has no house. Van Selms approaches the issues of family arrangements at Ugarit, and he begins with this assumption: 'We suppose that the life of gods and mythical heroes as depicted in the epical texts is on the whole a reflection of human life as known to the poets of Ugarit.'⁸³ That the gods' lives contained elements of human life seems unquestionable, but to assume the lives in detail are such a reflection is dubious.⁸⁴ An important lesson is presented by this scenario. The concern of myth is not to reflect accurately human realities - this could be done in secular texts. The myth makes a point. Here we are simply informed that Baal's daughters lived with El and Athirat, just as he himself did, as a circumstance which called for his own palace to be built. We should not read too much of everyday life into this. What can be distilled about Athirat? The most obvious information is that Athirat is considered a mother to Baal and his daughters. This is important to note, as it calls into question the assumption that the enmity between Athirat and Baal in other mythologies (as in the Elkunirša^v myth) carried directly

⁸³*Marriage and Family Life*: 10.

⁸⁴For instance, Baal, as cited at *KTU* 1.3.I.10-17, is drinking myriads of draughts of wine, and Kothar-and-Khasis builds a mansion for Baal by burning it for seven days (4.VI.22-35).

through to Ugarit. The 'family life' of the gods is not as much the emphasis of the myths, as is the outcome of their actions.

One proper question applied to such a text as this, which is repeated several times, is: in what contexts within the story does it occur? Another valid question is: does this affect its form at all? To answer the first question, the statement of Baal's lament is found on the lips of Baal (3.IV.47-53), Anat (3.V.35-44), and Athirat (4.IV.47-57). Since all three deities use the same formulation, even when they are included in the number of those petitioned by Baal, their words may be regarded as a standard formula. The actual context suggests that these words are ultimately a message to be presented in the hearing of El. They appear as a form of lament. In each case where the message of lament is uttered, it is in the form of an appeal for help; Baal requires a house to establish his kingship, but he does not have the sanction of El to build one. The plea is presented to Anat, who is supplicated in the 'third class' of gods, 'the children of Athirat'. Thus, the primary position in his standard lament is filled by the appeal to El himself. Ultimately, it is El who must give the order to have the house built. This is demonstrated by the texts regarding the palace of Yam in *KTU* 1.2.III.7-11, as well as being supported by 2.III.18-20, regarding Athtar's lack of a house. What is important in the context of this study is that Athirat's intervention is needed to win the approval of El. Thus, in Baal's lament, the second deity to whom he appealed was Athirat. The very fact that Baal and Anat had to approach Athirat on the matter demonstrates that Anat's forceful appeal to El was not granted.⁸⁵ As stated above, Anat is classed in

⁸⁵I see no need to rearrange the tablets in order to form a coherent seasonal pattern, as with de Moor, *The Seasonal Pattern in the Ugaritic Myth of Ba 'lu* (AOAT 16), Kevelaer and Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1971: 39-42. His suggestion that El could not resist the forceful approach of Anat is to betray a misunderstanding of the mythology. Surely a system of mythological thinking which could allow Baal to come back after having died could also permit El to deny the desire of an irate Anat.

the tertiary division of gods, that of the children of Athirat. Thus, in the course of the circulation of his supplication, the words of Baal are presented, in reverse order, to the gods to whom he must appeal. Initially he gives his lament to Anat. Then, in ascending rank, he cries to Athirat (the 'second class', outranking Anat), and finally, via Athirat, to El (the 'first class', the god whose permission is required). A subtle, literary chiasmus is evident in this arrangement of Baal's lament, and in the order of the gods to whom he makes it.

The point to grasp here for the study of Athirat in the Baal Cycle is that she is the means by which to reach El. Anat burst directly into El's dwelling to make her demand (3.V), but did not achieve her goal. Athirat, approaching her consort respectfully (see below), has success.

The next text with importance for our study is *KTU* 1.3.VI.9-11. The context seems to point to Baal sending a message to Kothar-and-Khasis, interestingly enough, via Athirat's messenger(s) and not his usual messenger(s) Gupn-and-Ugar. The text reads:

... šmšr 10l dgy.aṯrt
11mǵ.l qdš .amrr ⁸⁷

... Start,⁸⁶ O Fisherman of Athirat
Go, ○ Qodesh-and-Amrur

This passage introduces the character of the 'fisherman of Athirat', Qodesh-and-Amrur. Some scholars have argued that Athirat's epithet of *rbt aṯrt ym* should be understood in the sense of her association with the 'day', that is, as a sun goddess.⁸⁸ I have suggested above that she may have had a

⁸⁶Following Gibson's rendering (*CML*²: 152) based on the Akkadian cognate *mutaššuru*. Other suggestions, 'proceed' (Gordon, *PLMU*: 84) and 'cleave the skies' (de Moor, *ARTU*: 19), suggest the same kind of action; the context seems to demand this.

⁸⁷The name here appears without *thw* which normally links this binomial together. See, for instance, 4.IV.13.

⁸⁸Usually on the basis of South Arabian evidence, for example, D. Nielsen, *Ras Samra Mythologie und Biblische Theologie* (Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes

special connection with Yam, the god of the sea. Although her servant being a fisherman does not, *prima facie*, rule out the possibility that Athirat could have been associated with the sun at Ugarit, it does require some explanation if that is the case. The fact remains that Athirat does maintain a marine connection through her fisherman, and his character must be discussed in this context.

De Moor suggested that the important Amorite god Amurru had been demoted to the position of Athirat's servant in the person of Qidsu wa-Amurru (his vocalisation).⁸⁹ Perlman, in her dissertation on the goddesses Athtart and Athirat,⁹⁰ took up the discussion of the nature and possible origin of Qodesh-and-Amrur. She writes:

Aṯirat's other helper (or is *dgy* an epitheton?), while possibly "Holy-and-Exalted," is more likely the name of the god Amurru compounded with his epithet *qds*, "holy." This god was no coastal deity; he belonged in the Syrian steppe, probably riding a donkey. It appears quite likely that our Aṯirat was Amurru's consort transplanted to the Western coast.⁹¹

Although Perlman does not press her point, the suggestion on the nature of Qodesh-and-Amrur should be considered seriously. The reconstructions of de Moor and Perlman appear to be given strength from the fact that Ashratu was known as the consort of the god Amurru in Mesopotamia.⁹² When we see the two together in the Baal Cycle, two questions arise: 1) do these two deities naturally go together, or 2) is it

21), Leipzig, 1936: 27-37. Although he maintains the meaning 'sea' for *ym* in Athirat's title, E. Lipiński ('The Goddess Aṯirat in Ancient Arabia, in Babylon, and in Ugarit' *OLP* 3 (1972): 101-119) argues that she is to be understood as a solar deity.
⁸⁹*Seasonal Pattern*: 52.

⁹⁰A. L. Perlman, *Asherah and Astarte in the Old Testament and Ugaritic Literature*, Ph. D. dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, 1978.

⁹¹Perlman, *Asherah and Astarte* : 83.

⁹²P. Jensen, 'Die Götter Amurru(u) und Ašratu.' *ZA* 11 (1896-97): 302-305.

simply a matter of coincidence that two sets of deities with the same names appear in two separate mythological spheres? Attractive as Perlman's hypothesis is, it does come as the result of crossing cultural gaps. The material available on Amurru comes from Mesopotamia. The binomial element *qds̃* does not appear to have been applied to Amurru in Mesopotamia,⁹³ and he does not otherwise occur in the Ugaritic mythological texts. Where the place name Amurru occurs (4.I.41, see below), it is spelled *amr*, rather than *amrr*, as here. In order to weigh the evidence properly a study of Amurru in the Amorite material would be required.⁹⁴ Such an exploration is beyond the scope of this dissertation; however, I shall discuss the relationship of Ashratu and Amurru in my chapter on the Mesopotamian material.

We can perhaps discover something about Athirat by the fact that her messenger(s) is being sent on a mission by Baal. Such a scenario would seem to suggest that somewhere before 3.VI Athirat had sent some message to Baal. Otherwise we would have difficulty in trying to determine why Baal is using her messenger(s) rather than his own. If this reconstruction were to prove tenable, I would further suggest that Athirat's postulated message to Baal did not require an immediate reply, thus there is time for the messenger(s) to be sent to Kothar-and-Khasis in order to attain gifts to present to Athirat. Perhaps it is because a gift is being ordered for Athirat that Qodesh-and-Amrur was sent. Certainty is not possible on this matter.

⁹³A. Deimel, *Pantheon Babylonicum, Nomina Deorum e Textibus Cuneiformibus Excerpta et Ordine Alphabetico* (Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici), Rome, 1914: 177-178; K. Tallqvist, *Akkadische Götterepitheta, mit einem Götterverzeichnis und einer Liste der prädikativen Elemente der sumerischen Götternamen* (Studia Orientalia Edidit Societas Orientalis Fennica VII), Helsinki, 1938: 251.

⁹⁴See J.-R. Kupper, *L'iconographie du dieu Amurru dans la glyptique de la Ire dynastie babylonienne* (Classe des lettres, mémoires 25), Brussels, 1961.

Following the instructions given to Qodesh-and-Amrur, tablet three breaks off. When tablet four becomes legible, the message of Baal is being delivered to Kothar-and-Khasis. The lament of Baal is repeated (again to a god of the third stratum, one of the 'children of Athirat', thus keeping within the scheme presented above), and instructions are given concerning gifts for Athirat. 4.I.20-22 reads:

20argmk. šskn.m ˁ	I say to you, make ready, ⁹⁵ I pray,
21mgn.rbt.atrt ym	a gift ⁹⁶ for Lady Athirat of the Sea,
22mg'z.qnyt.ilm	a present ⁹⁷ for the Bearer of the gods.

Baal wished to seal his petition with a gift. This does not demonstrate that Athirat in the Baal Cycle is corrupt, accepting bribes for illicit activities. It would rather seem, from her reaction at the approach of Baal and Anat (see below), that she is innately afraid of the pair. The gift takes the edge off of her fear, as it also does in *KTU* 1.4.II.21-26.

Immediately following Baal's request for a gift for Athirat, Kothar-and-Khasis is portrayed as producing a wealth of presents.⁹⁸ This list finishes with an unusual tricolon (4.I.41-43) which reads:

⁹⁵Causative form of *skn*, 'to prepare', cognate with the Akkadian *sakānu*.

⁹⁶This is to see Ugaritic *mgn* as cognate with Hebrew *māgan*, 'to deliver up, give'. In this case, it must be taken as a substantive, therefore rendering 'a gift'.

⁹⁷This word is most difficult. Obviously, by parallelism *mg'z* must approximate to 'gift' of line 21. Gibson (*CML*²: 151) suggests a root *g'zy*, but does not offer a cognate. Maier (*ʿAšerah: Extrabiblical Evidence*: 6) also presents the same root, but translates on the basis of context. Del Olmo Lete (*MLC* : 193) does not offer a cognate. Caquot, Szyner, and Herdner (*TO* : 194, n. d) draw attention to the Arabic *gāḍa*, 'to dim, obscure', and *ʿagāḍa*, 'to close the eyes', intending to demonstrate its force as a bribe. De Moor (*ARTU*: 45) and Gordon (*PLMU*: 89) render the noun as 'bribe'; Gordon adding in a footnote, that 'Nothing pejorative is intended by the word "bribe"'. Although the context denotes such a sense for the present, I find the word 'bribe' a little too strong for the integrity of the characters. 'Present' suggests the winning of favour without implying corruption. See especially J. C. De Moor, 'Ugaritic *km* - Never "Behold"?' *VZ* 1 (1969): 202, n. 6.

⁹⁸For a profusely illustrated study of the list of gifts which Kothar-and-Khasis produced, see R. Heyer, 'Ein Archäologischer Beitrag zum Text *KTU* 1.4 I 23-43' *UF* 10 (1978): 93-109.

41 $\text{\textcircled{S}}$ ⁹⁹ .il.dqt.k amr	a divine bowl whose handle ¹⁰⁰ (was shaped) as (in) Amurru, ¹⁰¹
42sknt .k hwt.yman	appearing ¹⁰² like the beasts ¹⁰³ of Yman,
43dbh.rumm.l rbbt	in which were wild oxen by myriads.

The translation of this tricolon presents several difficulties and therefore remains tentative. However, for the present study I would indicate the possible reference to Amurru in line 41, denoting the style of the bowl. This passage is followed by a double line in the text, which indicates the intended end of the episode. The possible mention of Amurru in line 41 may point to the land of Athirat's origin. The 'bowl' is the climax of the list of presents, and it is described in detail. It would be fitting (although I cannot insist that this interpretation is the correct one) if the *pièce de résistance* of Baal's gifts were a reminder of Athirat's 'homeland'.¹⁰⁴

We next find Baal and Anat approaching Athirat whilst she was engaged in an enigmatic activity. *KTU* 1.4.II.2-11 reads:

⁹⁹Correcting *KTU* 's error $\text{\textcircled{S}}$.

¹⁰⁰I understand *dqt* to be the relative *d* added to the noun *qt*, 'handle' (see J. A. Emerton, 'Ugaritic Notes' *JTS* 16 (N.S., 1965): 440-441 for discussion and cognates). See also Gibson, *CML*²: 56 and *TO* : 196. If *dqt* were to be taken as an adjective, its form would appear to be feminine. As $\text{\textcircled{S}}$ is masculine, this seems unlikely. I am indebted to Prof. J. C. L. Gibson for drawing my attention to this discrepancy.

¹⁰¹Or 'lamb', depending on which word of the next line is taken to be in parallel with it.

¹⁰²Gordon maintains the view of Ginsberg and Gaster (as cited in *TO* :197, n. s) that *sknt* should be translated 'stele' (PLMU: 90). This would be an unlikely conclusion to a list essentially composed of furniture. Caquot, Sznycer, and Herdner tentatively suggest '(et) la base au pays de Ym'an' (*TO* : 197). Gibson and de Moor take the approach of supposing *sknt* to be taken as 'appearance' and 'shaped' respectively (*CML*²: 56, and *ARTU*: 46). Gibson notes that *sknt* is literally 'image' (56, n. 7), and del Olmo Lete offers the noun 'forma' (*MLC*: 595). I understand *sknt* as a participle modifying *qt*, 'handle'.

¹⁰³See Emerton, 'Ugaritic Notes': 439; *hwt* may be cognate with Hebrew *hyh*, 'living thing, animal' (BDB: 312b).

¹⁰⁴For more on Amurru, see below in the chapter on Akkadian material.

2 l ab n []	to the stone []
3 aḥdt.plk h[.b ydh]	She grasped her spindle [in her hand,]
4 plk.t 'lt.b ym nh	her spindle whorl ¹⁰⁵ in her right hand. ¹⁰⁶
5 npynh.mks. bšr h	Her garment of covering ¹⁰⁷ she let loose, ¹⁰⁸
6 tmt 'mdh.b ym.	she carried ¹⁰⁹ her clothes into the sea,
7 n 7 npynh.b nhrm	her two garments into the river.
8 štt.ḥptr.l išt	She placed a cauldron on the fire,
9 ḥbrl.l zr.pḥm m	a pot on top of the coals.
10 t 'pp.tr.il.dpid	She fluttered her eyelids ¹¹⁰ (at) Bull El the
	Compassionate
11 t g'zy.bny.bnwt	she winked ¹¹¹ (at) the Creator of Creatures.

The actual activity represented here has been variously explained. Caquot, Sznycer, and Herdner apparently suppose Athirat to be frightened

¹⁰⁵This meaning requires reading *qlt* rather than *t'lt* in line 4. For this interpretation see B. Margalit, *A Matter of >Life< and >Death<, a Study of the Baal-Mot Epic (CTA 4-5-6) (AOAT 206)*, Kevelaer and Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1980: 28-29. His suggestions will be discussed in the text.

¹⁰⁶W. G. E. Watson ('Strophic Chiasmus in Ugaritic Poetry' *UF* 15 (1983): 261) understands this couplet as an example of partial chiasmus:

She grasped her spindle in her hand,
(her) spindle she lifted up in her right hand.

¹⁰⁷The root of *mks* would seem to be *ksy*, of which *mks* is a participial form. *ksy* would be cognate with Hebrew *ksh*, 'to cover', which occurs in the form *m^ekasseh* in Lev. 9.19 and in Isa. 23.18 it actually denotes fine clothing. It is in parallel with *mdh*, 'her clothing' in line 6.

¹⁰⁸Coogan's rendering 'she tore off the garment which covered her flesh' (*SAC*: 97) may seem rather forced, especially when his verb 'tore' has to be supplied by parallelism with a hypothetical definition. His understanding of what is actually happening, however, may very well be correct. I shall discuss this possibility below.

¹⁰⁹Many commentators suggest that Athirat carried her clothes into the sea, interpreting the text as a laundering episode. For a cognate Gibson (*CML*²: 152) turns to Arabic *mata* 'a, 'carried off'. Aisleitner puts forward the same cognate, with the same meaning (*WUS*: 199), as does del Olmo Lete (*MLC*: 586). I concur with the laundering interpretation, although I believe the text supports flirtatious undertones.

¹¹⁰This word presents a difficulty, both in meaning and in interpretation. Clearly the action is directed to El, but his presence would make the scenario of Athirat's trip to his abode redundant. It seems that the root is 'wp, 'to fly', which Gibson (*CML*²: 154) further qualifies as an L stem, meaning to 'flutter the eyelids'.

¹¹¹As a parallel to 'she fluttered her eyelids', *g'zy* would seem to have some ocular connotation as well. The Hebrew root 'šh (BDB: 781a) would be consonantly sound, and the meaning appears to be 'shut the eyes', therefore, in this context, 'wink'.

to^{the point of} incontinence at Baal and Anat's approach.¹¹² Maier supposes that Athirat is praying to El.¹¹³ Gibson suggests that Athirat is about her 'woman's work' by the sea shore.¹¹⁴ De Moor also sees this as evidence that she is doing her spinning and laundering by the sea.¹¹⁵ The text supports the activities of laundering; however, the mention of winking and fluttering eyelids would appear to suggest that something more than spinning or washing is being done, at least in Athirat's mind. The difficulties when approaching what an ancient character is supposed to be thinking are legion. No hard evidence can be adduced by asking the writer, and the text is an enigma at this point. This stated, we may be able to glean some information from the text itself.

The first point I would like to make is that this episode is similar to the sea shore episode in text 23. Perhaps the first similarity to notice between *KTU* 1.4.II.2-11 and 1.23 is that both take place by the sea. This is stated in *KTU* 1.23.30, on the reverse of text 23. The next point of similarity is that mention is made of something (a 'cauldron' in the case of 4.II, and a 'bird' in the case of 23) placed on the fire//coals. We are made aware that text 23 has sexual overtones by the euphemistic kissing and embracing, with pregnancy resulting (lines 49-51, 55-56). Finally, both texts contain mention of some 'symbol' of the deity involved. Athirat is portrayed with her spindle, and El, in text 23, is portrayed as having a 'sceptre', *ḥṭ*. El's sceptre in this text is a euphemism for phallus, as is indicated by the juxtaposition of the two women calling out that El's sceptre has been lowered (23.46-48), with El's subsequent impregnation of the women (48-51). I shall be dealing more fully with text 23 in the next chapter, but I

¹¹²*TO*: 197-198.

¹¹³*Ašerah: Extrabiblical Evidence*: 33.

¹¹⁴*CML*²: 10.

¹¹⁵*ARTU*: 47, notes 207 and 208.

would put forward these similarities to help make sense of the present text. It must be admitted that *KTU* 1.23 is not an Elimelek tablet, and that utilising an episode from that tablet to enlighten one in the Baal Cycle is to be done with caution. It is probable, however, that certain motifs were known by different Ugaritic mythological writers, and that some overlapping may have occurred.

A consideration of the spindle of Athirat may also enlighten the issue. Here the justification of translating *t'lt* as 'whorl' (following the suggestion of Margalit¹¹⁶) should be discussed. In his interpretation, three reasons exist for favouring the reading *q* as opposed to *t'* (the wedges for either reading are very similar, *t' = 𐎓𐎌* *q = 𐎓𐎍*): 1) it causes alliteration, 2) *qlt* occurs in parallelism with *p [lk]* in 4.III.15, and 3) *qlt* provides a suitable interpretation.¹¹⁷ Of these three reasons, the second and third seem to carry the most weight. The characteristic of alliteration may indeed occur in Ugaritic poetry, but it should not be decisive for supplying a textual variant. It is better to recognise alliteration where it occurs rather than make it a criterion for possible textual emendations. The second reason, that *qlt* appears in parallelism with **plk* in 4.III.15, deserves some attention. I will discuss the incident in column III below; however, initially I should state that the context of the occurrence seems to be a feast which has caused Baal distress. Immediately following the suggested restoration of 'spindle' and the reading 'whorl', Baal delineates three types of feasts which he hates. The one matter which all three have in common is their sexual immorality (on which see below). The trouble with this interpretation for Margalit's argument is that he misconstrues the role of the spindle by the sea in 4.II.3-11:

¹¹⁶*Matter of Life and Death*: 28-29.

¹¹⁷*Matter of Life and Death*: 28.

Even those who have realized that the text depicts Asherah laundering, preface the latter activity with some spinning-by-the-sea. There is in fact no basis for this assumption. The spindle, though designed primarily for spinning or winding wool and flax, could be - and was - put to other uses as well...of particular significance here - as a weapon wielded by a rebuffed Asherah. In the text at hand it should be understood as serving as a bat to beat laundry.¹¹⁸

Even if a spindle could be used as a 'bat', this interpretation does not help explain the winking at El which Asherah seems to be doing whilst at her work. A further consideration is that Margalit's suggestion that the spindle could be used as a weapon of Athirat is derived from a troublesome borrowing from the Elkunirša myth, to be discussed below. The interpretation of the spindle has other nuances to be considered.

The spindle has been considered by some scholars as Athirat's symbol of sovereignty. This, at first consideration, seems unlikely. The spindle was an emblem of an everyday woman's work, hardly the sceptre of a queenly figure.¹¹⁹ Even El, the head of the pantheon is not pictured with a symbol of his authority, other than perhaps his 'beard' in *KTU* 1.4.V.4., or his 'sceptre' in text 23. In fact, traditional regalia seem to be strangely absent from the supreme heads of the Ugaritic pantheon, as presented in the texts. They are present, apparently, in *KTU* 1.23.8-9:¹²⁰

<i>mt.wšr.yṭb.bdh.ḥṭ.tlk bdh</i>	Mt-w-Šr sat, in his hand a sceptre of bereavement, in his hand
<i>ḥṭ.ulmn.yzbrnn.zbrm.gpn</i>	a sceptre of widowhood

Apart from the difficulties in understanding text 23 as a whole (see below) the first several lines contain many allusions for which we have no

¹¹⁸*Matter of Life and Death*: 28.

¹¹⁹I am not suggesting that Ugaritian queens did not practise spinning and weaving, but simply that it was a common practice of women.

¹²⁰The word *ḥṭ* is used here, with the general meaning of 'stick, sceptre'.

certainty of interpretation. In this perplexing context, I have no suggestions with which to venture to understand the meaning of these lines. However, the 'royal emblems' are present, in the hands of a deity (?). The sceptre (*hṭ*) also appears in the context of Athtar's subterfuge (2.III, *hṭ* occurs in line 18), and of Mot's attempt at usurpation of Baal's position (6.VI.1-30). Both of these occurrences are uttered from the mouth of Shapash, warning the respective deities that El will not support them, and indeed, he will 'break the sceptre of your rule' (*lyṭbr. hṭ.mṭ pṭk*). Other mentions of *hṭ* can be translated by 'stick' or 'wand', not as royal symbols.¹²¹ The point of this digression is that El appears without symbols of royalty, and Athirat, other than perhaps her spindle, does likewise. Their authority is inherent; and as the texts indicate, respect is shown to them.¹²² This, together with the pedestrian nature of spindle and whorl, should suggest that, since we have an alternative solution for the word *t'lt*, the spindle is not specifically a symbol of authority. For its nature we must look to the character of Athirat.

If the spindle is not a royal symbol, it is indeed a woman's utensil. Athirat shares some qualities of human women, as shown by the parallelism of her name with the common word for 'woman' in 3.I.14-15 (see above). The question arises: what aspect of an everyday woman's life is being shared by Athirat in her use of the spindle? The solution could be

¹²¹Other than text 23 and the instances discussed in the text, *hṭ* occurs as a noun in 19.I.14; 95.3; and 114.I.8.

¹²²One may object that Yam's messengers do not bow to the assembly of the gods, presided over by El. This bicolon in *KTU* 1.2.I.31 is ambiguous. It begins with a *l* which could be either a negation or an asseverative. I would understand it as the latter. To argue for insubordination on such a text is tenuous. The other objection that might be raised is Anat's violent approach to El, and her demands (3.V.27-32) indicate disrespect. In keeping with the understanding of the texts presented here, namely, that 'character' is the overwhelming trait of the story, as opposed to a strictly coherent story line, I would suggest that the threats of Anat are a reflection of her characterisation, not of general disrespect for El.

as simple as her being the goddess of weaving, but for this we have no textual support. We should not wander too far from what the text allows us to suggest. The allusion to spinning utensils implied in the use of the symbol may connote sexual activity rather than the actual task of spinning. The text does support this interpretation in^{the} light of the winking and fluttering of eyelids at El (whether or not he is actually present). The purpose of this 'eyeing' can hardly be other than seduction. The shape of a spindle would be as suggestive as to evoke associations as a phallic symbol. Without venturing too far into an anthropological realm of interpretation, I would suggest that the character of Athirat, as presented in the texts as the consort of El, allows this interpretation. We must keep in mind the character of Athirat which we have been able to distil to this point (i.e., as a 'consort'), as well as interpreting what the text actually states. The interpretation of the spindle and whorl with this association will recur shortly (see below).

At this occurrence of Athirat in the Baal Cycle, we again find her associated with, by proximity, the sea. I have noted above that in light of Athirat's epithet, *rbt atrt ym*, we should especially note passages where she is associated with the sea. Here, I believe, the text supports Athirat contemplating sexual activity with El by the sea as she is laundering her clothes. I do not think that this presses the text too far - the other interpretations which have been presented also leave many questions unanswered. Admittedly, the text is fragmentary as this scene begins, and dogmatism must be avoided. Such sexual interests of Athirat do seem to be supported by *KTU* 1.4.III.10-22.

KTU 1.4.II.12 - 21 narrates the interruption of Athirat's 'eyeing' El. Her sudden mood change is described in what is a stereotyped response to bad news.¹²³ The text reads:

12 <i>b</i> <i>nš</i> . <i>‘nh</i> .	with the lifting ^{of} her eyes
<i>w tphn</i> 13 <i>hlk</i> . <i>b</i> <i>‘l</i> .	she saw the approach ¹²⁴ of Baal,
<i>atrt</i> 14 <i>k t</i> <i>‘n</i> .	Athirat ¹²⁵ indeed perceived ¹²⁶
<i>hlk</i> . <i>btlt</i> 15 <i>‘nt</i>	the approach of Virgin Anat,
<i>tdrq</i> . <i>ybmt</i> 16[<i>limm</i>].	the swift arrival of Ybmt [Limm], ¹²⁷
<i>bh.p</i> <i>‘nm</i> 17[<i>tṭ</i> .	at this (her) feet [stamped,
<i>b</i> <i>‘dn</i> . <i>ksl</i> 18[<i>tṭbr</i> .	beh] ind (her) loins [broke,
<i>‘ln</i> . <i>p</i>] <i>nh.t</i> <i>d</i> <i>‘</i>	on top] her [f]ace sweated, ¹²⁸
19 <i>tḡ</i> <i>ṣ</i> [<i>pnt</i> . <i>ks</i>] <i>lh</i>	[the joints of] her [lo]ins convulsed,

¹²³For this poetic description see D. Hillers, 'A Convention in Hebrew Literature: the Reaction to Bad News' *ZAW* 77 (1965): 86-90.

¹²⁴*hlk* here should be understood as an infinitive absolute, standing as a substantive.

¹²⁵*KTU* and most commentators take this word to be a misspelling of *atrt*; the context would certainly support this. Although the issue of the confusion between Athirat and Athtart has been fuelled by this error, the argument has several difficulties to which to answer. First of all, Athtart begins with an ayin, and Athirat with an aleph; this word begins with an aleph. Secondly, Athirat does not appear in text 4, thirdly, Athtart appears in parallel with Anat in texts 2 and 114, but Athirat and Athtart do not occur in parallel. In the general course of the argument for the (con)fusion of Athirat and Athtart, Old Testament evidence is usually presented. The difficulties of Judg. 7.5 will be discussed below, along with the inconsistency of supposing that Baal and Asherah had become consorts by the Iron Age (see below).

¹²⁶The word order in this passage is difficult. In order to make sense of the verse structure, I would understand the first four lines of this pericope to be a bicolon followed by a tricolon. Line 13 places 'Athirat' [corrected] as the subject, at the first position in the first line of the tricolon; this emphasizes Athirat as the subject. The *k* of *kt* *‘n* has an asseverative force; thus the word order builds excitement, until after the tricolon the standard reaction to bad news is portrayed.

¹²⁷The difficulties in construing this epithet of Anat are many. Gibson (*CML*²: 56) proposes 'sister-in-law of peoples'; Maier (*ʿAšerah: Extrabiblical Evidence*: 8) concurs. Coogan (*SAC*: 98) reads 'the Mistress of the Peoples'; Gordon (*PLMU*: 91) has tentatively, 'the Progenitress of Heroes'. Del Olmo Lete (*MLC*: 195) translates 'Pretendida de los pueblos'; Caquot, Sznycer, and Herdner (*TO*: 198) decline to translate it. De Moor (*ARTU*: 47) proposes 'the Wanton Widow of the Nations'. In a private communication, N. Wyatt has suggested that the epithet might be understood as 'beloved of Limm', 'Limm' being another name for the storm god. Whatever approach is taken, we are left without certainty as to its precise meaning.

¹²⁸Following Gibson (*CML*²: 148), with the Arabic cognate *wada* *‘a*, 'flowed' and the Ethiopic *waza* *‘a* 'sweated'.

zł.ksp.w n[] 28h rš the plating of silver and [] of gold,
 šmh.rbt.a t[rt] 29ym. . . Lady Ath[irat] of the Sea rejoiced. . .

The question which immediately presents itself is: what does Athirat mean by her query as to who the intended victims of Baal and Anat's violence are to be? This could be interpreted as the fear of the mother of the gods for the safety of her children at the approach of the storm; an earthly concern transferred to the divine realm. While this possibility cannot be ruled out, the hopes of finding a mythological solution in the texts themselves would prevent a simple acceptance of this answer. The problem is that the only account that we have in the Baal Cycle of Baal specifically smiting the children of Athirat in general is 6.V.1-4, which occurs after the present scene. Another solution is possible. We are here concerned with an incident which occurs following the defeat of Yam by Baal. We have seen above that Athirat is in some way closely associated with the sea (*ym*). Could it be that she fears for the safety of her offspring in the light of the battle between the 'beloved of El', Yam, and Baal? The text itself would support this interpretation.¹³² The mood of Athirat again takes a sudden change as she spies the presents being brought by Baal and Anat (lines 26-29). This does not reflect an aspect of corruption in Athirat; as noted above, it is merely a reaction of relief that her fears were unfounded.

As the text continues, Athirat instructs her servant to throw a net into the sea. *KTU* 1.4.II.29-36 reads:

¹³²This is suggested already by de Moor (*ARTU*: 48, n. 212).

29. . . <i>gm.l g'lmh.</i> k[tʃh]	Moreover to her squire ¹³³ indeed [she called]
30 ^c <i>n.mktr.</i> ¹³⁴ <i>ap</i> t[]	'See the cunning work, moreso[]
31 <i>dgy.rbt.aṭ</i> r[t.ym]	O Fisherman of Lady Athir[at of the Sea]
32 <i>qh.rtt.bdk</i> t[]	Take a net ¹³⁵ in your hand[]
33 <i>rbt. 'lyd</i> m[]	A great one upon both hands[] ¹³⁶
34 <i>b mdd.il.y</i> [m]	Into ¹³⁷ the beloved of El, Ya[m]
35 <i>b ym il.d</i> []	Into the divine Yam, who[]
36 <i>hr.il.y</i> [m]	the divine [r]uler ¹³⁸ of the s[ea]

Following this episode, the text becomes too fragmentary to reconstruct, to the end of the column. This leaves us with the perplexing task of deciphering what is happening in this section. Gordon supposes that a banquet is perhaps being arranged.¹³⁹ De Moor, in keeping with his seasonal presuppositions, determines that this passage indicates the reopening of the fishing season, in March, and that Athirat is treating her guests to seafood.¹⁴⁰ Either of these interpretations is defensible; the fisherman is casting his net into the sea, and the text is too broken to determine much more. Although these two suggestions appear to be straightforward, they do not address the issue of why the sea here is called

¹³³I am aware that this use of a feudal term is anachronistic; however, the proposed translations of 'page' or 'lad' lack the sense of status to be associated with a divine being.

¹³⁴This form is a hapax. The root would seem to be *ktr*, 'clever, skilful'. The preformative *m* would seem to indicate a participial form; therefore, I have rendered it as 'cunning work'. See also *TO*: 199, n. n.

¹³⁵We have an excellent cognate in the Hebrew *rešet*, 'net' (BDB: 440a). This would be an appropriate command for a deity whose epithet is 'Fisherman'.

¹³⁶The poetic structure of this pericope seems to require that a verb be supplied for this lacuna. This would make sense of the following line as well. I could speculate as to what the verb might be, but no matter what the exact word, the context indicates clearly enough that a net is being cast.

¹³⁷The net is being placed, or thrown into the sea. In order to demonstrate that this is not just an ordinary fishing expedition, the text states that this is the 'beloved of El' Sea - that is, Yam, the *mdd.il*.

¹³⁸This is to restore a *n* before *hr*, the common epithet of Yam.

¹³⁹PLMU: 91.

¹⁴⁰*Seasonal Pattern*: 144, and *ARTU*: 48, n.214.

mdd il, 'the beloved of El'. Since, with Gibson,¹⁴¹ I suppose Yam to be an ever-present threat, I would see here an allusion to his (Yam's) having to be restrained at the approach of Baal. Baal was his natural enemy; Athirat has some measure of control over the sea. Thus when Athirat perceives that Baal's mission is peaceful, she orders his old (and continuing) rival to be held back by a net.¹⁴² I would not suggest 'borrowing' in any direct sense here; however, in *Enuma Elish*, Marduk restrains Tiamat with a net, and in *Ezekiel 32* Yahweh metaphorically nets the Pharaoh as a sea monster. It would appear that the motif of netting the sea monster may have been widespread in the ancient Near East. This may be a further indication of Athirat's relationship with the sea.¹⁴³

Following her instructions to her servant, the text breaks off. It would seem, however, when the text does resume at column III, that Anat is speaking to Baal before their actual arrival in the presence of Athirat. Her speech is fragmented, but we can begin to make sense of Baal's answer, especially in the light of parallel passages within the myth. *KTU 1.4.III.10-22* reads:

10 y [t]b.aliyn.b 'l	Mighty Baal replied,
11y t'dd.rkb.'srpt	the Rider of the Clouds responded:
12 [ql(?)].ydd.w yqlšn	'The beloved ¹⁴⁴ [] and mocked ¹⁴⁵ me,

¹⁴¹Theology of the Baal Cycle': 215-216.

¹⁴²See already *TO* (199, n. o): 'Ou faut-il entendre qu'Athirat, gagnée à la cause de Ba'al, est disposée à prendre son parti dans la lutte qui l'oppose au dieu de la mer (*b-ym* aux lignes 34 et 35 pourrait se traduire «contre Yam»)»?

¹⁴³M. B. Brink (*A Philological Study of Texts in Connection with Aḫart and Aḫirat in the Ugaritic Language*, D. Litt. dissertation, University of Stellenbosch, 1977: 63, 314-322) proceeds far beyond the evidence when he begins to argue that Athirat and Yam are to be *identified*. They certainly may be associated, but we have no evidence, textual or otherwise, to support the contention that the two merged into a single deity.

¹⁴⁴In the AB Cycle, *ydd* and *mdd* both appear to mean 'the beloved', usually in the context of the fuller title *-dd il*, 'the beloved of El'. The two deities to whom these titles are applied are Yam and Mot. Since the cycle has already dealt with the case of

13 <i>yqm.w ywptn.</i>	he arose and spat on me,
<i>b tk 14 p[h]r.bn.ilm.</i>	in the midst of the assembly of the gods.
<i>št 15 p[lk].¹⁴⁶b tlhny.</i>	The sp[indle] was placed on my table,
<i>qlt 16 bks. ištynh</i>	the whorl into the cup from which I
	drank.
17 <i>b(?)m.tn.dbhm. šna.b 'l.</i>	[] two sacrifices Baal hates,
<i>tlt 18 rkb. 'rpt.</i>	three the Rider of the Clouds,
<i>dbh 19btt.</i>	a sacrifice of shame,
<i>w dbh .w dbh¹⁴⁷20 dnt.</i>	and a sacrifice of fornication,
<i>w dbh .tdmm 21amht.</i>	and a sacrifice of the seduction of
	maidens,
<i>k bh.btt.l tbt</i>	for in them shame is seen,
<i>22w bh.tdmmt.amht</i>	and in them is the seduction of maidens.

Several issues pertinent to our subject arise from this short discourse. The first issue is perhaps the identification of the 'beloved' of my translation. Although 'beloved' is known to be a title of either Yam or Mot, two separate words are employed: *ydd* and *mdd*. Yam is normally referred to as *mdd*, but in the broken context of 4.VI.12, only the *-dd* remains. The *ydd* form is generally applied to Mot, although he is once referred to as *mdd* as well (*KTU* 1.4.VIII.23). Some evidence is available to suggest that *ydd* here might refer to Yam. When giving instructions not to have a window installed in his palace, Baal gives the following reason to Kothar-and-Khasis, (4.VI.12-13):

Yam, and the story of Mot is yet to come, it seems reasonable to suppose that Yam is being indicated by this word. Further support is forthcoming.

¹⁴⁵The root of this form would seem to be *qlš*. *TO* (176, n. s) suggests an Arabic cognate *qalaša*, 'être en émoi'. Gibson (*CML*²: 157) suggests a Hebrew cognate *qilles*, meaning 'despised' or 'abased'. The actual form of the verb is a third masculine singular, with a third person masculine suffix.

¹⁴⁶Restored following Margalit, *Matter of Life and Death*: 37. See pages 41-42 for a detailed defence of this restoration.

¹⁴⁷This is an obvious case of dittography, and should be disregarded in translation.

[] <i>dd.il.ym</i>	[lest(?) the be] loved of El, Yam
[] <i>qlšn.w pṭm</i>	[(?)] mock me and spit on me.

The same two verbs (*qlšn* and *wṭṭ*) are also used in this passage, along with the *-dd* of 'beloved', to be understood as the title of Yam here. If we have a parallel account of Yam spitting at Baal, as well as an account of his mockery, the possibility emerges that Yam could indeed be the culprit of 4.III.12-14. It is also possible that 'mocking' and 'spitting' are standard terms of contempt, in which case the 'beloved' in our text cannot be named with certainty. I propose no myth to explain the situation being presented in this scene. In order to translate the passage adequately, we should hope for context to be our guide. As the immediate context is unclear, I would suggest recourse to other similar contexts within the same mythological cycle. In doing so, we find Baal fearing an affront by Yam spitting at him in 4.VI.12-13, and we see Athirat pictured with a spindle and whorl in 4.II.3-4. The spitting and the spindle appear to recur in this passage. We are also aware that Athirat and the sea seem to be linked in some respect. We do not possess the broken section of Anat's speech to Baal at the beginning of column III; neither do we possess the broken end of column II. I am not suggesting anything to fill this lacuna; rather I am pleading for our ignorance of what belongs in it. Baal seems to be responding to a speech by Anat, the contents of which we do not know. In my attempt to make some sense of the context, I find some of the explanations of Margalit¹⁴⁸ at this point fitting in this context.

We do know that Baal enumerates the three kinds of sacrifice which are abhorrent to him, a feast of shame (*bṭt*), a feast of fornication (*dnt*), and a feast where maidens are seduced (*tdmmt amht*). These three

¹⁴⁸Margalit *Matter of Life and Death*: 36-44.

types of sacrifice have the common element of sexual impurity. The description of these feasts follows immediately after the enigmatic incident involving a table and cup, a spindle and whorl. There is no room for dogmatism here, but it might be reasonably suggested that the presence of Athirat's emblems at Baal's place at a banquet also suggested sexual impurity. The case, however, seems to be overstated by Margalit :

. . . it is the depth of understanding which this restoration imparts to the overall passage that clinches the case beyond any reasonable doubt. That the latter half of our passage has orgiastic overtones is self-evident, as is the role of the spindle as a female and phallic sexual symbol. But more important still is the association of Asherah *simultaneously* with both the spindle and sexual activity.¹⁴⁹

Margalit then cites the Elkunirša myth as evidence. As we have seen, this kind of direct borrowing across cultural boundaries does not offer us valid evidence. We would need to know the context of the myth contained in the Hittite Elkunirša fragment. We may, however, take Margalit's point that the feasts hated by Baal do indicate sexual promiscuity, and that the spindle seems to be symbolic in this situation.

Taken together with *KTU* 1.4.II.3-11, a coherent picture begins to emerge. Athirat is pictured by the sea shore, washing her clothes and holding her spindle, as she makes eyes at El. As Baal and Anat approach Athirat, they are discussing a sacrifice at which Baal was dishonoured, and seeing a spindle on the table caused him distress. It would seem from this much of the Baal Cycle, that Athirat was considered to be a sexually active goddess. The broken beginning of 4.III.12 does not permit us to declare with certainty which character is to be understood by *ydd*. If it is Yam, this scene may point to a connection between Athirat and Yam.

¹⁴⁹*Matter of Life and Death*: 41-42, emphasis in the original.

The text continues (*KTU* 1.4.III.23-36):

23 <i>aḥr.mg̃y.aliyn.b ʿl</i>	Thereafter Mighty Baal arrived,
24 <i>m̃g̃yt.bl̃lt. ʿnt</i>	Virgin Anat arrived,
25 <i>tmgnn.rbt aṯrt ym</i>	they petitioned ¹⁵⁰ Lady Athirat of the Sea,
26 <i>t̃g̃zyn.qnyt ilm</i>	they gave presents ¹⁵¹ to the Bearer of the Gods,
27 <i>w t ʿn.rbt.aṯrt ym</i>	And Lady Athirat of the Sea answered,
28 <i>ik.tmg̃nn.rbt 29 aṯrt.ym.</i>	'Why do you petition Lady Athirat of the Sea,
<i>t̃g̃zyn 30 qnyt.ilm.</i>	(why) do you give presents to the Bearer of the Gods?
<i>mgñtm 31 ṯr.il.dpid.</i>	Have you petitioned Bull El the Compassionate,
<i>hm. g̃z̃tm 32 bny.bnwt</i>	or have you given presents to the Creator of Creatures? ¹⁵²
<i>w t ʿn 33 bl̃lt. ʿnt.</i>	And Virgin Anat answered,
<i>nmgn 34 []m.rbt.aṯrt.ym</i>	'We would petition. . . Lady Athirat of the Sea,
35 [n] <i>g̃z̃.qnyt.ilm</i>	[give] presents to the Bearer of the Gods,
36 [] <i>nmgn.hwt</i>	[then] we shall petition him. ¹⁵³

Athirat asks the obvious question: why petition her when it was El's permission that was needed? It was in the light of Anat's unsuccessful attempt at coercing El that this approach to Athirat was made. Baal and Anat realised that it is only through Athirat that El's permission could be

¹⁵⁰Understanding *mgn* as cognate with Arabic *majana* (Gibson, *CML*²: 150), 'importuned'.

¹⁵¹See page 60, note 97.

¹⁵²The structure of Athirat's answer indicates that a question would be an appropriate way to translate, thus del Olmo Lete (*MLC*: 198), Gibson (*CML*²: 58), Caquot, Sznycer, and Herdner (*TO*: 201-202), Gordon (*PLMU*: 92), and de Moor (*ARTU*: 50).

¹⁵³I understand *hwt* as an object pronoun, used here instead of a suffixed pronoun.

gained. Perhaps Anat's reply was only a matter of formality; we cannot know for certain. This text again points to the nature of Athirat as having its most important aspect in relationship to El. El is not easily persuaded: his mind could be changed; but only with the influence of Athirat.

The next three lines of text are broken, reading 'Mighty Baal', 'Lady Athirat of the Sea' and 'Virgin Anat', respectively. Thereafter follows the description of a feast of the gods, in stereotyped verse.¹⁵⁴ This is the end of the column as we have it. When column four becomes legible, Athirat is preparing for her journey to bring Baal's petition to El.

KTU 1.4.IV.1-19 is as follows:

1 \bar{t} r[il.]	Bull [El]
[.rbt] 2a \bar{t} r[t.y.m.]	[Lady] Athir[at of the Sea,]
[šm ^c .l qdš] 3w a mr[r]	['Hear o Qodesh-] and-Amr[ur]
[.rbt] 4a \bar{t} r t.y m	[Lady] Athirat of the Sea,
[mdl. ^c r]	[saddle ¹⁵⁵ the ass,]
5 šmd.phl.	harness ¹⁵⁶ the donkey,
š[t.gpnm.dt] 6ksp.	pl[ace on guide ropes which] are silver,

¹⁵⁴See J. Lloyd, 'The Banquet Theme in Ugaritic Narrative' *UF* 22 (1990): 169-193 for discussion.

¹⁵⁵On the matter of whether or not saddles were in use in the Bronze Age, and descriptions of the various animal trappings used, see R. Good, 'Some Ugaritic Terms Relating to Draught and Riding Animals' *UF* 16 (1984): 77-81, and W. G. E. Watson, 'Unravelling Ugaritic *MDL* 'SEL3 (1986): 73-78. Lexicographically and historically, the question is a difficult one. Good (80) admits that saddles were in use in the Bronze Age, but he doubts the proposed etymology of *mdl*. His own etymology (cognate with Aramaic *dallel* 'to lead') also cannot be considered proven. Arguing against the saddle interpretation he writes 'Even the goddess Astarte rode without saddle, and this makes it seem highly improbable that, to cite a pertinent Ugaritic example, the goddess Asherah should have her mount equipped with a saddle' (80). Athirat is, however, portrayed with quite fashionable trappings - gold and silver. Perhaps Watson's etymology (Akkadian *muddulû*, 'elastic strip') is more likely, but I see no need to discount the possibility of a saddle being used when they were in fact known in the Late Bronze Age. See, for example, M. Littauer and J. Crouwel, *Wheeled Vehicles and Ridden Animals in the Ancient Near East* (Handbuch der Orientalistik), Leiden, 1979: especially pages 65-66 and figure 38.

¹⁵⁶On this word also see Good, 'Some Ugaritic Terms', and also J. Healey, 'Swords and Ploughshares: Some Ugaritic Terminology' *UF* 15 (1983): 48, especially in relation to the use of the term discussed below.

<i>dt.yr q[.nqbnm]</i>	[trappings] which are yellow gold,
<i>7 'db.gpn.atn t[y]</i>	prepare the guide ropes of [my] she- ass, ¹⁵⁷
<i>8yšm 'qd <š>.w amr [r]</i>	Qodesh-and-Amru[r] obeyed,
<i>9mdl. 'r.</i>	he saddled the ass,
<i>šmd.pḥl.</i>	harnessed the donkey,
<i>10št.gpnm.dt.ksp</i>	placed on the guide ropes which are silver,
<i>11dt.yrq.nqbnm</i>	the trappings which are yellow gold,
<i>12 'db.gpn.atnth</i>	he prepared the guide ropes of her she- ass.
<i>13yḥbq. qdš.w amrr</i>	Qodesh-and-Amrur clasped,
<i>14yštn.atrt.l bmt. 'r</i>	he set Athirat on the back of the ass,
<i>15l ysmsmt.bmt. pḥl</i>	on the comfortable ¹⁵⁸ back of the donkey.
<i>16qdš.yuḥdm.šb 'r</i>	Qodesh took hold of a torch,
<i>17amrr.k kbkb.l pnm</i>	Amrur was like a star in front,
<i>18atr.bilt. 'nt</i>	behind (came) Virgin Anat, ¹⁵⁹
<i>19w b 'l.tb 'mrym. špn</i>	but Baal departed to the heights of Sapon.

Once the decision had been made to visit El, Athirat ordered Qodesh-and-Amrur to prepare her beasts of burden. Ass-riding was a common method of transport, although it has been debated whether or not a saddle was being described here.¹⁶⁰ Littauer and Crouwel note in their monograph on the subject that: 'In the Sinai graffiti the riders - Asiatic chiefs - also wear long robes and are apparently seated sideways, their

¹⁵⁷Lines 4b-5a, 7 are a strophic chiasmus into which an additional couplet has been inserted, (Watson, 'Strophic Chiasmus': 264).

¹⁵⁸*ysmsmt* is an uncertain word. Normally, we would expect an adjective to follow its noun, but here *ysmsmt* is before *bmt* 'back'.

¹⁵⁹W. G. E. Watson ('Parallels to Some Passages in Ugaritic' *UF* 10 (1978): 398-399) points to a comparison of lines 7-18 with the Akkadian text *STT* 366. This comparison serves to demonstrate the wealth of the trappings of Athirat's donkey, and may also point to her riding as a sign of her rank.

¹⁶⁰In addition to the notes in Good and Watson, cited in note 155 above, iconographic representation are presented in Littauer and Crouwel, *Wheeled Vehicles and Ridden Animals*: throughout.

asses being led (by a line attached to a nose ring) by attendants on foot.¹⁶¹ This matches the picture with which we seem to be presented in this text. Gibson notes that the donkey was not specifically the mount of royalty,¹⁶² but our attention is drawn to the portrayal of Anat as walking while Athirat rode. The text itself gives us no grounds to determine why this difference in modes of transport is mentioned, other than the fact that Athirat is the matron and Anat her offspring. We can draw no firm conclusions from it.¹⁶³

The matter of whether Anat is pictured as accompanying Athirat or not is still debated. Maier sees Anat and Baal as departing to Sapon together, while Athirat rides on to El's abode.¹⁶⁴ The trouble with this interpretation is that when Athirat does acquire the permission she sought, it is Anat who is aware of this news before Baal (4.V.20-27). Anat does, in fact, break the happy news to Baal. I would see in this scenario a case for supposing that Anat is present with Athirat as she journeys to El. On the other hand, it could be argued that Anat is not in the scene when Athirat actually visits El. In spite of this valid point, Anat is on hand to receive the news and to give it to Baal. These issues are perhaps modern concerns, and not matters over which an Ugaritian would brood. The text is our guide, and although I have made my preference known in my translation, the ambiguity of the wording makes certainty impossible.

Perhaps the only specific information afforded us about Athirat in this passage is that she alone, of the deities in the Baal Cycle, is portrayed as riding a donkey. The significance of this to her character is lost to us.

¹⁶¹*Wheeled Vehicles and Riding Animals* : 66.

¹⁶²*CML*²: 59, n. 1.

¹⁶³For a brief discussion see M. S. Smith, 'Divine Travel as a Token of Divine Rank' *UF* 16 (1984): 359.

¹⁶⁴*ʿAšerah: Extrabiblical Evidence*: 14.

The text continues (KTU 1.4.IV.20-39):

20idk.l ttn.pnm 21 ^c m.il.	Then indeed she set her face towards El,
mbk.nhrm	at the source of the rivers, ¹⁶⁵
22qrb.apq.thmtm	in the midst of the confluence of the two deeps.
23tgly.dd.il.w tbu	she uncovered ¹⁶⁶ the tent ¹⁶⁷ of El,
24qrš.mlk.ab. šnm	and she entered the room of the King, Father of Years, ¹⁶⁸
25lp ^c n.il.thbr.w tqł	at the feet of El she bowed down and fell,
26tšthwy.w tkbdh	she prostrated ¹⁶⁹ herself and she honoured him.
27hlm.il.k yphnh	Behold, El indeed saw her,

¹⁶⁵Rivers' could be either dual or plural here. Coogan (SAC: 99), Gordon (PLMU: 93), de Moor (ARTU: 52), del Olmo Lete (MLC: 200), and Maier (ʿAšerah: Extrabiblical Evidence: 14) all read 'two rivers'. Gibson (CML²: 59) and Caquot, Sznycer and Herdner (TO: 204) read an unspecified number of rivers. The primary reason for seeing this form as a dual is that the parallel line does indeed mention the 'two deeps'. Cosmologically speaking, it would perhaps be arguable that there are four rivers (as suggested in a private communication by Dr. N. Wyatt). In either case, the point being made by the text is that El dwells where the rivers originate.

¹⁶⁶Third feminine singular verb of the prefixing conjugation. The root is *gly*, cognate with the Hebrew root *glh*, 'to uncover, remove' (BDB: 162b)

¹⁶⁷R. Clifford ('The Tent of El and the Israelite Tent of Meeting' *CBQ* 33 (1971): 221-222) argues for the translation of *dd* as 'tent'. He admits that 'there is no extra-Ugaritic evidence for *dd* as "tent"', but, he suggests, 'the intra-Ugaritic evidence is strong.' (222, n. 4). Del Olmo Lete, on the other hand, notes that 'the specific meaning of "tent, pavilion" cannot be justified etymologically, although it has in its favor the semantic parallelism with *qrš* /*ahl* ; in this sense ar. *qada* offers some support, but turns out to be semantically risky and imprecise' ('Notes on Ugaritic Semantics IV' *UF* 10 (1978): 43). He proposes a cognate in the Hebrew *zdh* of the Siloam tunnel inscription (44). He does admit that his cognate is hapax, and although his etymology does bring into question any easy acceptance of *dd* being understood as 'tent', the verb *gly* does have an evident cognate in Hebrew *glh* (see previous note). Clifford's argument is supported by the apparent parallelism between *dd* and *ahl* in KTU 1.19.IV. 51-52. On the basis of context, and in consideration of the verb, I would tentatively retain the translation 'tent'.

¹⁶⁸This meaning is much disputed. *šnh*, 'year' in Hebrew, occurs in both masculine and feminine forms in the plural (BDB: 1040a). Many scholars still hold to this interpretation as a befitting title for the creator of the gods. See de Moor (ARTU: 16), Caquot, Sznycer, and Herdner (TO: 204), Gibson (CML²: 59), Coogan (SAC: 99), and del Olmo Lete (MLC: 200). See also Smith, *The Early History of God*: 32, n. 46.

¹⁶⁹For two detailed studies of this word, see J. Emerton, 'The Etymology of *hištaḥ^awah*' *OTS* 20 (1977): 41-55, and S. Kreuzer 'Zur Bedeutung und Etymologie von *Hištaḥ^awah* / *Yšthwy*' *VT* 35 (1985): 39-60.

28yprq.lšb.w yšḫq	he parted the throat and laughed,
29p ʿnh.l hdm.yṯpd.	he placed his feet on the footstool,
wykrkr 30 ušb ʿth.	he twirled ¹⁷⁰ his fingers,
yšū.gh.w y ṣ[h]	he raised his voice and shou[ted]
31ik. mgyt.rbt.aṯ r[t.y]m	'Why has Lady Athirat of the Sea arrived?
32ik.atwt.qnyt.i [1m]	Why has the Bearer of the G[ods] come?
33rgb.rgbt.w tḡt []	Are you indeed hungry and journey [worn(?)]?]
34hm. ḡmu.ḡmit.w ʿs[]	Or are you indeed thirsty and weary?
35lḫm.hm. štym.	Eat, indeed, drink!
lḫ [m] 36b ṯlḫnt. lḫm	Ea[t] food from the tables!
št 37b krpnm.yn.	Drink wine from carafes!
bk <s>. ¹⁷¹ ḫ rṣ 38dm. ʿšm.	From a cup of gold the blood of trees,
hm.yd.il m lk 39 yḫssk.	or does the hand of El the King tempt you? ¹⁷²
ahbt.ṯr.t ʿrrk	The love of the Bull arouse you?

This encounter between El and Athirat has spawned a great deal of speculation. Some scholars appear to read modern concerns into the study of the the marital relationship between the gods El and Athirat in the Ugaritic myths. Nowhere in the texts, as we have them, do we find the poet attempting to demonstrate the character of a marital relationship for its own sake. The point of this passage is not to describe the family life of El in the sense of a marriage in which he lives separately from his spouse ('montfrei' marriage) as put forth by Brink, following van Selms.¹⁷³ Brink explains the situation thus:

The relationship of Aṯirat and El appears to be 'montfrei' since the husband has no legal powers over his wife. On this evidence

¹⁷⁰For the basic meaning of the root of *krkr*, see M. I. Gruber, 'Ten Dance-Derived Expressions in the Hebrew Bible' *Biblica* 62 (1981): 338.

¹⁷¹The original *bk* is recognised as a scribal error for *b ks*, thus *KTU*: 17.

¹⁷²The cognate roots of this verb would seem to be the Akkadian *ḫasasu*, Arabic *ḫassa*, and Ethiopic *ḫašaša*; (Gibson, *CML*²: 147, del Olmo Lete, *MLC*: 552, Aistleitner, *WUS*: 114-115). The sense of arousal is rather straightforward. El seems to be guessing at why his spouse may have come, thus 'tempt' is an appropriately suggestive translation.

¹⁷³Brink, *Philological Study*, following van Selms, *Marriage and Family Life*: 65.

Van Selms (1954, p.65) would have it that the poets wish to convey that the period of sexual intercourse between the father god and mother god is past, something which occurred before the beginning of the present era in which a multitude of younger gods cavort around the place.¹⁷⁴

The main difficulty with such an approach is that it does not consider the plot of the myth, nor the character of mythology in general. Athirat has just been solicited for bearing Baal's petition to El. In order to emphasize the extreme remoteness and holiness of El, a long journey is described by the poet. El is so holy that even Athirat has to journey far to see him. It is an indication of El's rank, not of his marital status, that Athirat bows before him.¹⁷⁵ Surely the intention of the poet is to demonstrate the extreme sanctity of El, no matter who may be calling. It is exactly the opposite that the poet wishes to express when he portrays Anat as bursting in and making her demand to El with threats (3.V). As we have noted above, the text itself demonstrates that this method is futile.¹⁷⁶

This informs us about Athirat as well. She is a most welcome guest in the remote abode of El, and she pleases him. This is important to the plot of the story, since her aim is to acquire permission for a house to be built for Baal. This request on behalf of Baal may also point to her role as queen mother. The method of achieving her goal is to please El. We know from the remainder of text four that her mission was a success.

The poet next moves directly to the point of Athirat's visit. Thus we read in *KTU* 1.4.IV.40-47:

40w t 'n.rbt.aṯrt ym
41tḥmk.il. ḥkm.

And Lady Athirat of the Sea answered,
'Your decree El, is wise,

¹⁷⁴Brink, *Philological Study*: 339.

¹⁷⁵Dr. N. Wyatt has drawn my attention to the similarity between this passage and 1 Kgs. 1.16 where Bathsheba bows before David.

¹⁷⁶So Gibson, 'The Theology of the Ugaritic Baal Cycle': 206-210.

<i>ḥkmt</i> 42 <i>ʿm ʿlm.</i>	(your) ¹⁷⁷ wisdom is forever,
<i>ḥyt. ḥzt</i> 43 <i>tḥmk.</i>	a life of rejoicing is your decree.
<i>mlkn.aliy</i> [n.] <i>b ʿl</i>	Our king is Aliy[n] Baal,
44 <i>ṭṭn.w in.d ʿlnh</i>	our ruler and there is no one above him,
45 <i>kllyn.q[š] h[.] nb[ln]</i>	both of us ¹⁷⁸ will car[ry] his chal[ice],
46 <i>klny n[.] nbl.ksh</i>	both of us will carry his cup, ¹⁷⁹
47 <i>[an]y [.] l yṣḥ.ṭr il abh</i>	[Groan]ing indeed he cries to Bull El his father...

Hereafter follows a repetition of the formula we explored above. The startling juxtaposition of Baal's position as the king of the gods and his lack of a house is the mainstay of this appeal. After Anat's brash approach to El, she also used this reasoning (3.V.29-44). It would be unwise in the light of the stereotyped nature of this speech, to attempt to discern any specific characteristic of Athirat. She simply affirms her support of Baal's kingship, perhaps as a reflection of her supportive role as *rabtu*.

Following the repetition of Baal's lament, El responds to the plea (*KTU* 1.4.IV.58-V.1).

58 <i>w y ʿn ṭṭn.il.dpi d</i>	And Benevolent El the Compassionate answered,
59 <i>p ʿbd.an. ʿnn.ṭr t</i>	'So, a servant am I, a lackey of Athirat? ¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷The personal pronoun of *tḥmk* 'your decree' should be understood as doing 'double duty' here.

¹⁷⁸Apparently *kl* with the first person dual suffix *-ny* (*UT* : 37) and *n* energetic 'both of us', see Gibson (*CML*²: 60).

¹⁷⁹Watson also cites this couplet as an example of partial chiasmus ('Strophic Chiasmus': 261).

¹⁸⁰The root of *ʿnn* has prompted suggestions of several cognates. Del Olmo Lete (*MLC*: 602) presents several possibilities, Arabic *ʿanna*, Hebrew *ʿanan*, Arabic *ʿawwana*, and Hebrew *ʿonen*. The meanings of these possible cognates would seem to find support in the *ʿbd* in the first half of each line. The difficulty is to determine what exactly the poetic structure is - is it line 59 paralleled with line 60, or is it 59a paralleled by 59b, and 60a paralleled by 60b? Clearly the sense is that El is questioning who is to build this house.

6wn ap. 'dn.mṯrh	Now is even the time ¹⁸⁴ of his rain,
7 b'ly 'dn. 'dn.ṯrt. ¹⁸⁵ b glṯ	let Baal appoint the time ¹⁸⁶ of gushing in flood, ¹⁸⁷
8w tn.qlh.b 'rpt	and let him give his voice from the clouds,
9 ṣrh.l arṣ.brqm	let him loose to the earth (his) lightnings.
10 bt.arzm.ykllnh	Is the house of cedars? He will complete it. ¹⁸⁸
11hm.bt.lbn t.y 'msnh	Or is the house of bricks? He will construct it. ¹⁸⁹
12l yrgm.l ali yn b 'l	Indeed let it be told to Mighty Baal:
13 ṣḥ. ḥrn.b bhm ¹⁹⁰	'Call a caravan ¹⁹¹ into your mansion,
14 'dbt.b qrb.hkkl	wares ¹⁹² into the midst of your palace,

for lines 4 and 5. Lines 4 and 5 are a bicolon following the monocolon of line 3. The translation of *irtk* as 'your breast', according to the Akkadian cognate *irtu* seems to be sound (see Gibson *CML*²: 142).

¹⁸⁴The root of 'dn would seem to be 'dd, which occurs in Hebrew as 'd. The n should be considered enclitic. The basic meaning of 'dd appears to be some aspect of time reckoning, thus I have translated it simply as 'time'.

¹⁸⁵Reading r (𒀭𒀭) for *KTU* 's k (𒀭). See note 187.

¹⁸⁶As in the previous line, 'dn would mean 'time'. Here it follows a jussive form of a verb of the same root, and together they may be understood as 'let . . . appoint a time'.

¹⁸⁷The final two words of line 7 are difficult, and although context does provide enough evidence for a general, weather-related phenomenon, it does not give us an exact answer. Scholars are divided on the meaning, Gibson (*CML*²: 60) and de Moor (*ARTU*: 54) read a reference to a barque of snow. Gordon suggests a ship on the ocean (*PLMU*: 95). I have followed the suggestion of Caquot, Szymer, and Herdner (*TO*: 207), who explain *CTA* 's (and *KTU* 's) *ṯkt* as *ṯrt* (note t) and *glṯ* as 'flood' as it appears in parallel with *thmt* in *PRU* 5.1, line 5 (= *KTU* 1.92.5). I have examined the photographs in *CTA* volume 2, but this particular section on both pictures is indistinct. In the line drawing, the k is shaded, and a r would be a reasonable suggestion, all the more so as it provides a good parallel to the previous line.

¹⁸⁸The lines 10 and 11 throw off the pattern formed by the preceding lines, and seem to indicate that no matter what type of house he desires, Baal will be able to accomplish his wish. The form *ykllnh* is from the root *kll*, in the prefixing conjugation with a third masculine singular suffix. The pattern is repeated in line 11 as well.

¹⁸⁹The root 'ms appears to be used in a building context in Neh. 4.11 (so Gibson, *CML*²: 154). Although the final radical in *BHS* is s', there is textual support for the reading of s. Gibson also provides Arabic *ḡammaṣa* 'set in cement' as a possible cognate.

¹⁹⁰I follow *KTU* in correcting *bhm* to *bhtk* on the basis of parallel passages.

¹⁹¹A possible cognate may be found in the Akkadian *ḥarrānu*, 'road, path'. The context does seem to dictate that it is the goods of a 'caravan' that are being summoned.

¹⁹²Hebrew has 'izzabôn, 'wares' which may be a cognate.

15tblk. ḡrm.mid.ksp	may the rocks bear you ¹⁹³ much silver,
16gb ʿm.mḥmd.ḥrṣ	the hills choicest gold,
17yblk.udr.ilqšm	may magnificent gems be brought to you, ¹⁹⁴
18w bn.bht.ksp.w ḥrṣ	thus build a mansion of silver and gold,
19bht. ṯhrm.iqnim	a mansion of pure lapis lazuli.'

Athirat first praises the wisdom of El, then she utters what appears to be a blessing on the building of Baal's house. We should not read too much into this episode. Athirat was approached to obtain permission for Baal to build a house. The appropriate channel for acquiring the approval of El was through her. Athirat's rejoicing at the end of her mission does not spell out any specific details about her character; rather, it marks the successful end of her journey.

After the building of Baal's palace was completed, Baal invited the gods to a feast. In describing the guests, two collective epithets are used: 'his kinfolk' (*a [r]yh*, *KTU* 1.4.VI.44) and 'the seventy children of Athirat' (*šb ʿm bn aṯrt*, line 46). This juxtaposition demonstrates that strict, logical family trees which exclude Baal from the number of Athirat's children are a misunderstanding of the mythological nature of the text.¹⁹⁵ The seventy children of Athirat are the gods. This collective epithet points out that Athirat was considered to be the mother of the gods. This is the final mention of Athirat in the 'Palace of Baal' section of the Baal Cycle. Her role

¹⁹³The root of *tblk* is *ybl* 'to bear'. This is a jussive form with a second person singular suffix attached.

¹⁹⁴No consensus has been reached on the interpretation of this line. I have chosen to follow Gibson (*CML*²: 61) and del Olmo Lete (*MLC*: 203), as their translations fit the context well.

¹⁹⁵As opposed to Maier, (*ʿAšerah: Extrabiblical Evidence*: 36, where he suggests that 'ʿAṯirat's sons, here also called the brothers of Baʿl, are not actually his physical brothers (brothers via adoption?)'). The point of the text is to convey the message that Baal is among the number of the gods, the *bn aṯrt*, not to trace his lineage. See also N. Wyatt, 'The Relationship of the Deities Dagan and Hadad' *UF* 12 (1980): 375-379 for an explanation of Baal's epithet *bn dgn*.

as queen mother appears to be emphasized throughout the episode, in her support of the king of the gods. Athirat is demonstrated to be most important in her relationship to El, and also important in relationship to the other gods who are her progeny.

Thus far we have been able to discern from the Baal Cycle that Athirat was cast in the role of mother of the gods, and that she had some special relationship with the sea. She appears to be especially concerned with the reigning king among her children. Her 'definition' would seem to emerge from relationships, a trait which will further appear as we explore the final section of the Cycle, 'Baal and Mot'.

2.B.iii. Baal and Mot

Athirat appears only in text 6 of this final section of the Cycle. During what remains of the negotiations between Baal and Mot, she does not appear. This could be by accident of the state of the texts. Both texts 5 and 6 are badly broken. When Athirat does appear in *KTU* 1.6.I.39-55, it is in relation to first Baal, then El. The text reads (Anat is speaking as the translation begins):

39. . . <i>tšmḥ ht 40aṛt.w.bnh.</i>	'Now Athirat and her sons will rejoice, ¹⁹⁷
<i>ilt.w šb 41rt.aryh.</i>	the Goddess and the company of her kin,
<i>k mt.aliyn 42b 'l.</i>	for dead is Mighty Baal,
<i>k ḥlq.zbl.b 'l 43 arš.</i>	for perished ¹⁹⁸ is the Prince, Lord of the Earth.'
<i>gm.yšḥ il</i>	El cried aloud,
<i>44l rbt.aṭ rt ym. šm 'c</i>	'Hear O Lady Athirat of the Sea,
<i>45l rbt.a ṭr[t] ym.</i>	O Lady Athira[t] of the Sea,
<i>tn 46 aḥd.b.b nk.amlkn</i>	give one of your sons and I will make him king.'
<i>47w t 'n.rbt.aṭrt ym</i>	And Lady Athirat of the Sea answered,
<i>48bl.nmlk.yd 'yl ḥn</i>	'Shall we not ¹⁹⁹ make him king who knows (and is) intelligent?' ²⁰⁰
<i>49w y 'n. lṭpn.il dpi 50d.</i>	And Benevolent El the Compassionate answered,

¹⁹⁷The primary radical has shifted to *š* from *š* in Hebrew. The Arabic cognate retains the *š* (del Olmo Lete, *MLC*: 629).

¹⁹⁸An Akkadian cognate for *ḥlq* is *ḥalaqu*, so Gibson (*CML*²: 147) and del Olmo Lete (*MLC*: 552).

¹⁹⁹*bl* in Hebrew is clearly a negative adverb (BDB: 115). In order to accommodate it within the translation, I have followed de Moor (*ARTU*: 85) in rendering this monocolon as a query.

²⁰⁰Caquot, Sznycer, and Herdner (*TO*: 256, n. h) cite various attempts at translating the difficult *ylḥn*. They provide an Arabic cognate *lahina* 'être intelligent'. The same cognate is offered by Gibson (*CML*²: 150) and del Olmo Lete (*MLC*: 571).

<i>dq.anm.l yr z</i>	'One who is small of vigour ²⁰¹ cannot run, ²⁰²
51 <i>‘m.b ‘l.l y ‘db.mrh</i>	(compared) with Baal he cannot release ²⁰³ the spear ²⁰⁴
52 <i>‘m.bn.dgn. ktmsm</i>	(compared) with the son of Dagon he is weak. ²⁰⁵
53w <i>‘n.rbt.atrt ym</i>	And Lady Athirat of the Sea answered,
54 <i>blt.nmlk. ‘ttr. ‘rz</i>	'Shall we not make Athtar the Terrible king?
55 <i>ymk. ‘ttr. ‘rz</i>	'Let Athtar the Terrible be king!'

Here we see Athirat in her position of authority as queen mother. When news of Baal's death is brought, it is she who nominates his successor. This pericope begins with the puzzling statement of Anat that Athirat should rejoice that Baal is dead (lines 39-43). Maier suggests that Athirat may be exalting in her opportunity to put forward one of her sons to accept the kingship.²⁰⁶ His point should not be dismissed, as it offers an alternative to one that assumes that hatred between Athirat and Baal is

²⁰¹*anm* would seem to be cognate with Hebrew *ʾōn*, 'vigour, wealth' (BDB: 20a), so Gibson (*CML*²: 75), de Moor (*ARTU*: 85) and del Olmo Lete (*MLC*: 225).

²⁰²*KTU* calls the reading *yrz* into question, and proposes a possible *yrq*. The photograph in *CTA 2* is unclear at this point, and with both possibilities open, one must chose from context. The point which the text seems to be making is that an intellectual who is not physically fit cannot fill Baal's place.

²⁰³Following Gibson (*CML*²: 154), I would take *‘db* to be cognate with the Hebrew *‘zb* 'to loose', in this case 'to release', thus BDB: 736b.

²⁰⁴This word appears to have an Egyptian cognate *mrh*. For the suggestion of the apparent metathesis in Hebrew, see Gordon (*UT*: 437-438) and the reference he makes there.

²⁰⁵This word is difficult. The root appears to be either *mss*, del Olmo Lete (*MLC*: 580) or *kms* (with an Akkadian cognate *kamasu* 'to kneel' (*CML*²: 149)). I take this to be a verbal form, perhaps a Gt stem of the latter root. Although the exact form is unknown, this connotation seems to fit the context well, as the comparison is being made between the physical ability of Baal and of his proposed replacement (see note 202). Gibson (*CML*²: 75) and Watson ('Parallels to Some Passages': 399), following *TO*, read *k.msm*. This understanding suggests that Athirat's proposed king could not cause a rainstorm at the opportune moment. I have followed the stichometry of N. Wyatt, private communication.

²⁰⁶*ʾAšerah: Extrabiblical Evidence*: 36.

portrayed in the texts. Could it not be that Athirat does rejoice in her chance to display her authority? We have seen all along that Athirat is portrayed in relationship to other gods, and this is also true in this instance. Here Athirat is responsible for suggesting who the new king will be, as she perhaps was asked to proclaim a name for Yam, and as she supported Baal's kingship in his request for a palace.

This scenario represents the suggestion made by Gordon, mentioned above; namely, that Athirat, as *rabttu*, was the 'queen mother', one of whose functions was to name the successor to the throne.²⁰⁷ Since the evidence comes from the text itself at this point, perhaps we should examine Gordon's suggestions and weigh them in ^{the} light of the evidence.

Rbt (vocalised by Gordon as *rabttu*) seems to indicate an office of considerable standing. In a recent article Gordon has noticed the lack of an appropriate translation for *rabttu*.²⁰⁸ Gordon's first piece of evidence for this office from the Ugaritic texts is that in the divorce documentation of King Amīštamru II. Amīštamru's wife Piddu left him and created a crisis for the royal household in Ugarit. It was her son Utrisharruma who was to be the royal heir, and the title of *rabttu* was indeed applied to her.²⁰⁹ One of the Ugaritic divorce documents, in Akkadian, after settling the matter of Utrisharruma's position as heir-apparent, contains the following provision:

And in the course of time the daughter of Bentešina [Piddu] with regard to her sons, her daughters and her sons-in-law (?) shall raise no claim: they belong to Ammistamru, king of Ugarit. If she raises a claim this tablet he will produce against her. [Yaron's translation].²¹⁰

²⁰⁷Ugaritic *rbt* ': 130.

²⁰⁸Ugaritic *rbt* ': 127.

²⁰⁹See also R. Yaron 'A Royal Divorce at Ugarit' *Orientalia* 32 (N.S., 1963): 21-31.

²¹⁰'Royal Divorce' : 23.

Much care is taken to lay claim to the children of Amištamru's estranged wife. This would seem to support Gordon's suggestion that it was the *rabtu* who was the mother to the heir-apparent.

Gordon next draws out the evidence from our present text. He notes that Athirat is asked to provide one of her sons to replace Baal, and that El rejects her first suggestion. He then states:

It is to be noted that the successor to the throne must be a son of the Rabitu (= Asherah), subject to the approval of the Rabitu's royal husband who has advisory and veto power as to which one of her sons shall rule.²¹¹

Gordon also presents details of the royal households of Israel and Judah.²¹² Although his approach cuts across cultures, it should be considered that the genres are all 'royal' and the cultures are linked in some respects. Although the evidence from the reign of Amištamru is taken from Akkadian legal documents, it is probable that the situation presented in the Ugaritic mythology reflects such a cultural reality. El is presented as king in the mythological texts, and Athirat is his consort. She does in *KTU* 1.6.I.39-55 suggest one of her offspring as the new king, at the request of El. It might be objected that since the gods collectively are her offspring, no matter who she might nominate would of necessity be her son. I would argue that this insists on too much of a modern rationalisation of the story for the study of an ancient mythology. Athirat has the title of

²¹¹Ugaritic *rbt*': 130.

²¹²For further reading on the queen mother in Israel see G. Molin 'Die Stellung der G^ebira im Staate Juda' *TZ* 10 (1954): 161-175; H. Donner 'Art und Herkunft des Amtes der Königinmutter im Alten Testament' in *Festschrift Johannes Friedrich zum 65. Geburtstag am 27. August Gewidmet*, R. von Kienle, A. Moortgat, H. Otten, E. von Schuler and W. Zaumseil, editors. Heidelberg, 1959: 105-145; G. Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, Lund, 1963: 57-88; and N. Andreasen 'The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society' *CBQ* 45 (1983): 179-194.

rabtu, and in the light of the meaning of this title we would expect her be the one to nominate the next king, no matter if all the candidates are her children. What is important is that the gods carry out their roles in the myth. In the light of the evidence presented by Gordon, and in consideration of what this text tells us, I am inclined to see the *rbt* of Athirat's title as indicating her role as the 'queen mother' of Ugaritic mythology in the Baal Cycle.

I have suggested above that Maier's reason for the rejoicing of Athirat at Baal's death (that she now has the opportunity to exercise her role as queen mother) was to be considered plausible. Other scholars have suggested that her rejoicing is the result of her being affronted by Baal as presented in the Hittite *Elkunirša* myth.²¹³ Such a solution requires stepping outside the narrative as we have it in the Baal Cycle to complete it by another narrative. It also borrows a theme from a myth found within another cultural context (Hittite). This deductive method cannot be used to establish a coherent story line when a specific incident is being explored. The reasons for Athirat's exultation should be found in the Baal Cycle, or left open to question. I believe that Maier's suggestion does find support in the text itself. Another possible reason for the rejoicing of Athirat would recall the reason for her fearful reaction at the approach of Baal and Anat. Could it be that she still resents the harm brought onto Yam by Baal? The text does not state this explicitly, but we may infer it from the contexts in which Athirat is portrayed as distressed at Baal's arrival, and in her title which also connects her with the sea.²¹⁴

²¹³Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh*: 46.

²¹⁴See N. Wyatt 'Who killed the dragon?' *AuOr* 5 (1987): 185-198 for the suggestion that Athirat was involved in the overcoming of the sea.

The final mention of Athirat in the Baal Cycle is again in regard to her role as the mother of the gods. In a broken context, after the resuscitation of Baal, a curious incident is recounted in which he is portrayed as smiting the children of Athirat (*bn atrt*). *KTU* 1.6.V.1-6 reads:

1 <i>yihd.b 'l.bn.atrt</i>	Baal seized ²¹⁵ the children of Athirat,
2 <i>rbm.ymh ş.b ktp</i>	he smote the great ones with a broad- sword, ²¹⁶
3 <i>dkym. ymh ş.b şmd</i>	he smote the crushers ²¹⁷ of Yam with an axe, ²¹⁸
4 <i>ş gr m.ymş h.l arş</i>	the small ones ²¹⁹ he dragged to the ground, ²²⁰
5 <i>p(?) y[^c l.]b^c l.l ksi.mlkh</i>	Then (?) Baal [ascended ²²¹] to the throne of his kingship
6 [].l <i>khṭ.drk th</i>	[] to the seat of his dominion.

²¹⁵See the discussion of this word in the section on *KTU* 1.4.IV.58-V.1, above.

²¹⁶I follow Gibson (*CML*²: 149) in his choice of English words, but I would suggest the Hebrew *ktp* (BDB: 509a) as a cognate. R. Good, in his article 'Some Ugaritic Terms Relating to Draught and Riding Animals' notes that in order to understand the development of the parallel word in this passage (*şmd*), its original meaning of 'shoulder' must be brought to light (page 79). The development would then be from 'shoulder' to 'shoulder blade' to 'weapon shaped like a shoulder blade' (79). This deduction provides, along with the cognate given by Gibson (Arabic *katifu*), useful information as to the nature of the weapon.

²¹⁷The interpretation of this word is most difficult, as it can support many translations. I have taken it to be from the root *dky*, in Hebrew *dkh*, 'to crush' (BDB: 194a). I understand it to be in the construct state. It is also possible that there may be a reference to Yam here as well; on this see the text.

²¹⁸So Good, 'Draught and Riding Animals': 79.

²¹⁹*şgrm* seems to be cognate to Hebrew *ş'r* 'small, insignificant' (BDB: 858b-859a)

²²⁰Although the sense of *ymşh* is obviously one of combat, an exact word is open to question. Virolleaud mentions the possibility of *mşh* being *mḥş* having been changed by metathesis ('Un Poème Phénicien de Ras-Shamra, la Lutte de Môt, Fils de Dieux, et d'aleïen, Fils de Baal' *Syria* 12 (1931): 223. The word *mşh*, however, does occur with violent connotations elsewhere (for example *KTU* 1.3.V.1) and the cognate proposed by Gibson (Arabic *maşaha*, *CML*²: 151) makes sense in this context.

²²¹Although the word is missing in the text, the sense is clear enough from context. Other suggestions would be 'returned' or 'sat' or the like.

That this passage presents difficulties to the translator is evident in the many different interpretations which it has generated. Gibson translates:

Baal seized the sons of Athirat
 he smote the great ones with the broad-sword,
 he smote the 'pounders' of the sea with the mace,
 he dragged the yellow ones of Mot to the ground.²²²

whilst Gordon offers:

Baal seizes the son of Asherah
 The great *one* he smites with a weapon
 The *tyrant* he smites with a stick.
 Mot is *vanquished*
Trampled to earth.²²³

and de Moor suggests:

Ba^c lu will seize the sons of Athiratu.
 The big ones he will slay with an axe-blade,
 those who are like Yammu he will slay with an axe,
 the small ones he will pull to the ground.²²⁴

These samples will serve to demonstrate the range of interpretation in recent scholarship. This passage seems to say that Baal is smiting someone. The difficulty is to determine who is being attacked. The inclusion of the *rbm* 'great ones' in line 2 and the *šgrm* 'small ones' in line 4 appear to be a merismus. Yet the various translations seem to indicate a lack of consensus even on this point. The issue is further confused by the range of possible translations for the letters *dkym* in line 3. The text may support a mention of the god Yam at this point. Scholars have long

²²²CML²: 79.

²²³PLMU: 115.

²²⁴ARTU: 94.

recognised the similarities between this passage and Psalm 93.²²⁵ Dahood, in the light of this similarity, would understand *rbm* and *dkym* as 'plurals of majesty serving as epithets of Baal.'²²⁶ P. van Zijl, on the other hand, would leave the questioned words untranslated, content with the knowledge that they are epithets.²²⁷ Our understanding of Athirat's association with the sea in her title *rbt atrt ym* would demand our attention when any possible clue is offered by the texts themselves. As this text does seem to offer clues, we should pay close attention to it.

Our first line of inquiry should be, why Baal is smiting the children of Athirat. We do know that Athirat was frightened at the approach of Baal and Anat in *KTU* 1.4.II.12-21, and that she was expected to rejoice at the news of Baal's demise in 6.I.39-43. I have argued that this was in response to Baal's slaying of Yam, as well as (in the latter case) her opportunity to exercise her personal function as *rabtu*. Here we are presented with a text which follows more than half a column of missing information. Column IV, immediately preceding this passage, is broken off, and the second half of column V is missing as well. Within this isolated context, there appears to be a mention of either Yam or of some beings (?) related to the sea (line 3). The list of the smitten person(s) is headed by the category *bn atrt*.²²⁸

²²⁵See P. van Zijl, *Baal. A Study of the Texts in Connexion with Baal in the Ugaritic Epics* (AOAT 10), Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1972: 213-215; Caquot, Sznycer and Herdner, *TO* : 265, n. c; M. Dahood, *Psalms II* (AB), New York, 1968: 340-342. On 'cosmic waters' in general, see H. May, 'Some Cosmic Connotations of *Mayim Rabbim*, "Many Waters"' *JBL* 74 (1955): 9-21.

²²⁶*Psalms II*: 341.

²²⁷*Baal*: 215.

²²⁸See the informative article by F. C. Fensham 'The Numeral Seventy in the Old Testament and the Family of Jerubbaal, Ahab, Panammuwa and Athirat' *PEQ* 109 (1977): 113-115. His remarks about the slaying of the seventy sons show affinity with the episode here presented:

It is thus clear from the examples from Shechem, Samaria and Sam'al that the princes of the royal house were called 'seventy sons' or 'seventy brothers'. It is also clear that only one of them could somehow lay claim to the throne of his father or his brother. With a coup it is very important for the rebel to kill these princes and to destroy any possible legitimate claim

As Gordon's translation demonstrates, this could be construed as a singular, 'the son of Athirat'. It could also be considered a plural construct, 'the sons (children) of Athirat' *rbm* 'the great ones' appears to be in parallel with *bn atrt*, but it could also be construed as a singular (thus Dahood and Gordon). Line 3 has a possible reference to Yam, *dkym*. The *dk* has been understood as 'those like' Yam taking the *d* as a relative pronoun and the *k* as a preposition.²²⁹ It has also been explained as the waves of the sea,²³⁰ and as an epithet which links the children of Athirat to their mother.²³¹ It could also be construed as a title of Mot,²³² or of Baal,²³³ or of those being attacked.²³⁴ Grammatically, most of these suggestions could be supported. Our recourse to context is of no avail because of its broken state. I would therefore suggest that we appeal to the fact that Athirat is known to have associations with the sea. I would understand 'the crushers of Yam' to be associates of the sea god, as the children of Athirat. Athirat is portrayed as the mother of the gods, and 'the crushers of Yam' appear in parallel with the *bn atrt* as well as the 'great ones' and 'small ones'. Perhaps in these broken contexts the answer lies as to why Athirat is associated with the sea, but certainty at this stage is impossible.

With this passage our information on Athirat in the Baal Cycle comes to a close. The section 'Baal and Mot' confirms that Athirat is the

to the throne. Certain circumstantial similarities between the events at Shechem and Sam'al are evident. In both cases the killing was done from the inner-circle of the seventy. In the case of Sam'al it was done by a son of Baršur and at Ophrah by a son of Jerubbaal.

('Numeral Seventy: 115.)

²²⁹De Moor, *ARTU*: 94; del Olmo Lete, *MLC*: 231.

²³⁰Caquot, Sznycer and Herdner, *TO*: 265; Coogan, *SAC*: 114.

²³¹Gibson, *CML*²: 79, n. 2.

²³²Gordon, *PLMU*: 155.

²³³Dahood, *Psalms II*: 341.

²³⁴Van Zijl, *Baal*: 215.

mother of the gods, 'the seventy sons of Athirat'. She is also the *rabītu*, and thus has the power to suggest the candidate for kingship when the position is vacant. In the light of this consideration of Athirat's character and role in the Baal Cycle, it is now possible to draw some conclusions.

2.C. Conclusions

In this chapter I have examined the Ugaritic evidence concerning Athirat in the texts written by Elimelek. I have attempted to address the concern about the role of women as 'embodied' in Athirat, and such an attempt has shown that, if women were the 'role models' for the primary goddess, they were essentially seen as being in relationship with their husbands and children. Many scholars cast Athirat in the role of the 'mother-goddess'. Athirat does not appear as the amorphous mother-goddess in the sense described by James:

From the foregoing survey of the Goddess cult in its many forms, phases and manifestations the life-producing Mother as the personification of fecundity stands out clearly as the central figure. Behind her lay the mystery of birth and generation in the abstract, at first in the human and animal world with which Palaeolithic Man was mainly concerned in his struggle for existence and survival; then, when food-gathering gave place to food-production, in the vegetable kingdom where Mother-earth became the womb in which the crops were sown, and from which they were brought forth in due season. With the establishment of husbandry and the domestication of flocks and herds, however, the function of the male in the process of generation became more apparent and vital as the physiological facts concerning paternity were more clearly understood and recognized. Then the Mother-goddess was assigned a male partner, either in the capacity of her son and lover, or of brother and husband. Nevertheless, although he was the begetter of life he occupied a subordinate position to her, being in fact a secondary figure in the cultus.²³⁵

Perhaps the most common description given of Athirat or 'Asherah' is that of the mother goddess. This modern epithet is often found in discussions of the goddess,²³⁶ but it must be qualified. The Ugaritic evidence from

²³⁵E. O. James, *The Cult of the Mother-Goddess, an Archaeological and Documentary Study*, London, 1959: 228.

²³⁶See Maier, *ʿAšerah: Extrabiblical Evidence*: 193; W. Louie, *The Meaning, Characteristics and Role of Asherah in Old Testament Idolatry in Light of Extra-*

Elimelek's work does point to a maternal aspect of Athirat, but in relation to two specific sets of offspring: the gods and royal children. Athirat does not appear to be connected with a fertility cult in Keret or the Baal Cycle; the mythology recorded by Elimelek does not connect her with agriculture or husbandry. She is the 'Bearer of the gods' (*KTU* 1.4.I.22), and Yaṣṣib, the royal heir, will suck her milk (15.II.26). She is not generalised into a mother-goddess in an anthropological sense.²³⁷

Athirat's actions are primarily presented in her status of having important relationships among the pantheon: she is consort to El, the mother of the gods, and the *rabītu*. As queen mother Athirat named the heir to the throne, and appears to have supported the reigning king. Although Athirat moved in royal circles, the texts portray her as sharing some characteristics with earthly women. She is pictured with a spindle, the pedestrian utensil of a housewife (4.II.3). Her name occurs in parallel with the word 'woman' (3.I.14-15).

We have also noted that the Baal Cycle demonstrates by its repeated usage of the title *rbt aṯrt ym*, and by the circumstances in which Athirat appears by the sea side or in association with Yam, that she is related in a special way to the sea (Yam?). The precise nature of this special

Biblical Evidence, Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1988: 151-179; Smith, *Early History of God*: xix.

²³⁷For a good critique of the prevalent acceptance of mother-goddess theories see P. J. Ucko, *Anthropomorphic Figurines of Predynastic Egypt and Neolithic Crete with Comparative Material from the Prehistoric Near East and Mainland Greece*, (Royal Anthropological Institute Occasional Paper 24), London, 1968: 409-426. For a further archaeological critique of these theories in a European context see A. Fleming, 'The Myth of the Mother Goddess' *World Archaeology* 1 (1969-70): 247-261; P. Muhly, 'The Great Goddess and the Priest-King' *Expedition* 32 (1990): 54-61; R. Hutton, *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles, Their Nature and Legacy*, Oxford, 1991: 4-6, 37-41; J.-P. Duhard, 'The Shape of Pleistocene Women' *Antiquity* 65 (1991): 552-561; and L. E. Talalay, 'Body Imagery of the Ancient Aegean' *Archaeology* 44 (1991): 46-49.

relationship cannot be gathered from the texts as they are, but we are able to determine with certainty that some relationship does exist.

Any hints of sexual activity connected with Athirat point to her status as the consort of El. She is not pictured as the lover or consort of Baal. She is the proper means by which to approach El, and she is able to change his mind. These are the characteristics of Athirat as portrayed in the Elimelek tablets. An examination of the remaining Ugaritic references to Athirat may add to our knowledge of her nature.

Chapter Three

Other Ugaritic Texts Referring to Athirat

Having considered the mythological texts of Elimelek, I shall now move to examine the Ugaritic texts which do not fit into his mythological cycles, but which mention Athirat. Although an examination of these smaller texts certainly has a place in a study of Athirat, a question concerning method is raised. I now propose to deal with small, sometimes isolated sections, and up to this point I have been 'contextualising' the information about Athirat into groups which have formed somewhat coherent units, such as 'Keret' and the 'Baal Cycle' of Ugaritic mythology. Can this method be carried over into a study of loosely related texts? What is the 'glue' which holds together small mythological fragments?

It must be admitted at the outset that our knowledge of Athirat's character will not, perhaps, be vastly increased by a collective dossier of coherent facts by examining these small texts. In fact, the information which we stand to glean from such an exploration is small compared with that which we found in the ordered cycles of Elimelek. The value of such a study as this lies principally in the ability which such divergent texts have to confirm or deny characteristics which we have already stated for the Ugaritic 'Elimelek' understanding of Athirat. Such texts as offering-lists also provide a glimpse into the cultic life which mythological texts do not always offer.

Included among these smaller texts is the relatively complete Shachar and Shalim (text 23). Since this is the largest text which will occupy our attention in this chapter, it will be dealt with at the outset. We shall then move on to other brief or isolated mythological texts.

After the fragments I shall discuss the texts which appear to have ritual connections: offering-lists, god-lists, and ritual calendars. Comparisons of such texts with each other demonstrate interesting variations. Although they do not allow us to conclude that sequentially mentioned deities are related as consorts or families, their ordering of the deities appears to be significant. Taken together such texts form a loosely connected genre which provides a context from which to glean cultic information. Studies¹ have been carried out concerning the ritual texts, and these presentations remain useful for such an investigation.

3.A. Shachar and Shalim and Mythological Fragments

3.A.i. Shachar and Shalim (*KTU* 1.23)²

KTU 1.23 is a most difficult fusion of myth and ritual. The difficulty is, in the words of Driver, that 'the connexion between the poetical pieces and the directions is not always clear'³ The obverse of the tablet deals with what seem to be rubrics interspersed with mythological allusions. Athirat

¹Notably J. C. de Moor, 'The Semitic Pantheon of Ugarit' *UF* 2 (1970): 187-228; J. Healey, 'The Akkadian "Pantheon" List from Ugarit' *SEL* 2 (1985): 115-125, and also 'The "Pantheon" of Ugarit: Further Notes' *SEL* 5 (1988): 103-111. See the summary of such lists in W. A. Maier, *Ašerah: Extrabiblical Evidence* (HSM 37), Atlanta, 1986: 38-44.

²For a study of a possible origin see: B. Cutler and J. Macdonald, 'On the Origin of the Ugaritic Text *KTU* 1.23' *UF* 14 (1982): 33-50, and for general interpretation, E. Lipiński, 'Fertility in Ancient Ugarit' in *Archaeology and Fertility Cult in the Ancient Mediterranean, Papers Presented at the First International Conference on Archaeology of the Ancient Mediterranean, the University of Malta, 2-5 September 1985*, A. Bonanno, ed., Amsterdam, 1986: 207-216; M. Pope, 'Ups and Downs in El's Amours' *UF* 11 (Schaeffer Festschrift 1979): 701-708; S. Segert, 'An Ugaritic Text Related to the Fertility Cult (*KTU* 1.23)' in *Archaeology and Fertility Cult* : 217-224; D. Tsumura, 'A Problem of Myth and Ritual Relationship - CTA 23 (UT 52): 56-57 Reconsidered-' *UF* 10 (1978): 387-395 and N. Wyatt, 'Sea and Desert: Symbolic Geography in West Semitic Religious Thought' *UF* 19 (1987): 380-383.

³*CML*: 22.

is mentioned several times, and therefore this section deserves our attention. The reverse of the tablet bears a narrative of the begetting of Shachar and Shalim by El. I will first explore the obverse, then discuss the relevance of the reverse for our investigation.

The first seven lines of the text seem to be an introduction, beginning with 'I proclaim the gracious gods' (*iqra.ilm.n* 𐎠 [mm]), and ending with a benediction to the king and his retinue. The following lines are set off by a line drawn across the tablet, and they tell of someone called *mt wšr*; but we cannot be detained with the identity of this character here.⁴ What we can glean from this section of the text, however, is that it is concerned, in some sense, with 'fertility' themes. This is hinted at by the references to *mt wšr* being harvested (?) like vines (lines 9-11). I mention this aspect since it may allow us a perspective from which to begin to consider the mythological part of the text. A rubric follows (line 12), which calls for a sevenfold repetition.

Lines 13 through 15 are set off by lines across the tablet. They read:

<p>13 <i>w.šd.šd.ilm.</i> <i>šd.aṭrt.w rḥm <y ></i> 14^c<i>l.išt. šb 𐎠d.ğz rm g.</i></p>	<p>And the field⁵ is the field of the gods, the field of Athirat and Rahma<y> upon the fire seven times a hero with voice,⁶</p>
--	--

⁴For a discussion of this character, see N. Wyatt, 'The Identity of *Mt wšr*' *UF* 9 (1977): 379-381, and the references therein.

⁵Driver (*CML*: 121) suggested 'effluence' as a translation for *šd*, based on the Syriac *šdayâ*, 'discharge'(148). T. Gaster has suggested (*Thespis, Ritual, Myth and Drama in the Ancient Near East*, New York, 1950: 225, 242) that *šd* might be understood as 'breasts' as *šd* could be substituted for the usual Ugaritic *ṭd*, 'breast'. This idea finds support in the fact that both *ḏd* and *zd* are substituted for *ṭd* with the meaning of 'breast' in text 23 itself (Gordon, *UT*: 501), and all four words begin with either a sibilant or a dental, and end with dalet. The fact that *šd* has no direct West Semitic attestation as 'breast', however, calls for caution in consideration of this hypothetical definition.

⁶This line is exceptionally difficult. After closely examining the photograph in *CTA* 2, I have determined that the word concerned is written *dgzrm*. In the context, this is

ṭb.[g]d. bḥlb.annḥ bḥmat fine coriander in milk, mint in butter,
 15w *‘l.a gn.šb ‘dm.d ḡṭ? t[.dḡ] ṭt* and upon the flame⁷ seven times indeed⁸
 the essence of incense⁹

These lines are notoriously difficult, and any reconstructions remain hypothetical. Although most of the words can be determined on the basis of cognates, they do not seem to fit together coherently. This may simply be the result of their being part of a ritual text, which, although meaningful to the initiated Ugaritian, remains opaque to us. I would suggest that since they contain a mention of Athirat and Rahmay, these lines concern themselves mainly with some aspect of the goddesses, involving a concoction to be placed on a fire. What aspect they reveal we are unable to determine. For our study, we would take interest in the mention of Athirat in line 13. The context is far too terse to inform us greatly about her nature. We may deduce that she is associated with a 'field' and with a goddess called Rahmay. The divine 'fields' which are mentioned in line 13 again seem to point to fertility-related issues, but in what context we cannot say. Since this section, like several others on the face of the tablet, is scored off by lines, they would appear not to form a continuous

very difficult to understand. Since the list seems to indicate items to be placed upon a fire, and since *dgṭ*, 'incense' appears twice in line 15, I would propose a possible

emendment of *šb ‘d.gʻzrm* to *šb ‘. dgṭ [.]rm* as *z* (𐎗) and *ṭ* (𐎗) are very similar in shape, and misplaced word dividers are not unknown in Ugaritic. I would then suggest that the *rm* might be an imperative form of *rmh* (in Hebrew, 'to shoot, cast', BDB: 941a) 'cast incense'. The difficulty with this suggestion is that it leaves the gimel following *gʻzrm* unaccounted for. I would recommend emendation as a final course of action, particularly with such a difficult text. My tentative reading, however, does seem to bring some order into the chaos, without disturbing the integrity of the text too much.

⁷I take *agn* to be an Indo-European loan word for 'fire' (Gordon, *UT*: 351).

⁸*dm* would seem to be an emphatic particle here, as *šb ‘* alone could have the connotation of 'seven times' (see previous line, and *CML*²: 144, 158).

⁹Literally, 'incense of incense'; I understand this to point to the basic quality of incense, its 'essence'.

narrative with the lines before or after. The next line, however, does make a reference to hunting (*wtšd*) which was presumably carried out in 'fields'.

The identity of Rahmay has been much discussed by scholars, many of whom understand her to be a form of Anat.¹⁰ Another line of interpretation is to take Rahmay as an epithet of Athirat, as do Gordon and *TO*.¹¹ This issue is of much interest to our study of Athirat, but the text does not easily provide an answer; thus it is a matter of interpretation. Nowhere else in our Ugaritic mythological texts do we see a double name of Athirat-Rahmay, nor can it be said to refer explicitly to Anat.

The following three lines, 16-18, are damaged, but seem to contain a reference to the goddess(es) again.

16	<i>tlkm.rḥmy.w tš d</i> []	Rahmay went out and hunted[]
17	<i>thgrn.g' zr.n ' m.</i> []	they girded on, the pleasant hero[]
18	<i>wšm.'rbm.y r</i> []	and the name entered . . []

Since Rahmay is mentioned in line 16, and since line 17 begins with what may be a feminine plural verb, we may speculate that Athirat was in parallel with her in the missing part of line 16.¹² As such a conjecture cannot be textually supported, I shall only mention it as a possibility.

The next certain mention of Athirat comes in the refrain at lines 23 - 27, which are also set off by a line before and after them.

23	<i>iqr an.i lm.n ' m m</i>	I call on the gracious gods,
	[.agzrym.bn] y m	[the ones dividing ¹³ the sons of] the sea,

¹⁰Driver, *CML*: 121; Gaster, *Thespis* : 225, 242; de Moor, *ARTU*: 120; Gibson, *CML*²: 157; and del Olmo Lete, *MLC*: 623.

¹¹Gordon, *PLMU*: 60 reads this as a double name, Asherah-and-Rahm, and Caquot, Sznycer and Herdner (*TO*: 371, note m) suggest she is 'un doublet d'Athirat'.

¹²This was also tentatively restored by *TO*: 371, as well as by del Olmo Lete *MLC*: 442.

¹³The lacuna is restored on the basis of lines 58 - 59. As *agzrym* may be construed as a dual, I would read it as such, thus removing the difficulty of two mentions of the

24 <i>yn qm. bap zd. aṭrt.</i> []	the ones sucking the nipple of the breast of Athirat []
25 <i>špš.ms?/š?prt. dlth m</i> [] 26 <i>w ḡnb m.</i>	Shapash numbering their branches ^{1 4} [] and grapes,
<i>šlm. ṛbm. ṭn nm</i>	peace to the ministers and soldiers
27 <i>hl km. bdbḥ n ṣmt</i>	the ones coming in to the gracious sacrifice

Again we are faced with problems of interpretation. The identity of the gracious gods is not clearly revealed, although it is of interest that they are associated with both Athirat (whose nipples they suck) and the sea (whose sons (?) they divide). We have noted in the previous chapter that Athirat is associated with the sea, but the exact relationship is not specified. Once again, although this time beyond the mythological cycles of Elimelek, we see a tangential relationship of Athirat and the sea - those who suckle at her breasts divide (?) the sons of the sea.

Also from this section we note that Athirat is here mentioned, not with Anat, but with Shapash. The reference to a numbering of branches in line 25 may point to an agricultural concern for the text. A maternal aspect also seems to be demonstrated by the mention of the suckling at Athirat's breasts. Her previously noted role as the mother of the gods in the Elimelek cycles also seems to be reinforced here.

This passage is immediately followed by a partial repetition of line 13, restored as:

sea in the line. The word *agzrym* itself is interesting. N. Wyatt (private communication) has pointed out that a form of this verb in Hebrew occurs in parallel with *ṣkl* in Isa. 9.19 (Eng. 20); thus allowing for the suggestion of 'devourers'.

¹⁴*msprt* appears to be a feminine participle of *spr*, 'to count'; *dlthm* could be from *dalît*, 'branch' (BDB: 194b). In a context of fields and vines in the text as a whole, it would make sense to have a line stating that the sun was numbering the fruits of (the land ?).

šd .ilm.šd.atrt.w rhm y

the field of the gods is the field of Athirat
and Rahmay

Does this have anything to do with the preceding fertility motifs of suckling and branches? The difficulty of relating the refrains and other scored-off pieces of the texts adds to the interpretative troubles. The following line, 29, is too damaged to translate, but it does not appear to be the same line which follows line 13, as the legible letters are the wrong ones.

This brings us to the end of the obverse. The texts with which we have been concerned are marked by their difficulty. Alternative translations and interpretations may be supported for the lines which I have translated; however, I believe that my translations reflect the basic nature of the text. Concerning Athirat we have been able to see that certain aspects of her character delineated by Elimelek may have carried through to other Ugaritic myths. She apparently retains some relationship to the sea, as well as retaining maternal features (lines 23-24). Now we must consider whether the reverse of the tablet concerns Athirat, or simply unnamed women.

The difficulties in understanding the relationship between the two sides of this tablet are pronounced. The text of the reverse is in relatively good condition, and the repetitiveness assists in filling in the gaps. The narrative relates how El, seeing two women (*mšt'ltm* in lines 31, 35, 36 and also *atm* in lines 39, 42, 43, 46, 48), subsequently seduces them. They conceive and give birth to first, Shachar and Shalim, and then to the gracious gods. The first interpretative difficulty encountered is that the women are nowhere named. The only goddess named in the narrative part of the tablet is Shapash in line 54:

šū .š db.l špš. r bt.w kbkm.kn []

Raise, prepare for Shapash the Lady
and the established stars []

Apparently an offering is being presented to Shapash, presumably for the birth of Dawn and Dusk. The title *rbt*, discussed in the previous chapter, is used for Athirat in the Elimelek cycle, but we must be cautious about suggesting that it would necessarily refer to her here. Elimelek gives us no grounds for supposing that Athirat is a solar deity. Likewise, Athirat is not given the title *rbt* in text 23, and when the title is given to her in the Baal Cycle, it is in the fuller form *rbt atrt ym*. We cannot equate the two goddesses on the basis of this title, especially when the forms of the two myths involved are so different.

In any case, it does not seem that Shapash is considered to be the mother of the gods in the narrative. She does, however, appear to be credited with some kind of thanks for their birth. She is mentioned with the 'established stars', placing her in the heavens, where Shachar and Shalim (probably the two phases of Venus as morning and evening star) are located. We should expect no less of a sun goddess. The meaning of line 54 is not altogether clear, and the following lines do not dissipate the obscurity, for they are a repetition of the account of El impregnating the women.

Are these two women in the narrative section the goddesses mentioned on the obverse? Many scholars answer this question in the affirmative. One of the first difficulties with this interpretation is the identity of Rahmay - is she a double of Athirat, or is she Anat or another goddess? Does she count as one of the women (she is treated as an individual in line 16), or is she to be considered one with Athirat? Shapash also appears to be mentioned on the obverse (line 25); is she one of the two women? If Rahmay is Anat, then the mention of Shapash increases the

goddesses mentioned to three. The problem becomes more acute in that the gracious gods are said to suck the breasts of 'the Lady' (*št*) in line 61 (and perhaps also 59). This title appears in Aqhat as a title of Anat, but any of the goddesses could conceivably be called 'the lady'.

In the light of the general difficulty in interpreting this text, and the profusion of titles and names of goddesses, it cannot be stated with certainty that the two women are Athirat and Rahmay. The birth of two sets of children does seem to indicate a fertility aspect to the reverse of the text, but that does not necessitate the presence of Athirat. In consideration of these problems, I believe we should suffice with what we have gleaned about Athirat above: she is portrayed as related to the sea (indirectly) and she is related to the maternal aspect of fertility in some respect. To suggest any more is to go beyond the present evidence.

3.A.ii. *KTU* 1.8

KTU 1.8 is apparently either column number II or V of a six column tablet, according to Dietrich, Loretz and Sanmartin.¹⁵ In content, it appears to be part of a recension of the Baal Cycle. This small fragment contains some 17 lines which juxtapose small sections gleaned from a myth similar to tablet *KTU* 1.4. The first two lines nearly repeat 4.I.21-22, which are Baal's instructions to Kothar-and-Khasis to make a gift for Athirat. The lines in text 8 read:

1 *ik.mgn.rbt.a* 1rt 2[y]m.(?)¹⁶ a gift for Lady Athirat of the Sea,
mḡz.qnyt.ilm a present for the Bearer of the Gods.

¹⁵See *KTU* page 30, note 1 on text 8.

¹⁶The corresponding text in 1.4.I.20-22 has *m* preceding *mgn*. With the broken context, I can make no sense of *ik* here.

The text next moves on to Baal's request for a house in lines 3-5 and thereafter to the enigmatic statement of Baal to his servants in 4.VII.54f. This would appear to be a summary of some of the main elements of the Palace of Baal episode. For our present concern, it does mention Athirat, but unfortunately it does not add anything to our observations about her characteristics.

3.A.iii. *KTU* 1.12¹⁷

This text is most difficult to translate. This is in part due to its unfortunate break which leaves us without the very top of the tablet and without the second half of much of column II. Briefly summarised, the text tells of the birth of the 'devourers' (*ʿqqm*) by Dmgy, the handmaid of Athirat (*amt atrt*).¹⁸ Baal spies and 'covets' (*ḥmd*)¹⁹ the creatures. After pursuing them, Baal has a fall, later apparently to be found by his siblings. The text, as we have it, thus ends. De Moor, who supposes the text to have been written by an inexperienced scribe, concurs with many scholars that the text may well have ended at the close of column II.²⁰ The reverse of the tablet is blank, which supports this. Gordon simply notes that double lines at this point indicate that the scene has ended.²¹

Our concern is what we may learn about Athirat from this broken tablet. Athirat plays no direct part in what is left of the myth; it is her

¹⁷For studies of this text, see A. Kapelrud, 'Baal and the Devourers' *Ug* 6 (1969): 319-332; J. Gray, 'The Hunting of Ba'al: Fratricide and Atonement in the Mythology of Ras Shamra' *JNES* 10 (1951): 146-155; and N. Wyatt, 'Atonement Theology in Ugarit and Israel' *UF* 8 (1976): 415-430.

¹⁸*KTU* 1.12.I.16-17.

¹⁹See Gordon, PLMU: 121.

²⁰*ARTU*: 128, see also Gray 'The Hunting of Ba'al': 152, Wyatt, 'Atonement Theology': 415.

²¹PLMU: 125.

handmaid (along with *Tlsh*, the handmaid of *Yarikh*) who bears one of the 'devourers'. This indirect parallelism between *Yarikh* and *Athirat* is unique in the Ugaritic corpus, and it occurs in an obscure myth. Gray attempts to understand the role of the goddess by stating 'We take *ʾamt* in apposition to *ʾatrt* and in construct relationship to *yrh*, the Moon-god or *El*'.²² He further suggests, '*El* himself is probably the Moon-god and *Aṭirat* his consort'.²³ Gray understands the point of the text to be the consideration of fratricide and the punishment of the blood-guiltiness of *Baal*. *Kapelrud* does not take great pains to identify the handmaids, but he does offer an alternative interpretation. He supposes that the devourers are locusts, impregnated by *Baal*, which increase and cause famines.²⁴ *Brink* does not draw any explicit relationship between the handmaids and *Athirat*, but he argues that the purpose of the text is to demonstrate the positive relationship between *Athirat* and *Baal*.²⁵ *Wyatt* argues that this text deals with the same fight between *Baal* and *Mot* presented in text 6.²⁶ As to the identity of the handmaids, *Wyatt* contends that:

The two mothers-to-be, called '*Tlš* the handmaid of *Yariḥu*' (i 14f.) and '*Dmgy* the handmaid of *Aṭirat*' (i 16f.) or perhaps better 'the handmaid *Aṭirat*', are to be understood as the wives of *El*. They call *El* 'our father', as we have seen, and *El*'s wives in *CTA* 23 do the same (i 33, ii 9). In that text the wives are *Aṭirat* and *Rḥmy*, the latter probably to be understood not as 'Anat (which would make nonsense of the mythological structure of the episode) but as *Šapš*, the sun-goddess, ultimately to be identified with *Aṭirat*, herself an ancient sun-goddess.²⁷

²²Gray, 'The Hunting of *Ba'al*': 146, note 8.

²³Gray, 'The Hunting of *Ba'al*': 148, note 21.

²⁴*Kapelrud*, 'Baal and the Devourers': 222-225.

²⁵*M. Brink*, *A Philological Study of Texts in Connection with Aṭtart and Aṭirat in the Ugaritic Language*, D. Litt. dissertation, University of Stellenbosch, 1977: 499-500.

²⁶*Wyatt*, 'Atonement Theology': 420.

²⁷*Wyatt*, 'Atonement Theology': 417.

The suggestions presented above are worth considering, but the text itself, as we have it, does not state that Athirat is indeed one of the mothers. The myth, even if contained on only two columns, is too badly broken to determine its genre with certainty (although the falling and rescue of Baal may indicate a possible rebirth).²⁸ I suggest that all we can learn about Athirat in this context is that she is indirectly associated with childbirth. Her handmaid is sent to the desert to bear a child. This maternal aspect accords with what we know of her through the myths of Elimelek, but to state much more about her in this context goes beyond the available evidence.

3.A.iv. *KTU* 1.114

This intriguing text has been interpreted in several ways by many scholars. The mythological tale of a divine feast is followed by a blank space on the tablet, then a rubric appears, perhaps for curing a hangover. The interest which this text has for our present study is that some scholars have suggested that Athirat appears in it, in a mere mention. Other scholars have supposed that the text supports some other interpretation. The relevant lines are 14 - 16, which are somewhat damaged:

14 <i>b</i> <i>i l.abh.g 'r.</i>	to El his father he gave rebuke,
<i>yṭb. il.w l 15a ṭr[t .]</i>	El sat and (?) Athirat (?),
<i>il.yṭ b.b mrzḥh</i>	El sat in his marzeah,
16 <i>y</i> ṣt.[y]n. <i>'d šb '.</i>	he drank wine until satisfied,
<i>trṭ. 'd škr</i> ²⁹	new wine until drunk.

²⁸This has been tentatively suggested in my article 'Old Testament Dagan in the Light of Ugarit', forthcoming in *VT*.

²⁹I have, for the sake of convenience, followed the text as presented by *KTU*.

The difficulty with this section of the text is that the damaged portions obscure the parallelism. Supposing that *yṭb il* in line 14 begins a bicolon, paralleled by a similar *il yṭb* in line 15, it might be proposed that *aṭr* [] should be parallel with *mrzḥḥ*.³⁰ The restoration to *aṭrt* is conjectural, and many scholars have suggested alternative readings for this word and for other uncertain letters in lines 14 -15. De Moor had originally accepted this restoration and read lines 14 -15 as:

(but) Ilu and the sons of Aṭiratu remained seated,
Ilu remained seated among his *mrzḥ*-guests.³¹

He later decided that the reading should follow Virolleaud's original reading in *Ugaritica V*, which he restored as *kb ṽašk [rr]*.

Ilu is sitting as if he is on the henbane drug,
Ilu is sitting with his society,³²

This proposal, however, has not found a wide following. Rainey dismissed the reconstruction of *aṭrt*: 'The awkward expression, *baṭ [rt]* (Virolleaud followed by Loewenstamm) does not commend itself. In any event the passage is not crucial for the main line of thought in the text'.³³ Although Rainey is correct in pointing out that the line is not crucial for understanding the text, our concern is to discover if Athirat is mentioned.

Pope reconstructs lines 14 -15 as:

b il abh.g ṽr.ḥ yṭb.il.[b(?)] El his father he chided. El sat [in]

³⁰For a discussion of the *mrzḥ* as an institution see J. C. Greenfield 'The *marzeah* as a Social Institution' *AAASH* 22 (1974): 451-455.

³¹J. C. de Moor, 'Studies in the New Alphabetic Texts from Ras Shamra I' *UF* 1 (1969): 168.

³²J. C. de Moor, 'Henbane and KTU 1.114' *UF* 16 (1984): 355-356.

³³A. F. Rainey, 'The Ugaritic Texts in Ugaritica 5' *JAOS* 94 (1974): 187.

at [rh] lil.ytb.bmrzhh

[his pl]ace. El sat in his *mrzh*³⁴

Pope further comments: 'There is no objection to El sitting with his sometime consort and mother of his numerous progeny, but she is not mentioned elsewhere in the text and the parallelism suggests a place rather than a person.'³⁵ The objection to Athirat not being mentioned elsewhere could be countered by the fact that *Tkmn-and-Šnm* is only mentioned once in the text, and that *Hby* also appears just once. The issue of the parallelism is the crux, but the broken end of line 14 seems to preclude any certainty. Xella follows Pope's reconstruction.³⁶

Margalit, basing his arguments on his stichometry and alliteration, reconstructs the passage thus:

ytb.il. [w]? l atr [h.]
il.ytb.bmrzhh

(But) El was presiding in [his] thiasus,
El was presiding in his "symposium"³⁷

However, even with his elaborate criteria for understanding the metre and phonetic structure of the passage, Margalit is forced to rely on scribal error to account for the troublesome lacuna at the end of line 14.³⁸

Cathcart and Watson do find a mention of Athirat in the text, proposing:

bil[.] abh.g'r.
ytb.il.kb[n]/at[rt]

He reproves his father El.
El continues to sit like a s[on of Athi]rat,

³⁴M. H. Pope, 'A Divine Banquet at Ugarit' in *The Use of the Old Testament in the New and Other Essays, Studies in Honor of William Franklin Stinespring*, J. Efron, ed., Durham, North Carolina, 1972: 171, 172.

³⁵Pope, 'Divine Banquet': 190.

³⁶P. Xella, 'Studi sulla Religione della Siria Antica I El e il Vino (RS 24.258)' *SSR* 1 (1977): 238, 240.

³⁷B. Margalit, 'The Ugaritic Feast of the Drunken Gods: Another Look at RS 24.258 (KTU 1.114)' *Maarav* 2 (1979-80): 98.

³⁸Margalit, 'Ugaritic Feast': 104-105.

They do not comment further on the mention of Athirat.

The possible reference to Athirat in this passage must remain just that. The lacuna at the end of line 14 does not permit any reconstruction with certainty, despite the many attempts at a solution. Studies which point to parallelism are likewise based on assumptions about the missing characters at the end of the line. For the purposes of this study it is sufficient to state that some scholars consider Athirat to be mentioned in this text, but it is in a context which would add very little to our understanding of her character.

3.A.v. RIH 78/20

One final text must be considered under our consideration of mythological mentions of Athirat. One of the texts found at Ras Ibn Hani in 1978 is a well-preserved tablet that mentions Athirat. Bordreuil and Caquot classify the text as 'mythologique',⁴⁰ de Moor⁴¹ and Avishur⁴² both consider it an incantation, and Saracino suggests that it is a cure for impotence.⁴³ More recently Caquot has labelled the text an 'exorcisme'

³⁹K. J. Cathcart and W. G. E. Watson, 'Weathering a Wake: A Cure for a Carousal, A Revised Translation of *Ugaritica V* Text 1' *PIBA* 4 (1980): 36, 38.

⁴⁰P. Bordreuil and A. Caquot, 'Les textes en cunéiformes alphabétiques découverts en 1978 à Ibn Hani' *Syria* 57 (1980): 343-351. A very clear photograph of the text appears on page 368.

⁴¹J. C. de Moor, 'An Incantation against Evil Spirits (Ras Ibn Hani 78/20)' *UF* 12 (1980): 429-432.

⁴²Y. Avishur, 'The Ghost-Expelling Incantation from Ugarit (Ras Ibn Hani 78/20)' *UF* 13 (1981): 13-25.

⁴³F. Saracino, 'Ras Ibn Hani 78/20 and Some Old Testament Connections' *VT* 32 (1982): 338-343.

after the initial word *ydy*.⁴⁴ That the text involves some kind of 'driving out' is apparent from the use of *ydy*, but the object being driven is still debated. Our concern is why Athirat is named in a text for expelling a malady or spirit. We are not assisted by knowing what the nature of the exorcised entity is.

The reference to Athirat occurs in line 16. The two previous lines appear to be a bicolon, as do lines 16 and 17. The difficulty comes in that the beginning of 17 is broken, and thus we are not able to determine the parallelism of the bicolon.

16	<i>hn.bnps̄.aṯrt.rbt.bl</i>	behold from the throat of Lady Athirat, from(?)
17	<i>xx]rk.lṯtm.itbnnk</i>	[]? . . . I perceive you ⁴⁵

The obvious difficulty is the broken context. Avishur does not attempt a translation of these two lines, content to recognise the words 'the Lady Ashera'.⁴⁶ De Moor understands 16-18 as two bicola:

lo, in the soul of Athiratu, the Lady,
 in the h[ear]t of] your [] may you be moulded!
 Let me observe you intently []
 and certainly do not enter! ⁴⁷

Caquot translates:

Voici, dans la gorge de la Dame Athirat

⁴⁴A. Caquot, J. de Tarragon and J. Cunchillos, *Textes ougaritiques, Tome II textes religieux, rituels, correspondance* (Littératures Ancienne du Proche-Orient 14) Paris, 1989: 54. Hereafter cited as *TO2*.

⁴⁵The form *itbnnk* appears to be a tL form, according to Gordon's paradigms (*UT*: 155). I follow Bordreuil and Caquot ('Les textes en cunéiformes alphabétiques': 349) in understanding the root for *bnn* in Hebrew *byn*, which appears in the form of *y^ebôn^enehû* in Deut. 32.10 (BDB: 107a).

⁴⁶'The Ghost-Expelling Incantation': 16.

⁴⁷'Incantation against Evil Spirits': 430.

sans ton [. . .] - - - je te discerne.⁴⁸

Caquot and Bordreuil suggest that Athirat is present here in the role of the 'patronne de la mer';⁴⁹ however her maritime role is not obvious. In this fragment we have Athirat mentioned in connection with some kind of exorcism. Her exact role, and thus any information on her character, is, at present, lost to us.

3.B. Texts associated with Ritual⁵⁰

3.B.i. *KTU 1.39*⁵¹

This text is an offering-list, wherein Athirat, mentioned in line 6, is given a sheep. The arrangement of gods is most interesting. Initially El is mentioned in the first two lines, where he is presented with two ewes, a dove, two kidneys, a liver of a bullock, and a sheep. Line 3, although obscure, mentions *Tkmn-and-Šnm*, and line 4 names Resheph. Next Baal is mentioned as receiving a sheep, then Athirat followed by *Tkmn-and-Šnm*. Line 7 enumerates like offerings for Anat and Resheph, and mentions the family of El (*dr il*) and the assembly of Baal (*p[h]r b 'l*).

The fact that Athirat follows Baal in this list speaks nothing of the alleged mythological association of the two. An offering list would be inclined to show the objects of personal devotion rather than to sketch

⁴⁸'Une nouvelle interprétation de la tablette ougaritique de Ras Ibn Hani 78/20' *Orientalia* 53 (N.S. 1984): 175; *TO2*: 60.

⁴⁹'Les textes en cunéiformes alphabétiques': 349.

⁵⁰For a relatively complete study of the various ritual texts see P. Xella, *I Testi Rituali di Ugarit - I* (Pubblicazioni del Centro di Studio per la Civiltà Fenicia e Punica 21, Studi Semitici 54), Rome, 1981.

⁵¹For a study of this text see *TO2* : 135-139. See also M. Dietrich, O. Loretz and J. Sanmartín 'Die Texteinheiten in RS 1.2 = CTA 32 und RS 17.100 = CTA Appendice I' *UF* 7 (1975): 141-146.

mythological scenarios. What is interesting about this particular listing is that it places a relatively infrequently mentioned *Tkmn*-and-*Šnm* twice in the first six lines. This double-god⁵² appears in *KTU* 1.114, which may also mention Athirat. In this text he (they) is (are) presented as helping the drunken El reach his house. Resheph is also mentioned twice, but the major mythological figures of Baal, Athirat, and Anat appear only once. This should caution against using offering lists to explain mythological scenarios. We do have here, however, evidence that Athirat was worshipped in the cult of Ugarit, as well as being portrayed in the mythology.

3.B.ii. *KTU* 1.41 and 1.87

This ritual text is similar to text 1.39,⁵³ and is partially restored on the basis of text 1.87,⁵⁴ of which it seems to be a duplicate. Athirat is mentioned twice in preserved lines, and once in a restoration (line 35). Her first mention is in line 15 (1.87.16), amid the same order of deities presented in text 39. Even with the assistance of text 87, the proposed second mention of Athirat in line 35 (1.87.38) is not certain. Dietrich, Loretz and Sanmartín leave the section concerned untranscribed (or restored), and Xella does not read Athirat there.⁵⁵ De Tarragon proposes to restore lines 34-36 as:

. . . une génisse pour [Ba'al]
d'Ou[ga]rit; un mouton pour le di[eu]-père, [Athirat;]

⁵²Possibly to be identified with the divine pair Shukamuna and Shumaliya (N. Wyatt, 'The Story of Dinah and Shechem' *UF* 22 (1990): 446-447).

⁵³*TO2*: 135, concerning 1.39 'Le texte 1.41 en est très proche (ansi que 1.87)'.
⁵⁴*TO2*: 152; Xella, *Testi Rituali*: 63, 74.

⁵⁵Dietrich, Loretz and Sanmartín, 'Texteinheiten in RS 1.2': 144, and also in *KTU*, page 75; Xella, *Testi Rituali*: 60, 62.

et [des oiseaux] pour . . .?⁵⁶

De Moor argues for a seasonal interpretation relating to the New Year festival for this text.⁵⁷ His lines 35 and following read:

a ram for Ba^c lu of Ugarit,
 a ram for Ilⁱbu,
 . . [] for Ilu,
 a ram for Athiratu
 and two birds for *Ri[>]thu*.⁵⁸

The letters remaining in this broken section are, on the basis of 1.87, read as . . .*rt* by *KTU*. This combination certainly would support the name Athirat, but of this we cannot be certain. If Athirat is mentioned here, we have her name presented among a differing list of gods than that presented above. Her name does appear in line 40, but again the context is difficult. De Tarragon reads lines 38-41 as:

Au cinquième (jour), [(au) temple de El, un siclé d'ar-]
 [gent] (en) hommage, et un sacrifice-*db[h^h]*
 [pour] Athirat; des oiseaux [pour *inš* des dieux.]
 [On re]vient (à) l'autel de Ba^cal: une génis[se pour Ba^cal;]⁵⁹

De Moor renders them as:

On the fifth:
 One full shekel of silver for the House of Ilu
 and sacrifice like [].
 [] for Athiratu,
 two birds for the Most Amiable of the gods.
 Repeat: 'Altar of Ba^c lu.'⁶⁰

Maier simply translates the relevant line:

⁵⁶*TO2*: 157.

⁵⁷*ARTU*: 157-158.

⁵⁸*ARTU*: 163.

⁵⁹*TO2*: 157.

⁶⁰*ARTU*: 163-164.

ʿAthirat ; birds for the ʿinš of the gods. . .⁶¹

The deities mentioned in this list vary in order and in who is included. Athirat is clearly mentioned following the house of El (restored on the basis of 1.87), and immediately preceding the *inš ilm*. De Moor's rendering seems to be based on root II of ʿnš 'be inclined to, friendly, social' in BDB.⁶² This root does support other connotations such as 'to be weak', 'to be soft', and in the Old Testament in general it seems to be a description of the human condition.⁶³ In any case, for our consideration the question should be asked: is *inš ilm* intended to be parallel to Athirat? As the ritual texts, such as these, were probably not intended for recitation as much as to preserve priestly ritual, we should not expect them to be poetic in the same sense as the narrative poems of Elimelek, or the mythological fragments. An examination of the list under discussion also gives us no grounds for considering a parallelistic structure as opposed to a simple enumeration. As noted above, the order of the deities, which inevitably varies between individual lists, and even between sections within a single list, cannot inform us as to the mythological relationships between the gods. What this text does seem to indicate is that Athirat had a thriving cult at Ugarit, and she was considered worthy of offerings.

3.B.iii. *KTU* 1.46 and 1.65

Text 1.46 has caused much speculation about the relationship between Baal and Athirat, since they are mentioned as the joint recipients

⁶¹Maier, *ʿAšerah: Extrabiblical Evidence*: 40.

⁶²BDB: 60 b.

⁶³BDB: 60-61.

of a bullock in line 8.⁶⁴ This is an example of the result of gathering information about 'Asherah' from divergent sources taken from varying genres and piecing together a larger picture of the goddess. This method may have been useful in the earlier days of Ugaritic studies in order to appreciate the scope of a deity's importance. Now that several years of this practice have transpired, we must examine the evidence within its own context to test the general theories which have grown out of this method. I have noted above that offering lists are notorious for spawning speculation about mythological relationships, although this was not their intended purpose. If we were to interpret modern religious dedications in such a way, many commentators would be hard-pressed to explain such church names as 'St. Paul's and St. George's' or 'St. Andrew's and St. George's'. If two gods are offered a sheep together it does not indicate that a consort relationship exists between them. Such dedications may exhibit nothing more than an indication of when a particular 'feast day' fell, or they may be simply a measure of popular piety: a worshipper may have offered a bullock to both Baal and Athirat because of a vow. In our present state of uncertainty of cultic practice at Ugarit, we have no basis to connect these god lists with our mythological episodes. In the light of the present discussion, *KTU* 1.65 should also be mentioned. Line 5 of this text reads *il w atrt*, which immediately follows *trmn w šnm*.⁶⁵ This text alone would not allow us to determine that El and Athirat were consorts. Their names are connected by *w*; this is not necessarily a sign of a consort relationship

⁶⁴As argued by A. Kapelrud, *Baal in the Ras Shamra Texts*, Copenhagen, 1952: 77, M. Pope, 'Aṭirat' in *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, H. W. Haussig, ed., Stuttgart, 1965: 248-249; M. Brink, *A Philological Study of Aṭirat*: 539-540. But see also S. Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel* (SBLMS 34), Atlanta, 1988: 41-42, 47.

⁶⁵The deity referred to here may be *tkmn w šnm*, known from other texts. In consideration of the fact that *trmn* occurs in other lists as well, we should not discount the possibility that this deity is intended here. The difference between the names in cuneiform only involves two wedges: *r* = (𐎺𐎠) and *k* = (𐎠).

since it is known from the names of double-gods such as Kothar-and-Khasis and Qodesh-and-Amrur. Without the mythological texts to support this relationship, we would not be able to assert the consortship of El and Athirat from the god-lists. The same is true of Baal and Athirat in text 46. Placing them together as consorts strains the evidence, and elsewhere in this same text (46.6) we have a reference to Athirat in a straightforward list with other deities. Line 6 allocates a sheep to El (partially reconstructed), Baal, Athirat and Yam, respectively. Line 3, following a lacuna, records a sheep for El, Baal and Dagon, in that order. Rank would seem to be more the concern than consort relations. Extreme caution must be exercised when one attempts to make mythological assumptions on the basis of ritual lists.

3.B.iv. *KTU* 1.49

This tiny fragment is another offering list which names Athirat, albeit in a partially reconstructed context. She apparently follows El (also partially reconstructed) and precedes Pidray (likewise reconstructed) and Athtart. Each deity is offered a gift, but what is important for our study is the order of the gods mentioned. The mention of Pidray is unusual, and if such lists betrayed mythological episodes, we should be at a loss to explain it here. The order of names in offering lists, as this example demonstrates, varies by factors beyond our knowledge.

3.B.v. *KTU* 1.112

This text is another offering list. Athirat appears on the reverse, in line 24, as the recipient of two sheep. Her name occurs in a list of deities

and their offerings on the preserved portion of the text. She follows El, Baal Zephon, and the Baal of Ugarit, each of whom receives one sheep. This may indicate a high status for Athirat in the devotional life of Ugarit, but we cannot decide this certainly on the basis of just one such tablet. Our recovered tablets contain the names of many gods in several orders, and the deities receive different offerings in different contexts. It is interesting to note here, however, that Baalat appears to be mentioned separately in line 4 of the obverse of this text. Baalat is often considered as an epithet of Athirat, but such an offering text as this may indicate that she had a separate cult at Ugarit.

3.B.vi. *KTU* 1.47, 1.118 and 1.148

This god list is of special interest because it exists in both Ugaritic and Akkadian recensions.⁶⁶ RS 20.24 provides Akkadian forms of the Ugaritic names in texts 1.47 and 1.118, and text 1.148 is an offering-list which largely follows the order of these two lists. Athirat appears in line 19,⁶⁷ paralleled by *Ašratum* in RS 20.24, and she is offered a sheep in text 148. There has been speculation about this list as well, since so many major figures appear so far down the list. Although such a list, appearing as it does in two languages, appears to have a 'canonical' aspect about it, we must remember that it is only one of a large number of god lists found at Ugarit. It should also be noted that 148 varies the order of some of the divinities; for example, Uš̄ry and Athtart change places, and Utbt drops out following Yam in 148. Extreme caution should be shown before declaring any one list

⁶⁶I am indebted to N. Wyatt for pointing this fact out to me.

⁶⁷The reference to Athirat is completely missing in *KTU* 1.47; however, on the basis of the preserved sections of this list it has been linked to the other two texts.

as more indicative of Ugaritic religion than any of the others. In this particular list, Athirat follows *g'rm w* [*'mqt*] and precedes Anat. A further varied order is thus added to our list.

3.C. Conclusions

This chapter has taken into account the references to Athirat outside of the Elimelek corpus. Although most of the texts are either ritual texts or fragmentary, they do offer support to certain of Athirat's characteristics observed in the Elimelek tablets. In *KTU* 1.23 Athirat once again appears to possess a maternal aspect. Since she gives suck to mythological creatures there, this may well be a reflection on her role as the mother of the gods. Other characteristics of Athirat do not appear to be evoked in these tablets. The ritual texts demonstrate that Athirat was actively worshipped in the cult of Ugarit. It is important that the order of deities in these lists not be forced into mythological hypotheses. As offering-lists, they simply tell us about the cultic life of the city. This is an area in which more study is necessary.

With these characteristics of Athirat in mind, we are now ready to examine the evidence of the Old Testament concerning Asherah.

Chapter Four

Old Testament Asherah

4. Preliminary Considerations

In chapters two and three of this study, I have examined the solid information concerning the character of the goddess Athirat in the Ugaritic material. Since Ugarit is the locus of the most abundant information on her character, it must be used as a touchstone for other ancient Near Eastern references to goddesses of the same name. The questions to be put forth in this chapter are 'Is there an Old Testament goddess Asherah? If so, is she to be identified with the goddess Athirat as established by Ugaritic materials?' Although many scholars dealing with the issue of the asherah in the Old Testament admit the presence of a goddess there, dissenting voices are still to be heard.¹ I shall not assume that she is present unless the evidence so indicates.

A word concerning terminology is necessary. Since אֲשֵׁרָה in the Old Testament may refer to a cultic object, or perhaps to a goddess, I shall differentiate between these two usages by capitalising the name of the goddess. The cultic object will not be italicised, except where it represents a strict transliteration. Where the context is ambiguous, I shall use אֲשֵׁרָה.

Upon examining the contemporary studies on Asherah, one discovers that many attempts at a text-critical approach to the Old Testament references are to be found. The monograph of W. Reed carefully considers which verbs are used with the asherah and which cultic objects

¹See especially E. Lipiński, 'The Goddess Aṭirat in Ancient Arabia, in Babylon, and in Ugarit' *OLP* 3 (1972):116, and A. Lemaire, 'Who or What was Yahweh's Asherah?' *BAR* 10 (1984): 46-47.

are mentioned in the same verses with it.² The dissertations of J. Engle, A. Perlman and R. Pettey³ compare the cultic objects mentioned or attempt to discern a formula which the Old Testament utilises concerning the asherah. T. Yamashita, following the Old Testament work of Reed, demonstrated a deuteronomistic source for many Old Testament asherah references.⁴ Although the information gathered from such investigations is helpful, the usefulness of a textual investigation into each of the forty verses where a form of the word אֲשֵׁרָה appears will still be most instructive.

In the Old Testament אֲשֵׁרָה is found in deuteronomistic sources (in deuteronomistic passages of the Pentateuch⁵ and in the Deuteronomistic History), in the chroniclers' account of Israelite history, and in the prophetic books. In this dissertation I shall examine each of these three categories in turn. I shall examine the deuteronomistic background of many of the Old Testament references to אֲשֵׁרָה and shall attempt to determine if the textual history of the verses yields any information on the goddess Asherah. A thorough investigation into the nature of the deuteronomistic redactors of the Pentateuch and Deuteronomistic History is beyond the scope of this dissertation. It must suffice to say that the deuteronomists have been widely recognized in their editorial work on passages dealing with cultic matters in the Old Testament.⁶

²W. Reed, *The Asherah in the Old Testament*, Fort Worth, 1949, chapters III, IV, and V.

³J. Engle, *Pillar Figurines of Iron Age Israel and Asherah/Asherim*, University of Pittsburgh, 1979; A. Perlman, *Asherah and Astarte in the Old Testament and Ugaritic Literature*, Graduate Theological Union, 1978; R. Pettey, *Asherah: Goddess of Israel?*, Marquette University, 1985 (but see now his *Asherah, Goddess of Israel* (American University Studies series VII, Theology and Religion volume 74), New York, 1990).

⁴T. Yamashita, *The Goddess Asherah*, Yale University, 1963.

⁵Exod. 34.13 is possibly an exception to this category. See below.

⁶Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*: 190; E. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition*, Oxford, 1967: 112; I. Provan, *Hezekiah and the Book of Kings* (BZAW 172): 57-90; R. Clements, *Deuteronomy* (Old Testament Guides), Sheffield, 1989: 60-63 (see also his

Is it possible to determine if Old Testament writers or redactors knew of Asherah as a goddess? Text-critical principles may be used to enlighten the issue, although they cannot finally demonstrate if a goddess was recognised. In this chapter I shall note the textual difficulties as they appear. If these difficulties perhaps indicate that the writer or redactor knew of Asherah, I shall note this point. My principle concern, however, will not be to determine the date or authorship of the various passages discussed; neither shall I attempt to determine the overall form of the asherah as a cultic object. As will be shown, this cultic object is generally conceived of as a wooden object, and therefore the assistance of archaeology in this situation is extremely limited. The texts themselves tell us little about its actual shape. Instances where the texts give us insight into possible forms of the asherahs will be noted. Each verse's contribution in this respect will also be considered in its own context. An insistence on a consistent form of the asherah in each verse, imposed from a modern perspective, should be avoided. In this chapter, however, my primary objective is to determine what, if anything, the texts themselves tell us about the nature and character of Asherah.

Many scholars have followed on the groundwork laid out by Yamashita, which argues for the deuteronomistic nature of the references to אֲשֵׁרָה in the Old Testament. This interpretation does account for many of the אֲשֵׁרָה references; nevertheless a difference is discernible between earlier and later texts. I shall look closely at the language of each verse or pericope concerning either the cultic object or the goddess. This exercise

'Deuteronomy and the Jerusalem Cult Tradition' *VT* 15 (1965): 300-312). For a discussion of the dating of the deuteronomistic redaction see J. M. Hadley, *Yahweh's Asherah in the Light of Recent Discovery*, Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 1989: 82-84.

will reveal some interesting tendencies to be found in the Masoretic Text, and perhaps will shed some light on deuteronomistic theology. This is an area in which new information may be gleaned for discussions of Asherah.

Concerning matters of method: conclusions drawn from our study of Athirat should not be initially incorporated into the Old Testament understanding of Asherah. It is necessary first to test the Old Testament materials to determine what they tell us about Asherah. I shall limit the textual study to what the texts themselves will support. After a thorough examination of the evidence, I shall attempt to determine if the nature and character of Old Testament Asherah coincide with Ugaritic Athirat.⁷ A method which I shall avoid is that of using tentative support from the Old Testament to give credence to composite theories based on several sources of information. An example of this kind of theory is one which states that the Old Testament views Asherah and Baal as consorts. This theory is built upon the assumption that Ugaritic El was eventually supplanted by Baal, who subsequently seized his spouse. The Old Testament cultic sites are adduced as evidence. Ultimately the basis of this presupposition of the consort relationship between Asherah and Baal in the Old Testament is based on two faulty pillars. The first is that deities mentioned together in the Old Testament are necessarily consorts (a matter I have discussed in an Ugaritic context above).⁸ This assumption is often further qualified to include only those deities mentioned together at a shrine; thus, when the asherah (as a cultic object) is mentioned together with the baal, it is supposed that they are consorts. Notwithstanding the vexed issue of who is

⁷On this issue see K.-H. Bernhardt, 'Aschera in Ugarit und im Alten Testament' *MIO* 13 (1967): 163-174.

⁸See also the discussion by S. M. Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh* (SBLMS 34), Atlanta, 1988: 38-61.

meant by the baal,⁹ this hypothesis does not account for the references to asherahs at 'high places'.¹⁰ The asherahs are also referred to in some verses together with altars, pillars and images.¹¹ The text does not indicate to whom these other cultic objects were dedicated. Who was the deity of the *מַצְבֵּה* (Exod. 34.13)? To whom was the *פֶּסֶל* (Deut. 7.5) dedicated? Indeed, was the *אֲשֵׁרָה* dedicated to Asherah?¹² The MT does not directly answer any of these questions; indeed, it is not concerned to give a full outline of 'pagan' religion. The texts are polemical, arguing that the very presence of these 'foreign' objects is offensive to Yahweh. Unless we are willing to assume (as the logic behind pairing together deities mentioned at the same shrine would oblige us to do) that we have a complex consort arrangement of unknown gods and goddesses at every shrine, some of which (according to Deut. 16.21) contained Yahwistic altars,¹³ we cannot hold to this presupposition. Further, an examination of the Old Testament evidence reveals that the baal, asherahs and all the hosts of heaven are referred to at the same shrines (2 Kgs 17.16; 21.3; 23.4; 2 Chron. 33.3). Scholars have not proposed that the 'hosts of heaven', whoever they may be, should be considered in any kind of consort relationship with either Baal or Asherah, or both.

⁹B. Halpern, "'Brisker Pipes than Poetry": the Development of Israelite Monotheism' in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* (H. L. Ginsberg Festschrift), J. Neusner, B. A. Levine, and E. S. Frerichs, eds., Philadelphia, 1987: 92-95. See also N. Wyatt, 'Of Calves and Kings: the Canaanite Dimension in the Religion of Israel' *SJOT* 6 (1992): 75.

¹⁰For recent research on the subject see P. Vaughan, *The Meaning of 'bāmâ' in the Old Testament: a Study of the Etymological, Textual and Archaeological Evidence* (SOTSMS 3), Cambridge, 1974; W. B. Barrick, 'On the "Removal of the 'High-Places"' in 1-2 Kings' *Biblica* 55 (1974): 257-259, and his 'What do we Really Know about "High Places"?' *SEÅ* 45 (1980): 50-57; R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions*, London, 1961: 284-288; I. Provan, *Hezekiah: 57-90*, and the sources cited in these.

¹¹Petty, *Asherah, Goddess of Israel*: 53.

¹²For alternative views see J. C. de Moor, 'אֲשֵׁרָה ^aasherah' *TDOT*, vol. 1: 441; M. S. Smith, *The Early History of God, Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, San Francisco, 1990: 94. I shall return to this question at the end of the chapter.

¹³See also Provan, *Hezekiah*: 60-65.

The second faulty pillar upon which this kind of theory rests is that it assumes information from various ancient Near Eastern cultures can simply be amalgamated to produce a fuller understanding of ancient Near Eastern religion. This method is not inherently faulty; however, it can be utilised only after each separate context is examined. Otherwise two half-understandings from different cultures do not always add up to a whole understanding in general. Such methods have led to the commonly supposed associations of Asherah with snakes and lions.¹⁴ We have not found these associations at Ugarit, and we shall note that the Old Testament does not support these associations either.

The Old Testament material has not provided clear-cut solutions to the question of Asherah. That אֲשֵׁרָה and some kind of tree and/or wooden cultic object are related is obvious,¹⁵ but this relationship is not clearly spelled out. When all the material has been presented we are still left without clear indications as to how Asherah influenced Israelite religion, if at all. This is complicated by the general lack of knowledge about the Israelite temple cult, given the sketchy nature of the Old Testament

¹⁴J. Day, 'Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature' *JBL* 105 (1986): 389; S. Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh*: 70; F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic, Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1973: 33-34; J. W. Betlyon, 'The Cult of ḶAšerah/ḶĒlat at Sidon' *JNES* 44 (1985): 55; W. G. Dever, 'Asherah, Consort of Yahweh? New Evidence from Kuntillet ḶAjrūd' *BASOR* 255 (1984): 25; W. A. Maier, ḶAšerah: *Extrabiblical Evidence* (HSM 37), Atlanta, 1986: 81-102. It is worth noting that W. G. Lambert ('Trees, Snakes and Gods in Ancient Syria and Anatolia' *BSOAS* 48 (1985): 435-451) gives convincing evidence that trees and lions have some association with the storm god, an association which may also include snakes. Caution is to be exercised before declaring that any of these symbols exclusively points to Asherah. I have considered this issue in, 'The Myth of Asherah: Lion Lady and Serpent Goddess' paper to be presented to 1992 Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, San Francisco; *now forthcoming in USA*.

¹⁵Day, 'Asherah in the Hebrew Bible': 392-398; Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh*: 1-3; J. A. Emerton, 'New Light on Israelite Religion: the Implications of the Inscriptions from Kuntillet ḶAjrud' *ZAW* 94 (1982): 15-19; M. Weinfeld, 'Kuntillet ḶAjrud Inscriptions and their Significance' *SEL* 1 (1984): 121-122; B. Margalit, 'Some Observations on the Inscription and Drawing from Khirbet El-Qôm' *VT* 39 (1989): 371-375.

material. Attempts at understanding the texts have led scholars to such divergent conclusions as (to demonstrate the extremes) that the evidence supports an essentially monotheistic Israel,¹⁶ and that Asherah was none other than the consort of Yahweh.¹⁷ In addition to the forty occurrences of אֲשֶׁרָה in the MT, many scholars have suggested that certain texts be emended to refer to the goddess Asherah, or simply refer to her in a disguised form.¹⁸ I shall not look at these verses in the course of this study. My purpose is to find out what the MT tells us about the goddess: any information gathered from an emended text or an implied reference could be tentative evidence at best.

With forty occurrences in the Old Testament, אֲשֶׁרָה would seem not to be an excessively rare word. By examining the various usages, each in its own context, as astutely suggested by Margalit,¹⁹ we are able to weigh the evidence from different sources. Old Testament אֲשֶׁרָה certainly points to a cultic object, one which is referred to in the plural by both the masculine and feminine genders. In deuteronomistic literature, the אֲשֶׁרָה are referred to as the asherot (הָאֲשֶׁרוֹת), Judg. 3.7)²⁰ and the asherim

¹⁶J. H. Tigay, *You Shall Have No Other Gods: Israelite Religion in the Light of Hebrew Inscriptions* (HSS 31), Atlanta, 1986: throughout.

¹⁷Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh*: 43; M. S. Smith 'God Male and Female in the Old Testament' *ThSt* 48 (1987): 333-340; Dever, 'Asherah, Consort of Yahweh?': 21-37.

¹⁸This has been suggested for Gen. 30. 10-13 (R. Patai, 'The Goddess Asherah' *JNES* 24 (1965): 40-41; C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges with Introduction and Notes*, London, 1918: 197-198); Hos. 14. 7-9 (Yamashita, *The Goddess Asherah*: 130; O. Loretz, 'Anat - Aschera (Hos 14,9) und die Inschriften von Kuntillet 'Ajrud' *SEL* 6 (1989): 57-65, J. Day 'A Case of Inner Scriptural Interpretation' *JTS* 21 (N.S. 1980): 309-319: this suggestion may be traced back to Wellhausen, see J. C. de Moor, 'הָאֲשֶׁרָה': 441; Loretz: 57); Amos 8.14 (Yamashita, *The Goddess Asherah*: 135); Gen. 49.24-26 (M. S. Smith, *The Early History of God*: 16-17); 2 Kgs. 17.30 (J. Gray, *I & II Kings, A Commentary* (OTL), London, 1964: 596); Jer. 2.27 (S. M. Olyan, 'The Cultic Confessions of Jer 2,27a' *ZAW* 99 (1987): 254-259; in the tribal name Asher (G. A. Barton, 'The Kinship of Gods and Men among the Early Semites' *JBL* 15 (1896): 173-174), and in the figure of Wisdom (Smith, 'God Male and Female': 337; and *Early History of God*: 94-95).

¹⁹'Some Observations on the Inscription': 371-372.

²⁰According to the apparatus in *BHS*, two Hebrew manuscripts and two versions (the Syriac and the Vulgate) read 'aštarôt rather than 'ašerôt. This would seem to indicate

(אֲשֵׁרִים), 1 Kgs. 14.23; 2 Kgs. 17.10; 23.14). This in itself is instructive. Does it perhaps indicate a point in time when the original meaning of אֲשֵׁרֵה had been forgotten? To suppose that deuteronomistic scribes had forgotten that a feminine singular noun normally forms a feminine plural strikes me as incredible. Perhaps 'asherim', as a collective for cultic objects, was given a masculine ending; but why this distortion when the feminine plural form could have been used? It would seem that 'asherim' is a denuded form of the goddess's name. In other words, the title was probably not transferred from the cultic object to a goddess, as we know of an earlier Ugaritic goddess bearing a phonetically comparable name. There may be a touch of irony in this use of a masculine plural for a feminine noun.²¹ The distribution of these masculine plural forms may display a propensity towards deuteronomistic polemic from after the time of Josiah, as will be considered more thoroughly below.

The references to the asherah in the Old Testament are mostly found in the historical books, particularly those of the Deuteronomistic History.²² This concentration of occurrences should tell us something about the asherah. It indicates that the deuteronomists²³ were perhaps more concerned about the אֲשֵׁרֵה issue than the prophets, who were generally

confusion on the part of the translators indicating a textual error; however, most of the Hebrew manuscripts retain the *ʾašerôt*, see below.

²¹For examples of ironic designations of particular deities, see A. Kuenen, *The Religion of Israel to the Fall of the Jewish State*, vol. 1, London, 1874: 303-304; W. Baudissin, *Studien zur Semitischen Religionsgeschichte*, vol. 1, Leipzig: 108; and M. Jastrow, 'The Element אֲשֵׁרֵה in Hebrew Proper Names', *JBL* 13 (1894): 27.

²²The complete listing of the occurrences is as follows: Exod. 34.13; Deut. 7.5; 12.3; 16.21; Judg. 3.7; 6.25, 26, 28, 30; 1 Kgs. 14.15, 23; 15.13; 16.33; 18.19; 2 Kgs. 13.6; 17.10, 16; 18.4; 21.3, 7; 23.4, 6, 7, 14, 15; 2 Chron. 14.2 (3); 15.16; 17.6; 19.3; 24.18; 31.1; 33.3, 19; 34.3, 4, 7; Isa. 17.8; 27.9; Jer. 17.2; Mic. 5.13(14).

²³Thus M. Weinfeld (*Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, Oxford, 1972: 3, 320) includes the phrase 'to worship the Baal/Baalim and the Asheroth/Asheroth' among those which characterise deuteronomistic theology.

silent on the subject (see below). The majority of the deuteronomistic passages concerned with אֲשֵׁרָה attempt to explain the anger of Yahweh with Israel and Judah, or to commend the reform movements of righteous kings. Yahweh is angry because the kings and people associate wooden cultic objects²⁴ of some kind with their altars. Again, this tells us something, albeit rather tersely, of the cult during the monarchy. The people were in the practice (if we take the historical books as reflecting actual cultic practice) of associating asherahs with cultic sites.

The passages in the historical books follow a familiar pattern of condemning the people for making (עָשָׂה)²⁵, or planting (נָטַע),²⁶ asherahs, or tell of their hewing down (גָּדַע),²⁷ and burning (שָׂרַף)²⁸ the asherahs. This terminology obliges one to see some wooden object being recognised as an asherah.²⁹ Reed argues for an image of the goddess Asherah rather than for a pillar or tree.³⁰ Although he provides evidence to support his supposition, the Old Testament does not insist upon a single type of object as an asherah (see below).³¹ To argue for a living or stylised tree may be a worthwhile exercise;³² however, the issue cannot be resolved by the texts. If each verse is considered on the basis of its internal evidence, several possible forms may be suggested for the asherahs. We cannot unreservedly gather all Old Testament information about אֲשֵׁרָה without first considering each mention of asherah in its own context.

²⁴W. L. Reed, *Asherah in the Old Testament*: throughout.

²⁵2 Kgs. 17.16.

²⁶Deut. 16.21.

²⁷Deut. 7.5.

²⁸2 Kgs. 23.15.

²⁹R. Patai, 'The Goddess Asherah': 37-39.

³⁰*Asherah in the Old Testament*: 42.

³¹Olyan (*Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh*: 5) has shown that such attempts to declare the asherah an image or a tree miss the point of the discussion. See also Pettey, *Asherah, Goddess of Israel*: 89.

³²Day, 'Asherah in the Hebrew Bible': 404; Emerton, 'New Light': 19.

In the majority of cases אֲשֶׁר־הָ appears in formulas which became indicative of the deuteronomists' polemic against בְּמִזְבְּחֵי-sanctuaries³³ and other foreign intrusions. Holladay has convincingly argued that the formula 'on every high hill and under every green tree' originated in Hos. 4.13:³⁴

On the tops of the mountains they sacrifice, and upon the hills they make offerings smoke, under oak, and poplar and terebinth that are good for shade, thus your daughters commit fornication, your daughters-in-law commit adultery.

This formula is of special interest in this study because the word אֲשֶׁר־הָ appears in association with it in 1 Kgs. 14.23; 2 Kgs. 17.10; and Jer. 17.2. אֲשֶׁר־הָ, however, does not appear with this formula in the book of Hosea. Perhaps at the time of Hosea (who frequently condemned worship of the baal) the אֲשֶׁר־הָ was not considered a particular threat.

Clearly what is needed is a contextual examination of the texts which mention אֲשֶׁר־הָ. I shall therefore explore the passages referring to אֲשֶׁר־הָ in the MT in the order of their occurrence within the categories of the Pentateuch, the Deuteronomistic History, Chronicles and the Prophets. In the course of this study, some significant points will appear.

³³W. B. Barrick, 'On the "Removal of the 'High-Places"': 257-259.

³⁴W. Holladay, "'On Every High Hill and Under Every Green Tree'" *VT* 11 (1961): 170-176.

4.A. The Pentateuch

4.A.i. Exodus 34.13

Exod. 34.13 is the first reference to the asherahs. The verse reads, 'Indeed their altars you will pull down, and their pillars you will shatter, and his asherahs (אֲשֵׁרָהּ) you will cut down.' This verse is found in the context of instructions to be carried out once the promised land is reached. Scholarly opinion on the composition of Exod. 34 varies widely. Verse 13 is part of a particularly difficult section of this chapter.³⁵ Noth observed:

There are additions in vv. 11b-13 in deuteronomistic language, in which the people are addressed partly in the singular and partly in the plural; they introduce the warning, frequent in Deuteronomy and the deuteronomistic writings, against the inhabitants of the land which is to be taken in possession and against their cultic institutions.³⁶

His observations are relevant to this study in that he notes the deuteronomistic element present in these verses and that he also notes that the people are addressed in both the singular and the plural. Verse 13 also refers to the cultic objects of the inhabitants of the land with both plural and singular possessives. The asherahs, however, are the only elements assigned a singular possessive. The verse is otherwise well balanced - their detestable things and their fate, their detestable things and their fate, but then, *his* detestable things and their fate. Commentators often note the deuteronomistic character of the verse, but do not discuss the textual problem.³⁷ Durham notes, 'the source criticism of Exod 34: 10-28, beyond broad designations, is very subjective and therefore of somewhat arbitrary

³⁵E. Zenger, *Die Sinaitheophanie. Untersuchungen zum jahwistischen und elohistischen Geschichtswerk* (Forschung zur Bibel 3), Würzburg, 1971: 228.

³⁶M. Noth, *Exodus, a Commentary* (OTL), London, 1962: 262.

³⁷J. Hyatt, *Commentary on Exodus* (NCBC), London, 1971; U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the book of Exodus*, Jerusalem, 1976.

conclusions'.³⁸ The suggested deuteronomistic origin of this verse is not certain,³⁹ although the verse addresses issues of concern to the deuteronomists.⁴⁰

The LXX, Syriac, one Hebrew manuscript and two Targums correct the imbalance of the possessives to 'their asherahs',⁴¹ but the MT of *BHS* retains it, perhaps as the *lectio difficilior*. Even if we were to emend the text, we would still need to ask ourselves, why in some important manuscripts does this verse mention his asherahs, and who is the 'he' being mentioned? A possibility is that the writer had someone in mind as having asherahs. As cultic objects, perhaps asherahs were envisaged as being possessed by Yahweh; however, the antecedents to the other cultic objects in this verse are the Canaanites. Another option is that the text has been corrupted in the process of textual transmission. Intentional distortion of the meaning of the verse does not appear to be present.⁴² Could it be that the writer or editor had a purpose in singling out the asherahs? They are referred to here in the masculine plural, perhaps indicating that a writer wished to dissociate them from Asherah.

4.A.ii. Deuteronomy 7.5

The next instance of אֲשֵׁרָה in the MT is in Deut. 7.5. The text states 'But thus you will do to them; their altars you will pull down, and their

³⁸J. Durham, *Exodus* (WBC), Waco, Texas, 1987: 458.

³⁹S. Schroer ('Die Zweiggöttin in Palästina/Israel. Von der Mittelbronze II B-Zeit bis zu Jesus Sirach' in *Jerusalem, Texte-Bilder-Steine* (Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus 6), M. Küchler and C. Uehlinger, eds., Freiburg and Göttingen, 1987: 217) notes that this is the oldest Old Testament reference to the asherah.

⁴⁰Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh*: 18.

⁴¹B. Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary* (OTL), London, 1974: 604.

⁴²M. Barker (*The Older Testament*, London, 1987: 142-154) seems to overstate the case for such intentional distortion.

pillars you will shatter, and their asherahs (אֲשֵׁרֵי יְהוָה) you will hew down and their images you will burn with fire.' This verse also falls within the context of instructions of how to deal with the inhabitants of the promised land, and it is very similar to Exod. 34.13.⁴³ To avoid the danger of infiltration by the Canaanite cult, the Israelites are commanded to rid the land of their (the Canaanites') asherahs. Of interest to us here is the fact that 'asherahs' is given the unusual plene spelling, whilst the possessive suffix is spelled defectively. This verse demonstrates no knowledge of 'Asherah' as a personal name. We would perhaps expect אֲשֵׁרֵי יְהוָה here, the spelling attested in Deut. 12.3. Of the forty occurrences of אֲשֵׁרָה in the MT, only three are spelled plene, and the other two occurrences appear in exilic or post-exilic additions.⁴⁴

Mayes recognised the divided nature of the pericope of Deut. 7.1-26,⁴⁵ and this text bears a distinct similarity to Exod. 34.13. If this verse came from the same hand as Exod. 34.13 with its textual difficulty, perhaps we have evidence indicating a period when the origin of the term אֲשֵׁרָה had caused the word to be distorted from a recognisable form of the name Asherah. Up to this point the Pentateuch does not refer to the goddess.

4.A.iii. Deuteronomy 12.3

Deut. 12.3 occurs in the context of instructions for the centralisation of the cult of Yahweh in Jerusalem. Unlike straight narrative style, this

⁴³A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (NCBC), Grand Rapids, 1981: 184; S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy* (ICC), Edinburgh, 1895: 99; Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh*: 18.

⁴⁴These are 2 Kgs. 17.16 and Mic. 5.13 (Eng. 14). For the exilic date of 2 Kgs. 17.16 see I. Provan, *Hezekiah: 70-73*. For the late date of Mic. 5.3 see below, 'The Prophetic References'. *The dating of this text, however, is extremely difficult.*

⁴⁵*Deuteronomy*: 181.

verse consists of a polysyndetic structure that follows the pattern: verb, object: verb, object: object, verb: object, verb: verb, object:

And you will pull down their altars,
and you will shatter their pillars,

and their asherahs you will burn with fire,
and the images of their gods you will hew down,

and do away with their name from that place.

The chiasmic structure in this presentation of the cultic objects and their fates is poetic.⁴⁶ This verse does not appear to be corrupt, but the LXX leaves out the mention of the asherahs and the 'images of their gods' (פְּסִילֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶם) referred to in this verse. Since the Hebrew manuscripts retain these two items, however, we should also retain them rather than emend the text. Verses 4-5 appear to be a later addition (along with 7-15, and 25-26) to the 'basic text'.⁴⁷ As Pettey has noted, this verse stands at the head of the 'great legal section of Deuteronomy, delineated by von Rad as 12:2 - 26:15'.⁴⁸ The verse also immediately follows a 'high mountain, hills, and every green tree' formula.⁴⁹ This poetic destruction formula at such an important place in the text is like a refrain which appears in modified form in other narratives concerning Israel's sin.

Of particular interest in Deut. 12.3 is that the MT lists the asherahs before the 'images of their gods'. If the verse is reckoned as poetry, as I have suggested above, the asherahs and the 'images of their gods' are in parallel. This may be an allusion in the text to the morphology of the asherahs in this verse, and it is given support in that the images are to be hewn down (עָדָה), a verb also used in relation to the asherahs in Deut. 7.5.

⁴⁶Compare W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry, A Guide to its Techniques* (JSOTS 26), Sheffield: 187-188.

⁴⁷Mayes, *Deuteronomy*: 181-182.

⁴⁸*Asherah, Goddess of Israel*: 91.

⁴⁹Holladay, "'On Every High Hill'": 170-176.

I would suggest that the asherahs here are counted among the images of the foreign gods, but I would also hasten to add that we cannot suppose that every reference to the asherah in the Old Testament necessarily indicates an image. Each verse must be considered in its context. The masculine plural form of 'their asherahs' (אֲשֵׁרֹתֵיהֶם) occurs in this verse with the plene and defective spellings of Deut. 7.5 reversed.

4.A.iv. Deuteronomy 16.21

Deut. 16.21 has provoked much discussion on the morphology of asherahs: 'You will not plant for yourself an asherah, any tree beside the altar of Yahweh your God which you will make for yourself.' To begin with, asherah here is simply אֲשֵׁרֶה, with neither article nor suffix. This is the only place in the Old Testament where asherah is mentioned as being planted, אֲשֵׁרֶה. The asherah is also mentioned alongside 'any tree'. The structure of this verse is peculiar. The asherah in apposition to any tree (אֲשֵׁרֶה-לְעֵץ) may be an asyndetic construction, serving to heighten the intensity of the latter phrase, 'You will not plant for yourself an asherah, *any tree*...'⁵⁰ In such a case a tree next to an altar would be considered just as offensive as an asherah. The word asherah is certainly in apposition to 'any tree', and as the pointing shows, it is not in the construct state. This verse, as opposed to the suggestion implied from the last verse, would seem to indicate that the asherah could simply be a tree. The traditional suggestion that אֲשֵׁרֶה-לְעֵץ is a gloss would also point to the understanding of the asherah as a tree.

⁵⁰I am indebted to Mr. D. Dawson for offering me this suggestion.

In the present state of text criticism, this verse is considered to be pre-deuteronomic by some scholars.⁵¹ Unlike the previous three verses already explored, the asherah here is not referred to in the masculine plural. This may simply be because the author chose to utilise a singular noun, or it may be that since it is in an earlier verse, the writer understood the meaning of אֲשֵׁרָה, and only condemned it in the context of a Yahwistic shrine. Asherahs and trees are associated explicitly with the altar of Yahweh in this verse. This does not indicate a consort relationship between the deities being revered, as argued above.⁵² The use of asherahs was apparently not considered offensive to all Yahwists earlier than the reign of Josiah.⁵³ The difficulty for the deuteronomist is clearly that a tree planted beside the altar of Yahweh implies something offensive. The tree in the ancient Near East has many associations.⁵⁴ The story of the two trees in J's account of the Eden narrative in Gen. 3 demonstrates that trees in themselves were not considered an offense to Yahweh. Why then, in the pre-deuteronomic Deut. 16.21, are trees a threat? The associations with Canaanite religion appear to have influenced this perspective.⁵⁵ The answer, I believe, may be that this verse was written by an author who, aware of the meaning of the asherah (namely that it was named after and therefore represented a Canaanite goddess), did not condemn cultic trees implicitly, but insisted that they should not be connected with Yahwistic altars.

⁵¹Mayes, *Deuteronomy*: 263, 265.

⁵²For the opposite view, see Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh*: 43.

⁵³Cf. Provan, *Hezekiah*: 57-90.

⁵⁴See E. A. S. Butterworth, *The Tree at the Navel of the Earth*, Berlin, 1970, for some ancient anthropological associations of trees with goddesses. See also G. Widengren, 'The King and the Tree of Life in Ancient Near Eastern Religion (King and Saviour IV)' *UUA* 4 (1951): 5-70.

⁵⁵P. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (NIC), London, 1976: 248.

This verse is the final reference to the asherah in the Pentateuch. To this point no verses have mentioned the goddess Asherah; therefore they allow us to state nothing of her character in the Old Testament.

4.B. The Deuteronomistic History: Judges

4.B.i. Judges 3.7

Judg. 3.7 reads, 'And the children of Israel did evil in the eyes of Yahweh and they forgot Yahweh their God, and they served the baals and the asherahs'. In this reference the text has moved from prohibition to description. An explanation is being proffered for the fall of the nation; the people are being reminded of their sinful beginnings. Of special interest to us is the fact that here the asherahs are rendered by the feminine plural, **הָאֲשֵׁרוֹת**. In the majority of cases employing the plural of asherah, asherim is utilised. **אֲשֵׁרוֹת** occurs in only two other instances in the MT, both in the later text of 2 Chron. Also of interest is that **הַבְּעֻלִים** are also mentioned in this verse. Since the baal(s) and the ashtarot (**הָעֲשֵׂתָרוֹת**) are mentioned together in the other deuteronomistic passages of Judg. 2.13, 10.6, 1 Sam. 7.4, and 12.10, and since two Hebrew manuscripts, as well as the Syriac and the Vulgate versions read **הָעֲשֵׂתָרוֹת** in this verse, it seems likely that a confusion exists here.⁵⁶ This verse is often considered to be a deuteronomistic addition. If this is so, we once again find an unclear understanding of the 'asherah' in the deuteronomistic sources. I concur, however, with the scholars who understand this reference to be to Astarte rather than Asherah. In any case, if the asherahs were intended by the author, this does not place Asherah in a consort relationship with Baal as suggested by some scholars (see above).⁵⁷ The plurals would appear to indicate that classes of deities were being served; not an individual god and goddess.

⁵⁶Hadley, *Yahweh's Asherah*: 93-94; Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh*:10, n. 28.

⁵⁷Petty, *Asherah, Goddess of Israel*: 98.

4.B.ii. Judges 6. 25-30

The next occurrences of references to the asherah are in the story of Gideon. Besides being an intriguing story, the text is difficult, raising many queries from the reader. Here the altar of the baal is mentioned alongside the asherah, in this case also a cultic object. Even without determining whom 'the baal' is meant to indicate,⁵⁸ it is obvious that no personal relationship between deities is occupying this writer. He is simply recounting the cultic trappings owned by Joash which his son Gideon destroyed. Judg. 6. 25-30 reads:

It happened that night that Yahweh said to him 'Take the bullock of the cattle which is your father's, and the bullock of seven years [the wording is awkward in Hebrew, causing GK to declare the verse corrupt on two grammatical points⁵⁹] and you will break down the altar of the baal which is your father's and the asherah which is next to it you will cut down. (26) And you will build an altar to Yahweh your God at the summit of this place of refuge (or fortress) in an orderly way [again the text is difficult] and you will take the second bullock and you will offer a holocaust on the wood of the asherah which you cut down.' (27) And Gideon took ten men from his servants and he did just as Yahweh his God spoke, but it happened that as he feared the house of his father and the men of the city to do it by day, he did it at night. (28) The men of the city arose early and behold, torn down was the altar of the baal and the asherah which was next to it was cut down and the second bull had been offered upon the altar which had been built. (29) And they said, man to his companion, 'Who did this deed?', and they inquired and sought and they said 'Gideon son of Joash did this deed.' (30) And the men of the city said to Joash 'Bring out your son and he will die because he pulled down the altar of the baal and because he cut down the asherah which was next to it.'

⁵⁸See Pettey, *Asherah, Goddess of Israel*: 99.

⁵⁹In §§ 126 w and 128 c.

The primary concern of the story of Gideon is not to explain the tenets of the cults which he defiled, nor is it to illuminate consort relationships of deities at the same shrine. The point does seem to be to explain the renaming of Gideon to Jerubbaal.⁶⁰ The text of this deuteronomistic pericope is corrupt.⁶¹ The grammar of verse 25 is difficult, especially concerning the bullocks. In the initial command to Gideon, Yahweh orders him to take a sacrificial bullock (seven years old) as well as a working animal to pull apart the altar, and here the text is corrupt. Consulting the commentaries, Moore states that the phrases about the bulls in v. 25 'are meaningless and grammatically impossible collocations of words'.⁶² Boling notes the difficulty but offers no comment on a solution other than trying to make sense of the text as it stands.⁶³ Soggin, however, draws attention to some interesting points.⁶⁴ He notes that פֶּרֶן-הַשֹּׁרֶן is utilised here rather than the more common פֶּרֶן-בֶּקָרָה. He also indicates that פֶּרֶן also frequently represents a sacrificial animal. Further he notes that a parallel with 1 Kgs. 18 may be present, a text which tells of the sacrifice of two bulls on Mount Carmel in the Elijah-versus-the-prophets-of-the-baal story. This connection may be more significant than it seems at first, since that chapter also contains a disputed mention of the prophets of the aserah. When he comes to make a decision, however, even Soggin must state 'The text remains a typical crux and at present its reconstruction is impossible'.⁶⁵ This corruption may simply be accounted

⁶⁰See A. G. Auld, 'Gideon: Hacking at the Heart of the Old Testament' *VT* 39 (1989): 257-267, for a recent study of the Gideon story and especially page 264 for the renaming motif.

⁶¹Although Auld dates this narrative as a late story ('Gideon': 263), the theme of destroying the cultic objects certainly reflects deuteronomistic theology.

⁶²G. F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (ICC, Second Edition), Edinburgh, 1898: 192.

⁶³R. G. Boling, *Judges* (AB) New York, 1975: 134.

⁶⁴J. A. Soggin, *Judges, a Commentary* (OTL, Second Edition) London, 1987: 123-125.

⁶⁵*Judges*: 124.

for by textual transmission. However, we have also noted confusion in verses concerning cultic matters in the deuteronomistic texts above. Were the deuteronomists unaware of the significance of the cultic details of the story? Did they understand the context, but not render it clearly?

The next point of interest comes in v. 26. When Gideon is commanded to build an altar to Yahweh, he is told to do so 'on top of this fortress in an orderly way (בְּמַעַרְכָּה)'. What is the fortress to which this verse refers? There is no previous mention of a fortress, merely a cultic location in Ophrah being under the care of Gideon's father. Temples, as the dwelling places of deities, may have been considered as fortified locations;⁶⁶ but this pericope does not describe the structure in detail. That reference is being made to a fairly developed cult may be indicated by the expression וַיִּשְׁכְּמוּ אַנְשֵׁי הָעִיר, 'the men of the city arose early' (v. 28). We encounter this idea of early awaking in the story of Dagon at Ashdod in 1 Sam. 5.1-5.⁶⁷ In fact, the same word is used by the writer of the story of Dagon, (שָׁכַם). R. de Vaux has argued that the cultus had the responsibility of awaking the deity in the morning.⁶⁸ Furthermore, this again points to the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel. His taunting includes a reference to the waking of the baal of the prophets (1 Kgs. 18.27). I should also note in this context, that Ps. 44.24 (Eng. 23) contains a cry for God to awake. If the Psalms were indeed the liturgical song book of the temple, we might expect to find cultic references therein. Could it be that the language of this verse retains the introduction to a cultic ceremony? Although this involves speculation,

⁶⁶Soggin, *Judges*: 124.

⁶⁷See my article, 'Old Testament Dagan in the Light of Ugarit' *VT*, forthcoming.

⁶⁸'Les prophètes de Baal sur le Mont Carmel' in *Bible et Orient*, Paris, 1967: 493-494. See also B. F. Batto, 'The Sleeping God: An Ancient Near Eastern Motif of Divine Sovereignty' *Biblica* 68 (1987): 153-177; T. H. McAlpine, *Sleep, Divine & Human, in the Old Testament* (JSOTS 38), Sheffield, 1987: 181-199; and M. S. Smith, *Early History of God*: 42.

outside evidence suggests that this was a prevalent practice in the ancient Near East. De Vaux cites the Talmud as stating that this cultic act of calling out to awaken the deity continued in Judah until the time of John Hyrcanus.⁶⁹ Considering the fragmentary cultic evidence present in Judg. 6.25-30, I would suggest that the text only tells us enough to cause us to wonder whether an instance of a cultus not fully explained by the later redactors of the passage is present.

A further point of contact with the two bulls may be represented in this passage. The episode of Jeroboam I's reform in the north narrates his making of two golden calves (I Kgs. 12.28) which were placed in cultic locations.⁷⁰ In this story we again have a cultic setting, with the presence of two, albeit molten metal, bovines. The stories are too dissimilar to suggest any exact duplications of ideas, but they perhaps indicate a common stratum of cultic life. With the corrupt state of the text in Judges, however, certain conclusions are impossible.

Thus the story of Gideon, often overlooked in studies of the asherah, is instructive. It points to a time in the mind of the redactor when, from a deuteronomistic perspective, the people of the unconfederated tribes considered the worship of foreign gods to be normal. Gideon appears as the innovator and were it not for an ironically Yahwistic argument by Joash (v. 31 - if the baal is a god he will defend himself), he would have been executed for his Yahwistic enthusiasm. The identities of the deities mentioned in this pericope concerning the worship of foreign gods are not explicit: the asherah is beside an altar of an unidentified baal. This narrative continues to support the hypothesis that deuteronomistic texts,

⁶⁹'Les prophètes de Baal': 493.

⁷⁰For another interpretation see E. Danelius, 'The Sins of Jeroboam Ben-Nebat' *JQR* 58 (1967-1968): 95-114, 204-223.

perhaps purposefully, do not clarify the cultic implications in verses where asherahs are mentioned. The references to the asherah in Judges, however, do not present Asherah as a goddess.

4.C. The Deuteronomistic History: Kings

The books of Kings contain several references to אֲשֵׁרָה. When we explore the books of Kings we find a general correlation between the masculine plural references to the asherim and the בְּמִזְבֵּחַ-sanctuary passages which are distinguished as later additions by Provan.⁷¹ Provan's theory, that much of 1 Kgs. 3 - 2 Kgs. 15 corresponds well with a Hezekian theme (excluding later deuteronomistic insertions) written at the time of Josiah, drew my attention to the distribution of variant spellings of the asherahs as cultic objects. Concerning the בְּמִזְבֵּחַ-formulae in Kings, Provan notes:

If it is now no longer acceptable simply to assume that one author is responsible for most of the formulae, then the question arises as to whether variations within these with regard to the view taken of the בְּמִזְבֵּחַ are also best understood as the result of redactional activity.⁷²

Might this statement also apply to the אֲשֵׁרָה references? Although Provan's study only tangentially concerns אֲשֵׁרָה, it is illuminating to compare his results with the references to the asherim in Kings. I have suggested above that polemical deuteronomistic passages appear to distort the name of the asherah as a cultic object, as indicated by their use of the masculine plural in reference to it. The pre-exilic references to אֲשֵׁרָה which broadly fit into Provan's proposed 'first edition' of Kings utilise the singular form of 'asherah'.⁷³ This could be accounted for by arguing that the author had only a single asherah in mind, and therefore used the feminine singular form. This may be the case. It is of interest, however,

⁷¹See Provan, *Hezekiah: 57-90* for the details of his redactional history of the various passages which mention the asherahs.

⁷²*Hezekiah: 74.*

⁷³1 Kgs. 14.15 may be an exception to this statement, see below.

that the later, exilic additions to the texts dealing with the **במה**-sanctuaries often refer to the plurals of these cultic objects in the masculine form 'asherim'. The correspondences are not exact, but close enough to attract our interest. The distinction between pre-exilic and exilic verses is not always clearly delineated, but at least a double, if not a triple redaction does appear to fit the evidence⁷⁴ of the verses which mention **אשרה**.

Many commentators on the books of Kings maintain a Josian date for the 'first edition'.⁷⁵ This is also of interest in consideration of the asherahs. Until the time of Josiah they were not implicitly condemned (see on Deut. 16.21 above). This pattern parallels, to some extent, Provan's idea that some **במות** were worse than others: after Josiah's reign the **במות** and asherahs were all considered as aberrations.

4.C.i. 1 Kings 14.15

The first reference is in 1 Kgs. 14.15:

Yahweh will smite Israel, as a reed in the water he will waver, and he will root out Israel from upon this good land which he gave to their fathers and he will scatter them beyond the river because they made their asherahs, provoking Yahweh to anger.

The context of this verse is the condemnation being delivered to Jeroboam by Ahijah on account of Israel's sins. The specific offence mentioned in this verse is that Israel had made asherim.⁷⁶ In the

⁷⁴See R. D. Nelson, *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTS 18), Sheffield, 1981, throughout.

⁷⁵See, for example, G. H. Jones, *1 and 2 Kings* (NCBC), Grand Rapids and London, 1984, especially his review of the previous scholarship on the subject. See also Pettey, *Asherah, Goddess of Israel*: 108-109.

⁷⁶I do not wish to bring comparative evidence into this study prematurely; however, in this verse a literary parallel with Ugarit may be present. The context tells us that the above verse is spoken by the aged prophet Ahijah on the occasion of the sickness of

following verse 'the sins of Jeroboam' are mentioned, and verse 9 charges him with making other gods and molten images. This verse appears to date from after the northern exile on the basis of the specific reference to Israel being 'scattered beyond the river' לְנַהַר מֵעַבֵּר לְנַהַר.⁷⁷ Although this verse is not necessarily exilic, the masculine plural form of asherim is used here. This form appears to be an exception to my hypothesis that only late deuteronomistic references use the masculine plural asherim; however, this verse does exhibit some polemical deuteronomistic traits. One such trait is the censure of the king for the cultic aberrations of Israel.⁷⁸ The editor, whilst drawing no explicit connection between the cultic objects and the foreign goddess, obviously considers the asherahs to be implicitly offensive to Yahweh. This condemnation of cultic objects outside of Jerusalem also corresponds to deuteronomistic theology. Whether this verse is late or not, it does oppose the construction of asherim. The text, however, does not provide any information on the nature or character of Asherah.

Abijah, Jeroboam's son. Note that the son of Jeroboam has a good Yahwistic name. This story is similar to, but not exactly dependent upon, the story of Keret (*KTU* 1.14 - 16). In the case of Keret, the question is, why is the king (or in the case of Abijah, the king's son, heir to the throne) ill? What will happen to the people if the king or king elect dies? We know that Keret was ill because he neglected to fulfil a vow - a vow to Athirat (*KTU* 1.14.IV.34-43). Abijah is being punished, according to Ahijah, because of the sin of Jeroboam, namely, the making of asherim. In a possible antithesis, the royal family is being plagued on account of Athirat in the case of Keret, for not fulfilling his vow to her, and on account of the asherim in the case of Jeroboam. The result in both cases is essentially the same. Keret recovers but curses his son and heir (*KTU* 1.16.VI.54-58), and in the Jeroboam story, his son dies as his wife steps over the threshold (1 Kgs. 14.17). No strong case can be made for this connection; however, the phonetic correlation of the names Athirat and 'Asherah' draws the episode of Keret to our attention.

⁷⁷J. Gray, *I & II Kings, A Commentary* (OTL), London, 1964: 306.

⁷⁸Reed, *The Asherah in the Old Testament*: 60; Pettey, *Asherah, Goddess of Israel*: 111.

4.C.ii. 1 Kings 14.23

The next occurrence is in 1 Kgs. 14.23, one of the passages utilising the Hosea formula mentioned above. The verse reads: 'They even built for themselves high places and pillars and asherahs upon every high hill and under every luxuriant tree'. This verse is dependent upon Hosea 4.13, as demonstrated by Holladay.⁷⁹ This **הַגִּבְעוֹת**-sanctuary reference interrupts 'the perfectly consistent picture' of the **הַגִּבְעוֹת** formulae in 1 Kgs. 3 - 2 Kgs. 15, according to Provan.⁸⁰ In this case, Rehoboam is being condemned as was Jeroboam earlier in the same chapter. The writer is drawing to the reader's attention the fact that both Israel and Judah were guilty of the offence to Yahweh by building such cultic sites. The perspective is exilic, explaining that the sins of Judah were present at the very beginning of the divided monarchy. The asherahs are designated by the masculine plural form. Once again, a later editor appears to disguise the origin of the word **אֲשֵׁרָה**.

4.C.iii. 1 Kings 15.13 // 2 Chronicles 15.16

1 Kgs. 15.13 is parallel with 2 Chron. 15.16, and their comparison raises some interesting issues. 1 Kgs. 15.13 reads:

And also Maakah his mother he removed from being queen mother (**מִגְּבֵי־רָה**) because she made a horrid thing for the asherah (**לְאֲשֵׁרָה**); and Asa cut down her horrid thing and burned it in the valley of Qidron.

⁷⁹"On Every High Hill": 170-176.

⁸⁰*Hezekiah*: 75.

2 Chron. 15.16 reads:

And also Maakah mother of Asa the king removed from being queen mother because she made for Asherah (אֲשֵׁרָה) a horrid thing; Asa cut down her horrid thing and pulverised and burned it in the valley of Qidron.

These two verses are very similar. The differences, however, lead to a question about the use of the definite article with a proper noun.⁸¹ In 1 Kgs. 15.13, Maakah made a horrid thing for *the* asherah; the vowel under the lamed is a qameṣ, indicating that the noun is definite. In 2 Chron. 15.16, similar wording occurs, but the Masoretes pointed this אֲשֵׁרָה with a pataḥ under the lamed. This is standard indefinite construction when the prefix comes before a ḥatep-pataḥ. Thus, in parallel cases, we apparently have the name of the goddess Asherah occurring with and without the article. Another possibility is that the reference in 1 Kgs. 15.13 was intended to indicate the cultic object, the asherah. When the chronicler utilised this passage, he understood the אֲשֵׁרָה to be a divine name.

Many scholars have noted the possibility (or certainty) that the goddess is intended in these verses.⁸² The definite article in the reference to 'the asherah' in 1 Kgs. 15.13 may perhaps be understood in the sense of the אֲשֵׁרָה being an example of 'whole classes ...restricted (simply by usage) to particular individuals'.⁸³ In other words, a prominent asherah may have assumed a particular status as 'the Asherah'. In any case the use

⁸¹See GK §§ 125d, 126e; Lemaire, 'Who or What was Yahweh's Asherah?': 47.

⁸²Reed, *The Asherah in the Old Testament*: 61; G. W. Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion* (Horae Soederblomianae V), Lund, 1963: 58-59; P. K. McCarter, 'Aspects of the Religion of the Israelite Monarchy: Biblical and Epigraphic Data' in *Ancient Israelite Religion, Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, P. D. Miller, P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride, eds., Philadelphia, 1987: 144; Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh*: 9; Petey, *Asherah, Goddess of Israel*: 114. Hadley (*Yahweh's Asherah*: 95-96) suggests that the chronicler did not fully understand this verse.

⁸³GK § 126e.

of the definite article does not preclude the possibility of a proper name in all cases.⁸⁴ Some scholars have recently argued that the goddess Asherah does not occur in the text of the Old Testament.⁸⁵ In these two verses the later, Masoretic pointing is the crux. A case may be made for either the goddess or the cultic object on the basis of the unpointed text לַאֲשֵׁרָה. The pointed text of Chronicles is unambiguous about it; a horrid thing was being made for Asherah.⁸⁶ The chronicler, who quoted this verse almost directly, appears to have understood Asherah as a proper name, according to the Masoretes.⁸⁷ Since the definiteness of אֲשֵׁרָה is ultimately a matter of pointing, dogmatism on the presence of Asherah must be avoided.

In both verses, we have an interesting grammatical construction in the second halves of the verses. Asa cut down her horrid thing (הַבְּפִלִּיזָהּ); the mappiq indicates the consonantal value of the he: *her* horrid thing. The nearest available feminine antecedent to the 'her' is not Maakah, but Asherah. If the image belongs to Asherah, it would appear that the goddess is being designated. If אֲשֵׁרָה is not a goddess the writer could also have intended for Maakah to be the antecedent. Either case may be argued.

The texts thus far may be used to support three possible manifestations of אֲשֵׁרָה: as an image, as a tree, and as a goddess. This text manifests an association between the asherah/Asherah and the queen mother.⁸⁸ This association will be considered more fully below.

⁸⁴GK § 125d. Scholars have long assumed 'Baal' in the Old Testament to be a proper name, even when it has the article, as a glance at the commentaries will demonstrate. See the discussion on this topic in J. Hadley, *Yahweh's Asherah*: 92.

⁸⁵Lipiński, 'The Goddess Ašīrat': 116, Lemaire, 'Who or What was Yahweh's Asherah?': 46-47.

⁸⁶Jones, *1 and 2 Kings*: 283-284.

⁸⁷On which see C. Frevel, 'Die Elimination der Göttin aus dem Weltbild des Chronisten' *ZAW* 103 (1991): 263-271.

⁸⁸G. Molin, 'Die Stellung der G^ebira im Staate Juda' *TZ* 10 (1954): 161-175; H. Donner, 'Art and Herkunft des Amtes der Königinmutter im Alten Testament' in *Festschrift Johannes Friedrich zum 65. Geburtstag am 27. August gewidmet*, R. von Kienle, A. Moortgat, H. Otten, E. von Schuler and W. Zaumseil, eds., Heidelberg, 1959: 105-145;

4.C.iv. 1 Kings 16.33

The next reference is 1 Kgs. 16.33. 'And Ahab made the asherah, and Ahab increased the acts to provoke Yahweh the God of Israel more than those before him.' With this passing mention of the asherah, we should note that among all the sins for which Ahab was infamous, the erecting of an altar for the baal (v. 32) and the making of the asherah, are singled out as the ones which particularly provoked Yahweh. Although this passage obviously reflects the deuteronomistic bias against foreign cultic objects, it does not appear to be exilic. This passage would likely have been composed after the fall of the northern kingdom, perhaps during the reign of Josiah. The asherah is here construed as singular; the definite article indicates that a specific asherah is being considered.

4.C.v. 1 Kings 18.19

The story of Elijah on Mount Carmel contains perhaps a second reference to Asherah. Although the four hundred prophets of Asherah in 1 Kgs. 18.19 are normally considered a gloss, we should consider the state of this verse on its own merits. In 1 Kgs. 18.19, Elijah is speaking: "Now send, gather to me all Israel to Mount Carmel and the four hundred fifty prophets of the baal and the four hundred prophets of the asherah who eat at Jezebel's table". The standard argument is that the prophets of the asherah

Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism*: 57-88; N. E. A. Andreasen, 'The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society' *CBQ* 45 (1983): 179-194; Z. Ben-Barak, 'The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*' *JBL* 110 (1991): 23-34; S. Ackerman, 'The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel' paper presented at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, Kansas City, 24 November 1991.

are nowhere else mentioned in the story, and therefore, either they were approved of by Elijah⁸⁹ (hardly probable in this context!) or they were a gloss on the 450 prophets of the baal.⁹⁰ The fact that four hundred prophets of Asherah are mentioned against four hundred and fifty prophets of the baal could provide evidence that the writer had two distinct groups in mind. With different numbers, the likelihood that the two groups were confused or simply doublets is minimal. Also in favour of including the prophets of the asherah is the fact that the asherahs and other cultic implements, including altars of the baal, are often mentioned in the same verses.⁹¹ Reed points out that in the LXX the prophets of Asherah are mentioned again in v. 22 and suggests that they could just as likely have been 'accidentally lost' in the MT of v. 22 as they could have been a later addition to v. 19.⁹² Although Jones' commentary appears to confuse Asherah and Astarte, he does note the transitional nature of this verse, and argues that these prophets should not be deleted.⁹³ Hadley further notes, 'If it is an addition, it is interesting that the Baal and the Asherah are singular, against the natural tendency of the later redactors to use the plural'.⁹⁴ Many exilic verses mentioning אֱשֶׁרָה do indeed utilise the masculine plural. Lipiński's criterion for deleting the prophets of the asherah from the verse seems to be that it militates against the view that Asherah does not appear in the Old Testament.⁹⁵ Olyan's only argument

⁸⁹R. Patai, 'The Goddess Asherah': 46.

⁹⁰Lipiński's statement that 'all critical commentators agree that the words "the 400 prophets of Asherah" are interpolated' (Syro-Palestinian Iconography: 91, note 14) is exaggerated. The commentaries of Gray and Jones, for example, do not insist on this interpretation.

⁹¹See J. A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* (ICC), Edinburgh, 1951: 300.

⁹²Reed, *The Asherah in the Old Testament*: 55.

⁹³*1 and 2 Kings*: 317.

⁹⁴*Yahweh's Asherah*: 97.

⁹⁵'Goddess Ašīrat': 114, 'Syro-Palestinian Iconography': 91.

against including them is that they appear no more in the story.⁹⁶ The evidence to support leaving the asherah's prophets intact appears to be just as strong as that for deleting them as a gloss.

Within the actual verse itself, we find many items worthy of comment. Primarily, we have the baal (הבעל) and the asherah (האשרה), but also the Carmel (הכרמל). If the argument is put forth that the article interferes with interpreting proper nouns, we have a difficulty. In this verse, with three possibly proper names, each of them has the article. If Carmel is being referred to, could not Asherah be intended as well? If so, in this verse, we have the prophets, not of the cultic object asherah, but of the goddess Asherah. Carmel, as a place name, occurs with and without the article in the MT. Even if the choice of whether or not to include it was arbitrary on the part of the writer, its presence in this verse should not be used as evidence against the goddess in the Old Testament. As Hadley has further pointed out, the one Old Testament occurrence of the Mesopotamian divine name Tammuz (Ezek. 8.14) spells the proper name with the definite article.⁹⁷ Context also appears to demand the presence a deity. The problem of the identity of the baal has been discussed by many scholars, and I have nothing to contribute to this discussion. Jones appropriately states that, 'Obviously an exact identification of the Carmel deity is by now impossible'.⁹⁸ The reasons for removing the prophets of the asherah are not compelling. We must simply note here the connection with the legend of Gideon, namely, the two bulls, and the cultic settings of the verses. Thus in two cases in the Deuteronomistic History, אֲשֶׁרָה may be interpreted as a goddess. This verse does not appear to be late.

⁹⁶*Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh*: 8.

⁹⁷*Yahweh's Asherah*: 116.

⁹⁸*1 and 2 Kings*: 316.

4.C.vi. 2 Kings 13.6

The asherah is next mentioned in 2 Kgs. 13.6: 'Indeed they did not cease from the sins of the house of Jeroboam with which he caused Israel to sin, he walked in it; and still the asherah stood in Samaria'. This verse is fraught with textual difficulties. First, we should note that the sins of the house of Jeroboam are made into a singular by Codex Alexandrinus. If this emendation were to be accepted, then we would have the making of the asherah singled out as the most offensive act which the king committed. Since the Hebrew and other versions do not insist on this, however, we should retain the MT; also, the MT's use of the plural makes perfect sense here. The next observation is that אֲשֵׁרָה, the hiphil perfect of אָשַׁה, is misspelled here. BDB notes⁹⁹ that many manuscripts correct this error. This verse also seems to contain later intrusions.¹⁰⁰ Next, the syntax of the phrase אֲשֵׁרָה הַחֲטִי אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהַלֵּךְ is difficult; it would seem to indicate a singular sin, rather than the 'sins' previously mentioned. Several versions, the LXX (except Vaticanus), the Vulgate, the Syriac, and Targum Onkelos, correct בְּהַלֵּךְ to a plural. All of this documentary correction demonstrates that many of the ancient translators recognised the difficulties with this verse. I have no solution to offer to the textual problems, but I would note that the presence of the asherah in Samaria is considered a paramount sin. This verse appears to be an instance of a later addition which retains the singular. Even the later editors, who tended to disguise the meaning of asherahs with a masculine plural, would have recourse to the singular if only one specific object were being discussed.

⁹⁹307 b.

¹⁰⁰Jones, *1 and 2 Kings*: 497-500.

4.C.vii. 2 Kings 17.10

2 Kgs. 17.10, like 1 Kgs. 14.23, incorporates the Hosea formula. 'And they set up for themselves pillars and asherahs on every high hill and under every luxuriant tree.' The article is not used with the asherahs in this verse, and the form is again the masculine plural. The textual transmission of 2 Kgs. 17 is complex.¹⁰¹ V. 10 is a later addition which again supports the hypothesis that it was the later redactors who misconstrued the asherahs in the masculine plural.

4.C.viii. 2 Kings 17.16

Some commentators would suggest that 2 Kgs. 17.16, a further list of crimes against Yahweh, is from yet a later redactor.¹⁰² Vv. 16-17 explain the fall of Israel narrated in the next verse:

And they left all the commandments of Yahweh their God, and they made for themselves a molten image, two calves, and they made an asherah and they did obeisance to all the hosts of heaven and they served the baals. And they made their sons and daughters pass through the fire and they practised divination and they observed signs and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of Yahweh to provoke him.

Asherah in this verse occurs without the article, and without any suffix. It is spelled plene, as in Deut. 7.5. The mention of two calves in v. 16 attracts our attention in the light of the two bulls of the Gideon story and the two bulls of the Mount Carmel episode. We cannot be detained by the

¹⁰¹Provan, *Hezekiah: 70-73*; Jones, *1 & 2 Kings: 542-543*.

¹⁰²Jones, *1 and 2 Kings: 543*.

question of whom the calves are meant to represent.¹⁰³ It is important, however, to note that the two bovines occur in cultic contexts, often in passages which mention an asherah. This does not indicate a particular relationship between bulls and Asherah, but allows us to support the cultic nature of the deuteronomistic Gideon story (see above).

4.C.ix. 2 Kings 18.4

The next passage mentioning the asherah is 2 Kgs. 18.4, in Hezekiah's reform.

He removed the high places and shattered the pillars and cut down the asherah and crushed the serpent of bronze which Moses made, for until those days the children of Israel were offering incense to it, and he¹⁰⁴ called it Nehushtan.

Hezekiah's reform demonstrates the trappings which the cult of Jerusalem had accrued. This text recalls the standard equipment, the *במה* - sanctuaries, the pillars, the asherah (in this case, the asherah, singular, with the article), followed by the mention of Nehushtan, the bronze serpent. A particular asherah is being referred to in this verse, thus the singular form is utilised. The verse does not appear to be late.

Many commentators have been tempted to associate the bronze serpent and the asherah (and therefore Asherah) in this verse.¹⁰⁵ The evidence adduced to support this claim is tenuous. The argument is based on the supposed association of Asherah with the 'fertility cult' and with serpents. Nowhere in the Old Testament do we have evidence that Asherah

¹⁰³See E. Danelius, 'The Sins of Jeroboam Ben-Nebat': 95-114, 204-223; A. H. W. Curtis, 'Some Observations on "Bull" Terminology in the Ugaritic Texts and the Old Testament' *OTS* 26 (1990): 17-31; N. Wyatt, 'Of Calves and Kings': 68-91.

¹⁰⁴See K. Joines, 'The Bronze Serpent in the Israelite Cult' *JBL* 87 (1968): 245.

¹⁰⁵Gray, *I & II Kings*: 608; Jones, *I and 2 Kings*: 562; Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh*: 70; Pettey, *Asherah, Goddess of Israel*: 130.

was associated with serpents. This evidence is also absent at Ugarit. The evidence presented by Olyan is based on Cross's analysis of Phoenician Tanit's identification with Asherah.¹⁰⁶ This identification is based on two uncertain associations: 1) the association of the epithets of Tanit as 'the one of the serpent' with 'the one of the lion' (assumed to be an epithet of Asherah, see below), and 2) the closeness of Tanit's epithet 'the one of the serpent (or dragon)' with Asherah's (allegedly) full epithet at Ugarit, 'the Lady who treads on the Sea (-dragon)'.¹⁰⁷ The difficulties with these identifications are legion. First, although Tanit may be construed as 'the one of the serpent', this puts us no closer to an identification with Asherah, who is not elsewhere identified with serpents. Second, the 'one of the lion' does not necessarily indicate Asherah either. We have no evidence that she was associated with lions in the Old Testament, or, more importantly, at Ugarit. Cross initially made the 'lion lady' identification with Anat.¹⁰⁸ Further, the identifications gleaned by this method cross many cultural boundaries and many years. There is not sufficient evidence, furthermore, to complete the meaning of Athirat's epithet at Ugarit as 'the Lady who treads on the Sea(-dragon)'. Ugarit knows of no myths in which Athirat treads a sea-dragon, and the interpretation of her name, *atrt* as from the

¹⁰⁶F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*: 32-33. Likewise, the evidence for associating Asherah and Tanit given by Maier (*ʿAšerah: Extrabiblical Evidence*: 99) is built on that given by Cross in *Canaanite Myth* and the identification with Qudshu (see below). R. A. Oden (*Studies in Lucian's De Syria Dea* (HSM 15), Missoula, Montana, 1977: 92-93) also bases his identification of the two on Cross's work, as well as the associations with the sea and motherhood. Motherhood is not a surprising attribute for most goddesses, and even in the Ugaritic texts, the sea is not the domain of Athirat alone, for Yam is the god of the sea. J. B. Carter ('The Masks of Ortheia' *AJA* 91 (1987): 378) only cites 'some degree of variation and syncretism' for the association of Tanit and Asherah.

¹⁰⁷Cross, *Canaanite Myth*: 32-33.

¹⁰⁸F. M. Cross, 'The Origin and Early Evolution of the Alphabet' *EI* 8 (1967, Sukenik Volume): 13*.

verb 'to tread' is far from certain.¹⁰⁹ Appeals to the title *dt bṭn* in the Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions do not strengthen the case, as their interpretation is still debated.¹¹⁰ The connections with 'Qudshu' likewise suffer on the basis of no substantial evidence. We possess no texts or iconographic representations which suggest that Asherah was identified with 'Qudshu' in the ancient Near East.¹¹¹ Without evidence for Asherah's association with snakes, her connection with Nehushtan is tenuous at best.

A consideration of the grammar of 2 Kgs. 18.4 reveals that **וּכְרַת** and **וּכְתַת** should be, according to the general formation of Hebrew prose narrative, imperfects. For **הָאֲשֵׁרָה** the LXX, Syriac, Vulgate, Targums, and one Hebrew manuscript read **הָאֲשֵׁרוֹת**. These two difficulties do not necessarily point to a late date for this passage. The feminine plural of the asherah in the variants would appear to be a later understanding. The MT should be retained, although the verbs throughout this verse are unusual.

4.C.x. 2 Kings 21.3

Manasseh is the next king accused of making the asherah. 2 Kgs.

21.3 reads:

And he turned and he built the high places which his father Hezekiah destroyed and he erected the altars to the baal, and he made an asherah just as Ahab king of Israel made and they bowed to all the hosts of heaven and he served them.

¹⁰⁹See Hadley, *Yahweh's Asherah*: 74-78 and the references there. For a recent attempt at an etymology see B. Margalit, 'The Meaning and Significance of Asherah' *VT* 40 (1990): 264-297. In support of the view that Asherah does tread on the dragon see N. Wyatt, 'Who Killed the Dragon?' *AuOr* 5 (1987): 185-198.

¹¹⁰For Albright's rendering see *The Proto-Sinaitic Inscriptions and their Decipherment* (Harvard Theological Studies 22), Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1969.

¹¹¹Yamashita, *The Goddess Asherah*: 116-122, Wiggins, 'The Myth of Asherah'.

In view of the grammar, the only difficulty is that **וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ** is a masculine plural form where we would expect a singular. The rendering 'he made an asherah, and they bowed down to all the hosts of heaven and he served them' seems unlikely. Either the verb should be singular, meaning that Manasseh was bowing to the hosts, or the remaining verbs should be plural, indicating the collective sin of Israel. Although this verse probably comes from a later redactor of Kings, the form of asherah is the 'pure' form, with no article and no suffix.¹¹² This perhaps points to an even later time when the original meaning of **אֲשֵׁרָה** was forgotten, or else it had ceased to be a threat,¹¹³ or perhaps the writer had one specific asherah in mind.

4.C.xi. 2 Kings 21.7

And he put the image of the asherah which he made in the house of which Yahweh said to David and to Solomon his son 'In this house and in Jerusalem which I chose from all the tribes of Israel will I place my name forever.'

This verse contains the third possible deuteronomistic reference to the goddess Asherah in the Old Testament. The verse clearly states that Manasseh placed an image of the asherah (**פֶּסֶל הָאֲשֵׁרָה**) in the temple.¹¹⁴ The definite article does not necessarily preclude a proper name, as argued above. It has been widely noted that the chronicler's parallel to this verse reads **פֶּסֶל הַסִּמָּל** (2 Chron. 33.7).¹¹⁵ This additional perspective is of little assistance, however, as the meaning of **סִמָּל** is not clear.

¹¹²Hadley, *Yahweh's Asherah*: 88.

¹¹³Hadley, *Yahweh's Asherah*: 92.

¹¹⁴Gray, *I & II Kings*: 644; Jones, *I and 2 Kings*: 597.

¹¹⁵See especially C. Dohmen 'Heißt **סִמָּל** "Bild, Statue"?' *ZAW* 96 (1984): 263-266; Hadley, *Yahweh's Asherah*: 100.

We may also have here further evidence that an asherah was an image of the goddess. This suggested identification holds true only for this verse, however; as Deut. 16.21 indicates, it may also have been a tree. This verse may witness to an introduction of a cult of Asherah in the Jerusalem temple. The details provided, however, do not permit a firm conclusion to this effect.

The final five references to אֲשֵׁרָה in the Deuteronomistic history appear in the reform of Josiah.

4.D. Josiah's Reform: 2 Kings 23.4-15

2 Kgs. 23.4-15 reads:

And the king ordered Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the second order and the watchers of the threshold to bring out from the temple of Yahweh all the vessels made for the baal and for the asherah and all the hosts of heaven and burn them outside of Jerusalem in the field of Qidron and he carried their dust to Bethel. (5) And he removed the priests to the idols who inclined the kings of Judah to burn incense at the high places in the cities of Judah and the surroundings of Jerusalem and the ones burning incense to the baal, to the sun and the moon and to the constellations and to all the hosts of heaven. (6) And taking the asherah from the house of Yahweh to outside Jerusalem to the Valley of Qidron he burned it in the Valley of Qidron and he pulverised it to dust and he flung its dust on the graves of the sons of the people. (7) And he pulled down the shrines of the qedeshim which were in the house of Yahweh where the women were weaving shrines for the asherah there. (8) And he brought in all the priests from the cities of Judah and he defiled the high places in which the priests from Geba to Beer-Sheba burned incense, and he pulled down the high places of the gates which were at the entrance to the gate of Joshua, the ruler of the city, which are upon one's left at the gate of the city. (9) Indeed, the priests of the high places did not go up to the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem, except they did eat unleavened bread among their brothers. (10) And he defiled the Tophet which is in the valley of Ben-Hinnom so that a man could not cause his son or daughter to pass through the fire for Molek.¹¹⁶ (11) And he removed the horses which the kings of Judah had given to the sun from the entrance of the house of Yahweh, to the halls of Nathan-Melek the eunuch, which is among the colonnades, and the chariots of the sun he burned with fire. (12) And the altars upon the roof chamber which Ahaz, king of Judah had made and the altars which Manasseh made in the two courts of the house of Yahweh, the king pulled down, and he ran from there and flung their dust on the valley of Qidron. (13) And the altars which were outside Jerusalem, which were south of the Mount of Destruction, which Solomon king of Israel built to Ashtoret the detestation of the Sidonians, and to Chemosh the detestation of Moab, and to Milcom, the abomination of the sons of Ammon, the king defiled. (14) And he shattered the pillars and cut down the asherahs and filled their places with bones of men. (15) Indeed, the altar which is in Bethel, the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat made which caused Israel to sin, even that altar and high place he tore

¹¹⁶For Molek see G. Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment* (JSOTS 43), Sheffield, 1985; M. Weinfeld, 'The Worship of Molech and the Queen of Heaven and its Background' *UF* 4 (1972): 133-154; and J. Day, *Molech: a God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament* (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 41), Cambridge, 1989.

down and he burned the high place and pulverised to dust and burned asherah.

In zeal for a reformed cult of Yahweh, Josiah attacked not only the elements he considered offensive in the temple cult, but also the items throughout the land which were considered as stumbling blocks, even the asherah and high place in Bethel. In association with אֲשֵׁרָה, five separate 'abominations' are mentioned. First, in v. 4 are the vessels for אֲשֵׁרָה; in v. 6 it is the temple asherah itself; in v. 7 it is the shrines being woven for אֲשֵׁרָה; in v. 14 it is the asherahs in the countryside; and in v. 15 it is אֲשֵׁרָה of Bethel. Each of these elements will be discussed separately. The redactional development of this passage would seem to be comprised of at least two stages.¹¹⁷ According to Jones, v. 14, the only verse utilising the masculine plural of אֲשֵׁרָה in this pericope, is from an editor later than the prophetic Deuteronomist, DtrP.¹¹⁸

Initially it should be noted that with the exception of v. 14, all the references to אֲשֵׁרָה are in the singular. As indicated above, the singular references may be utilised to express the presence of one asherah as cultic object, or perhaps to express the personal name of the goddess. That a goddess is intended in at least part of this pericope may be indicated in that she had offerings presented to her. This may be surmised from the mention of the vessels, הַכֵּלִים הַעֲשׂוּיִם לַבַּעַל וְלַאֲשֵׁרָה, in the temple in v. 4. Both names are prefixed with prepositions, thus the presence of the article before both is only a matter of pointing. Although the definite article does not necessarily preclude the mention of a divine name (see above), there is no decisive textual way of determining whether cultic images or actual deities are being mentioned here. I have noted above

¹¹⁷Jones, *1 and 2 Kings*: 605, 616-617; Koch, 'Aschera als Himmelskönigin': 103-105.

¹¹⁸Jones, *1 and 2 Kings*: 617.

three other deuteronomic verses which possibly refer to the goddess; likewise she may be intended in this verse.

V. 4c is often considered to be a later addition because of the reference to Bethel; however, this interpretation does not affect the present study.

Following the removal of the vessels, the asherah, אֲשֵׁרָה, was removed from the temple (v. 6). This asherah may have been the one placed in the temple by Manasseh. Manasseh is the first southern king explicitly said to have put an asherah in the temple (2 Kgs. 21.7).¹¹⁹ The singular reading קבר, 'grave' of the sons of the people, should be corrected to the plural, as with most of the versions.

When the asherah itself had been removed, Josiah next moved to evict the women who were weaving בתיים for אֲשֵׁרָה (v. 7). I have translated this word as 'shrines'. Since the meaning of בתיים is normally 'houses', which does not seem to fit here, a widely considered alternative 'clothes' is often advocated.¹²⁰ The suggestion that the 'weaving of *battim* may be a euphemism for sexual intercourse'¹²¹ is completely without textual support. I would suggest that the MT reading be retained, with the understanding that the 'houses' being woven for אֲשֵׁרָה designate shrines in which the asherahs would have stood. That many cultic sites existed for worship involving asherahs is sufficiently demonstrated by the texts themselves. That such cultic areas were enshrined in some kind of tent is possible. The bedouin of today still weave tents of goat's hair.¹²² Some of

¹¹⁹See Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh*: 9. Although Olyan is partially correct in stating that 'Aside from the time of cultic reforms under Asa, Hezekiah and Josiah, the asherah seems to have played a role in the cult of Yahweh, in the Jerusalem temple and at various other sanctuaries, as it did in the north', we have no evidence that the asherah stood in the Jerusalem temple until the time of Manasseh.

¹²⁰R. Patai, 'Goddess Asherah': 50; Gray, *I & II Kings*: 668; Jones, *I and 2 Kings*: 619.

¹²¹De Moor, 'אֲשֵׁרָה': 441; see also Pettey, *Asherah, Goddess of Israel*: 138-139.

¹²²T. Faegre, *Tents: Architecture of the Nomad*, London, 1979: 9-10.

the Psalms (61.5 (Eng. 4); 78.60; 15.1; 27.5-6) picture Yahweh as living in a tent. This being the case, it should not be unlikely that the gods were worshipped in tents. The Israelite desert tradition is even centred on the **מועד אהל** where the ark is housed: the tent, the dwelling place, of Yahweh among his people. Perhaps such a cultic tradition is referred to in this verse.

The identity of the **קדשים** in v. 7 is still a matter of debate. Although many commentators suppose the qedeshim to be male cultic prostitutes, as Gruber has pointed out, this interpretation is not certain.¹²³ He suggests that they be understood as cultic functionaries. Certainly the mention of the asherah in this verse does not suggest any sexual activities on the part of the qedeshim; the function of Asherah as a 'fertility goddess' in the Old Testament is not attested (see below).

The asherah in v. 7 is preceded by a prepositional prefix, and the definiteness assigned to the noun is the suggestion of the Masoretes. If either a cultic object or a goddess (and thus perhaps an image of the goddess) is understood in this verse, a shrine might have been utilised in its worship.

The next reference to **אשרה** during Josiah's reform is in v. 14. The asherahs, masculine plural, were removed. As mentioned above, this verse appears to be later than the other asherah (singular) references in this chapter. The use of the piel perfect with the waw-consecutive is one

¹²³M. Gruber, 'הקדש בספר מלכים ובמקורות אחרים' *Tarbiz* 52 (1983): 167-176. His argument is summarised in English in 'Hebrew *qēdešāh* and her Canaanite and Akkadian Cognates' *UF* 18 (1986): 133, n. 1.

indication of this lateness.¹²⁴ The other verbs in the verse are imperfects with the waw-consecutive.¹²⁵

In v. 15 the final reference, the asherah of Bethel was destroyed by Josiah. The mention of Bethel may mark this verse as a latter addition as well. A specific, and therefore singular, asherah is mentioned. The wording of v. 15 is emphatic: 'the altar which is in Bethel, the high place which Jeroboam son of Nebat made which caused Israel to sin, even that altar and high place he tore down and he burned the high place and he pulverised to dust and burned asherah'. The deuteronomists were intent on making the point that Josiah attempted to eradicate completely the cult of the asherah. In v. 15 asherah appears in its 'pure' form, without the article and without any suffix. Since a definite asherah is being referred to, we would expect the definite article here. Perhaps the deuteronomist deliberately used the unaugmented form, indicating that the goddess herself, symbolised by the cultic object, was finally destroyed. This is the final mention of אֲשֵׁרָה in the Deuteronomistic History.

4.E. Summary of the Deuteronomistic References

I shall now summarise what we have learned of Asherah from the deuteronomistic sections of the Pentateuch and Deuteronomistic History. We have seen that the deuteronomists refer to the cultic object in both the feminine singular and masculine plural forms. The distribution of these forms appears to concur with a 'double redaction' of the deuteronomistic writings, in which pre-exilic references to the asherah largely utilise the

¹²⁴Jones, *1 and 2 Kings*: 617.

¹²⁵On the verb forms in this pericope see Koch, 'Aschera als Himmelskönigin': 103-104. Koch suggests that layers of tradition may account for the differing verb tenses (which appear at the beginnings and endings of sub-sections in the pericope).

feminine singular. The exilic references, except when referring to a single, specific asherah, generally utilise the masculine plural. This perhaps points to an 'ironic' masking of the goddess's name, by which the cultic object was called. Such distortion coincides well with the deuteronomistic theology concerning foreign deities, namely, that they are not deities at all.

We have noticed that as cultic objects, some textual support may be found for morphologies both of a tree and of an image. If a specific verse does not allude to the morphology of the object, we cannot dogmatically state that it is one or the other. We have also noted that there is no certain reference to the goddess Asherah in the deuteronomistic writings. Since prefixed prepositions hide the article in an unpointed text, and since the definite article does not preclude the possibility of a proper noun in all cases, there is ambiguity. The three (or five) possible references to the goddess would tell us little of her character. They do not, however, support the alleged associations of Asherah with a 'fertility cult', serpents, lions, or the sea. The asherah may have some connection with bulls, but this may simply be a matter of the cultic settings in which the object is found. The asherah may have been associated with the queen mother. We shall now turn to the remaining Old Testament references in an attempt to discern if a goddess Asherah is indicated.

4.F. The Chronicler's References

The references to אֲשֶׁרָה in the book of 2 Chronicles do not all correspond to those of its *Vorlage*. The spelling of the word אֲשֶׁרָה as a cultic object is irregular. Both the masculine and feminine plural forms are employed. C. Frevel, in extending a proposal put forward by J. P. Weinberg, argues that the chronicler deliberately masked any references to the asherah which would admit to the presence of a goddess.¹²⁶ He presents evidence from various aspects of the parallels with Kings and internal evidence from 2 Chronicles to demonstrate that the chronicler attempted to hide mentions of אֲשֶׁרָה which specifically refer to the goddess. This can be seen in the chronicler's consistent use of the plural when referring to אֲשֶׁרָה. 2 Chronicles parallels three of the deuteronomistic references which possibly name the goddess Asherah. All three verses in Chronicles display difficulties with אֲשֶׁרָה, as will be discussed below.¹²⁷ Perhaps evidence for an intentional attempt to hide the goddess will be seen, but we should bear in mind that the phenomena observed by Frevel may have resulted from the chronicler's genuine forgetting of the reasons for the past difficulties caused by אֲשֶׁרָה. To the references to אֲשֶׁרָה in 2 Chronicles we will now turn our attention.

¹²⁶Die Elimination der Göttin', throughout. The reference to Weinberg is his.

¹²⁷The four Deuteronomistic references are 1 Kgs. 15.13; 18.19; 2 Kgs. 21.7; 23.4. The reference to Asherah in 1 Kgs. 18.19 is not dealt with by the chronicler, as he does not concern himself with the history of the northern kingdom. This supports Hadley's argument that 'perhaps by the time of his himself, and certainly the Chronicler, the term had ceased to be used with any knowledge of the goddess whom it had originally represented' (*Yahweh's Asherah*: 92).

4.F.i. 2 Chronicles 14.2 (Eng. 3)

The first instance concerns the righteousness of Asa. In 14.2 (Eng. 3) he is portrayed as reforming the cult in Judah: 'He turned from the foreign altars and the high places, and he shattered the pillars and hewed down the asherahs'. The asherahs here, as we would expect in a late text, are construed as masculine plurals and bear the definite article. There appears to be no knowledge of Asherah as the name of a goddess.

Williamson writes concerning Asa's reform in 2 Chronicles:

The Chronicler's account of the opening years of Asa's reign largely represents his own expansion of 1 Kg. 15:11-12. The description there, however, of 'the male cult prostitutes' and 'all the idols that his fathers made' did not accord well with his presentation of the previous reigns; consequently he has made Asa's reform much more 'Deuteronomic', thus anticipating the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah, and suggesting that the abuses rectified were not wholly pagan, but rather 'internal' Israelite practices.¹²⁸

This description of the chronicler's account could also be construed as evidence for a deliberate hiding of other foreign elements in the cult of Judah, or conversely, a genuinely forgotten situation. This particular reference does not have a parallel in Kings, so the question needs to be asked: why, if a deliberate hiding is taking place, does the chronicler add this extra-Kings mention of asherahs?

¹²⁸H. G. M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (NCBC), Grand Rapids and London, 1982: 259.

4.F.ii. 2 Chronicles 15.16

The reference in 2 Chron. 15.16 has been discussed with its parallel in 1 Kgs. 15.13. Since, however, this is the chronicler's only mention of **אשרה** which arguably refers to the goddess, I will consider Frevel's understanding of the verse here. First, he notes three variations from the Kings account in 2 Chron. 15.16,

1. Die Pendenskonstruktion wird aufgelöst. 2. Die Glieder der unklaren Verbindung werden umgedreht: Anstatt **מפלצת לאשרה** jetzt **מפלצת לאשרה**. 3. Die Vernichtungsnotiz wird durch **דקק** erweitert und so verschärft.¹²⁹

He suggests that these differences are intended to confine the meaning of **אשרה** to a cultic object.¹³⁰ Frevel acknowledges that although this one instance of the singular does not fit the plural usage elsewhere, it should not be considered as a contradiction to the goddess-elimination *Tendenz* of the chronicler.¹³¹ Frevel's observations are cogent. The name of Asherah here and in the parallel passage in 1 Kgs. 15.13 can only be supported on the basis of context and pointing. If the context is ambivalent, as it is in both of these instances, either case may be argued. Frevel's understanding does account for the differences in wording between 2 Chron. 15.16 and 1

¹²⁹Frevel, 'Die Elimination der Göttin': 266. (I translate this as: '1. The pendens construction was dropped. 2. The terms of the unclear connection were reversed: instead of **מפלצת לאשרה** now **מפלצת לאשרה**. 3. The destruction account was expanded by **דקק** and thus sharpened'.)

¹³⁰Die Elimination der Göttin': 267.

¹³¹Die Elimination der Göttin': 267.

Kgs. 15.13; however, it may also be accounted for on the basis of the meaning of the word אַשְׁרָה confusing the chronicler.¹³²

4.F.iii. 2 Chronicles 17.6

Jehoshaphat is described in 2 Chron. 17.6 as destroying asherahs. 'He was lofty in his heart in the ways of Yahweh and he also removed the high places and the asherahs from Judah.' This reference reverts to the masculine plural form with the definite article for the asherahs. Once again we should note that this passage has no *Vorlage* in Kings which mentions asherahs. This may suggest that the asherahs had lost some of their potential threat, and had become simply cultic objects to be removed in the interests of orthodoxy, in the eyes of the chronicler.

4.F.iv. 2 Chronicles 19.3

Jehoshaphat was further commended in 2 Chron. 19.3: 'Certainly good matters are found with you because you burned the asherahs from the land setting your heart to seek God'. In this verse the asherahs are designated in feminine plural form, with the definite article (הַאֲשֵׁרוֹת). This prompts the question: had the threat of asherahs become a matter of past, pre-exilic days, which was no longer understood? I have argued above that the masculine plural form was applied to the feminine asherah in an attempt to disguise ironically the name of the goddess. Here the feminine plural appears, as if no difficulty attended it. We should also note

¹³²Hadley notes: 'The parallel account in II Chron. xv 16 mentions asherah in the singular, against all other places where the Chronicler uses the plural. It is also indefinite, but the article in both verses is only a matter of pointing. It may be that the Chronicler did not fully understand this text' (*Yahweh's Asherah*: 96).

the curious use of the definite article with *elohim* for 'God' (האלהים) in this verse. The picture is one of a chronicler who did not view the asherahs as remaining a threat to the restored nation, but who wished to remind the people of the causes of their exile.

4.F.v. 2 Chronicles 24.18

Joash is brought into the asherah controversy in 2 Chron. 24.18. 'And they forsook the house of Yahweh the God of their fathers, and they served the asherahs and the idols and it happened that wrath was upon Judah and Jerusalem because of this offence.' The masculine plural and definite article are used to designate the asherahs in this verse. This is the third of the chronicler's accounts of the asherahs with no parallel in Kings. In the eyes of the chronicler, the asherahs persistently stood in Judah and were only removed by the great reformer kings. Otherwise they were stumbling blocks which were left standing despite the anger of Yahweh.

4.F.vi. 2 Chronicles 31.1

2 Chron. 31.1 concerns the reform of Hezekiah.

As they finished all this, all of Israel found in the cities of Judah went out and they shattered the pillars and hewed down the asherahs and they pulled down the high places and altars in all of Judah and Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh to completion, and the sons of Israel returned to their cities, each man to his possession.

We cannot be detained here by the question of the historicity of the reform of Hezekiah.¹³³ The reference to the asherahs is once again in the

¹³³The issue is dealt with in an essay by A. C. Welch, *The Work of the Chronicler, Its Purpose and Date* (Schweich Lectures 1938), London, 1939: 97-121. For the direction

masculine plural. This verse very roughly parallels 2 Kgs. 18.4 with the removal of the high places, pillars, and asherah(s) mentioned in each case. In 2 Kings, however, asherah is given in the singular form. The use of the masculine plural here could be understood as evidence for either intentional avoidance of the singular (thus evoking memories of the goddess), or as evidence that the actual connotations of the asherah had been forgotten.

4.F.vii. 2 Chronicles 33.3

2 Chron. 33.3 parallels 2 Kgs. 21.3. 'He turned and he built the high places which Hezekiah his father had torn down, and he built altars to the baals and he made asherahs and bowed to all the hosts of heaven and served them.' The sin of Manasseh is described in similar terms to that of the chronicler's *Vorlage*, except that the asherah, which was feminine singular in 2 Kgs. 21.3, appears here as the feminine plural. The use of the plural 'to accentuate Manasseh's apostasy'¹³⁴ does not readily account for this subtle difference. To the chronicler asherah without an article and without a plural rendering in 2 Kgs. 21.3 was perhaps confusing. Rather than assign a feminine singular a masculine plural as the deuteronomists had normally done, the chronicler rendered the form in the more natural feminine plural. Once again the evidence points to a misunderstanding as to the original problematic associations of the asherahs.

of scholarly opinion about the work of Hezekiah see H. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*: 350-388; J. M. Myers, *II Chronicles, Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB), Garden City, New York, 1965: 165-194; R. B. Dillard, *2 Chronicles* (WBC), Waco, Texas, 1987: 226-261, and the references given therein.

¹³⁴Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*: 390.

4.F.viii. 2 Chronicles 33.19

The next occurrence of asherahs, in 33.19, employs the masculine plural. 'And his prayer and the supplication by him, and all his sins and treachery and the places in which he built high places and he erected the asherahs and the images before his humbling, behold they are written in the words of Hoza.' This verse does not appear in the *Vorlage*, as Manasseh is not recorded as repenting by the deuteronomists. It is curious that when no deuteronomistic *Vorlage* exists (as far as we know), the chronicler utilised the masculine plural shortly after the feminine plural for the same cultic objects. Perhaps when faced with a feminine singular in v. 3, the chronicler assumed a feminine plural, whereas in 19 he reverted to a formulaic condemnation of making asherim. The other instance of the feminine plural in 19.3, however, has no *Vorlage* in Kings. I would see this as evidence of confusion over what exactly asherahs were meant to signify when they had been a problem before the exile.

Before leaving the reign of Manasseh, we should consider one instance in which Chronicles differs in the choice of words for the asherah in its *Vorlage*. In 2 Chron. 33.7 we read that Manasseh placed the image of the idol, פסל הסמל, in the temple.¹³⁵ In the parallel verse in 2 Kgs. 21.7, one of the possible deuteronomistic references to the goddess Asherah, we read פסל האשרה. For Frevel, this is prime evidence that the chronicler consciously sought to eliminate the goddess.¹³⁶ The chronicler even chose an obscure word as the substitute for אשרה. Either the chronicler deliberately hid the word אשרה, or he had a different account

¹³⁵See Dohmen, 'Heißt סמל "Bild, Statue"?: 263-266.

¹³⁶'Die Elimination der Göttin': 267-268.

in front of him, or he was unclear as to how Manasseh could have made an image of a cultic object and chose to emend the text.

4.F.ix. 2 Chronicles 34.3, 4 and 7

The final three uses of אֲשֵׁרָה in 2 Chronicles occur in the shortened account of Josiah's reform. 2 Chron. 34.3, 4, and 7 read:

And at eight years he ruled, and when he was still a lad he began to seek the God of David his father; in his twelfth year he began to purify Judah and Jerusalem from the high places and the asherahs and the images and molten images. [4] And they tore down before him the altars of the baals and the incense altars which were over above them and he hewed off the asherahs and the images and the molten images and he shattered and pulverised and scattered them on the face of the graves of the ones sacrificing to them. [7] And he tore down the altars and the asherahs and the images he crushed to dust, and he hewed down all the incense altars in all the land of Israel and he returned to Jerusalem.

All three mentions of the asherahs are in the masculine plural with the definite article. Of special interest is that whereas 2 Kgs. 23 has five references to asherah-related phenomena, 2 Chron. 34 only lists three. This fact again illustrates the difficulties the chronicler had with the connotations of asherah, as the two references which he left out could be interpreted as indicating the goddess. The vessels for the asherah in 2 Kgs. 23.4 perhaps demonstrate that the pre-exilic deuteronomist knew of the goddess Asherah. The chronicler does not mention them. In 2 Kgs. 23.7, where women were weaving shrines for the asherah, אֲשֵׁרָה appears without a plural ending. This too is missing from the chronicler's account. Frevel utilises this information as evidence for his hypothesis.¹³⁷ The information presented in the book of Chronicles allows itself to be

¹³⁷'Die Elimination der Göttin': 265-266.

interpreted in that way. I suggest that the chronicler had lost sight of the difficulties which had attended references to the asherahs in the pre-exilic times. Confronted with asherim as a plural for a cultic object, he utilised it himself, but not consistently. In the absence of asherim in his *Vorlage*, he twice utilised the more normal feminine plural. In any case, he did not mention the goddess Asherah, except perhaps in 2 Chron. 15.16. What emerges from all of this is that a confused image of אֲשֵׁרָה is present in 2 Chronicles. The evidence is not enough to allow us to determine any attributes of the goddess, unless it points to a time when the goddess was no longer remembered. This is what we might expect from a post-exilic explanation of the fall of Israel.

4.G. The Prophetic References

The prophetic references to the asherah number only four. They are Isa. 17.8; 27.9; Jer. 17.2 and Mic. 5.13 (Eng. 14). It would seem that none of these references can actually be attributed to the prophets themselves in whose books they appear (see below). The question of why the prophets did not condemn the asherah (cultic object or goddess) has often been raised, but any speculation is ultimately an argument from silence. No adequate solution appears to be in sight.

4.G.i. Isaiah 17.8

The first reference is Isa. 17.8. 'He will not gaze upon {the altars} the work of his hand, and he will not look upon what his fingers made {even the asherahs and incense altars}.' This passage comes within the wider category of the oracles against the foreign nations. Within this oracle against Damascus in Isa. 17, vv. 7-8 fit only with difficulty. Many commentators, and also *BHS*, point to the difficulty with 'the altars' and 'the asherahs and incense altars' in v. 8,¹³⁸ with some suggestion that they should be omitted. The grammatical form of the asherahs is the masculine plural with the definite article. The previous considerations of the masculine plural form supports the suggestion that the asherahs (and

¹³⁸R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* (NCBC), Grand Rapids and London, 1980: 157, 159; G. B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah I - XXXIX* (ICC), vol. 1, Edinburgh, 1912: 301; O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39, A Commentary* (OTL), London, 1974: 83-84; J. D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (WBC), Waco, Texas, 1985: 235, 237; H. Wildberger, *Jesaja* (BKAT) vol. 2, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1978: 634, 637, 640. The two more conservative commentaries of E. Young (*The Book of Isaiah* (NIC), vol. 1, Grand Rapids, 1972: vii) and J. Oswalt (*The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39* (NIC), Grand Rapids, 1986: 25) both consider most of the material in Isaiah 1-66 as originating with Isaiah himself, thus they see no difficulty with this passage.

therefore possibly the other cultic objects in this verse) are perhaps later additions to a text which might otherwise be an Isaianic prophecy. Clements argues that vv. 7-9 are entirely later additions, and if we understand the message of the verses to be advocating that 'Jerusalem alone was claimed as the sole authorised place of sacrificial worship'¹³⁹ the text gains a deuteronomic flavour.¹⁴⁰ The reference to the desolation of the land in v. 9 does at least point to the exilic period for the origin of this addition.

4.G.ii. Isaiah 27.9

The next mention of the asherahs comes in the Apocalypse of Isaiah (chapters 24-27). Virtually no critical commentators attribute this section to Isaiah himself, with many judging it to be post-exilic.¹⁴¹ Isa. 27.9 reads, 'Therefore, in this will the transgression of Jacob be atoned for, and this all the fruit of the removal of his sin, in his making all the stones of the altar like pulverised limestone, and they will not raise asherahs and incense altars'. Even among the apocalyptic chapters of Isaiah, this pericope is difficult.¹⁴² Watts dates it to the exile, and Clements to the hellenistic era.¹⁴³ The punishment of Leviathan introduces Isa. 27 and continuing, the oracle expresses Yahweh's care for Israel. V. 9 appears to provide the conditions of Israel's repentance, already fulfilled by the exile.¹⁴⁴ The

¹³⁹Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*: 159.

¹⁴⁰Gray, *Isaiah 1-XXXIX*: 301.

¹⁴¹See O. Kaiser, (*Isaiah 13-39*: ix) who vies for a date between the 'second half of the fourth century and the first third of the second century BC'. Young (*Book of Isaiah*) and Oswalt (*Book of Isaiah*), however, do represent the opposite opinion.

¹⁴²Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*: 220; Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*: 226; Gray, *Isaiah 1-XXXIX*: 456.

¹⁴³Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*: 310; Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*: 221.

¹⁴⁴Watts, however, construes the opening lines of v. 9 as a question; 'Therefore, by this will the guilt of Jacob be expiated? And (is) this all the fruit of the removing of this sin?' (*Isaiah 1-33* : 346) and indeed, the entire pericope as a dialogue.

asherahs are once again construed by the fixed masculine plural form of the later editors. Once again, Clements notes the tendency towards considering Jerusalem as the only legitimate cultic site in this verse.¹⁴⁵ This, in turn, appears to indicate the work of the deuteronomistic theologians.

4.G.iii. Jeremiah 17.2

Jer. 17.2 makes use of the formula initiated by Hosea:¹⁴⁶ 'As their children remember their altars and their asherahs under every luxuriant tree upon the high hills'. The text of Jeremiah has long been noted for its difficulty. Although chapter 17 may be considered as originating from Jeremiah,¹⁴⁷ vv. 1-4 present special difficulties. First of all, they are omitted by the LXX, although this may be due to haplography.¹⁴⁸ If the verses are retained, v. 2, or at least the mentions of the asherahs and altars, appears to be a later addition to the text.¹⁴⁹ A suffixed form of the masculine plural of asherahs appears in v. 2, and once again, this would fit the exilic usage of this form cited above.

¹⁴⁵ *Isaiah 1-39*: 222.

¹⁴⁶ W. Holladay, "On Every High Hill".

¹⁴⁷ J. Bright, *Jeremiah, Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB), Garden City, New York, 1965: 119.

¹⁴⁸ W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* (ICC), vol. 1, Edinburgh, 1986: 384; W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah I, A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1 - 25* (Hermeneia), Philadelphia, 1986: 484.

¹⁴⁹ McKane, *Jeremiah*: 387-388; R. P. Carroll, *Jeremiah, A Commentary* (OTL), London, 1986: 349; W. L. Holladay, *The Architecture of Jeremiah 1 - 20*, Lewisburg and London, 1976: 160-163.

4.G.iv. Micah 5.13 (Eng. 14)

Mic. 5.13 (Eng. 14) simply reads: 'I will root out your asherahs from your midst, and I will destroy your cities'. Once again, the text which concerns us can be dated only with difficulty, if at all. There is no scholarly consensus on the extent of the additions to the oracles of Micah, but many commentators consider 5.13 (14) to be late.¹⁵⁰ The argument is usually based on a change of the reasons for and basis of the punishment decreed by Yahweh. The grammatical form of 'your asherahs' is suffixed masculine plural, which we have noted in exilic texts. It is spelled plene (אֲשֵׁרָהִים), as in Deut. 7.5, and 2 Kgs. 17.16. The parallelism of asherahs with cities is unexpected. Many commentators resort to emendation. Wolff proposes to emend 'your asherahs' to 'your enemies',¹⁵¹ whilst other commentators would emend 'your cities' to 'your idols'¹⁵² and others attempt to explain the combination as it stands.¹⁵³ If we realise that Yahweh is intending the same fate for the two objects mentioned, namely, their destruction, then we should assume that some similarity exists between the objects. At first, we should have difficulty discovering anything that cities should have in common with asherahs. To state that they are both 'idolatrous' begs the question. That they were common institutions in the life of the people may be a solution. Yahweh was

¹⁵⁰J. M. P. Smith, W. H. Ward and J. A. Bewer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah and Joel* (ICC), Edinburgh, 1912: 16, 113; J. L. Mays, *Micah, A Commentary* (OTL), London, 1976: 24-25, 124; D. R. Hillers, *Micah* (Hermeneia), Philadelphia, 1984: 73-74; R. Mason, *Micah, Nahum, Obadiah* (Old Testament Guides), Sheffield, 1991:24.

¹⁵¹H. W. Wolff, *Micah* (BKAT), Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1982: 132.

¹⁵²Hillers, *Micah* : 73; L. C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (NIC), London, 1976: 356, 359-360.

¹⁵³Mays, *Micah*: 127.

angered by the everyday structures of society, their cities, and their asherahs. Mays understands 'asherahs' and 'cities' to represent the cultic and military aspects which are condemned in 5.9-14 (Eng. 10-15).¹⁵⁴ I suggest that this is as acceptable a solution as an emendation would be.

One further possibility should be considered here. The verb used to describe the destruction of the asherahs is שׁרַף , 'to root or pluck out'.

Although the verb may be used figuratively elsewhere,¹⁵⁵ it may be understood in its basic sense here. Although argumentation from verbal forms does not supply indisputable evidence, this verse may represent the asherahs as trees. As with Deut. 16.21, this cannot be defended dogmatically, but it appears to be the basic meaning of the poetic denunciation.

The goddess Asherah is thus not mentioned in the prophetic books. The cultic object, referred to four times in the masculine plural form, is evident in later additions. It appears, therefore, that the asherahs were not of particular concern to the prophets.

4.H. Rabbinic Sources

For the sake of completeness, a brief consideration of Rabbinic sources must be included. The Mishnah refers to the asherah in four chapters,¹⁵⁶ one in the tractate 'Orlah ('the fruit of young trees'¹⁵⁷), one

¹⁵⁴*Micah*: 127.

¹⁵⁵W. Louie, *The Meaning, Characteristics and Role of Asherah in Old Testament Idolatry in Light of Extra-Biblical Evidence*, Th. D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1988: 13, note 2; Reed, *Asherah in the Old Testament* : 36.

¹⁵⁶Louie, *Meaning, Characteristics and Role of Asherah*: 16.

¹⁵⁷*The Mishnah*, edited and translated by H. Danby, Oxford, 1933: 89; literally 'uncircumcision' (M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, 2 vols., New York, 1926.) The reference is 1:7.

in Sukkah,¹⁵⁸ one in 'Abodah Zarah ('idolatry'),¹⁵⁹ and one in Me' ilah ('sacrilege').¹⁶⁰ The asherah is discussed in the corresponding sections of the Gemara of the Babylonian Talmud for Sukkah,¹⁶¹ 'Abodah Zarah,¹⁶² and Me' ilah.¹⁶³ In addition, the asherah is also mentioned in the Gemara of Pesahim.¹⁶⁴ Without going into the details of the Rabbinic discussions, it may be stated that the asherah is understood to be a tree. The traditions recorded in 'Orlah, Sukkah, Pesahim, and Me' ilah are all concerned with the use of items associated with trees which were asherahs. 'Abodah Zarah enters into discussion on what an asherah is, and the Mishnah states:

Three kinds of *Asherah* are to be distinguished: if a tree was planted from the first for idolatry, it is forbidden; if it was chopped and trimmed for idolatry and it sprouted afresh, one only need take away what has sprouted afresh; but if a gentile did but set up an idol beneath it and then desecrate it, the tree is permitted. What is an *Asherah*? Any tree under which is an idol. R. Simeon says: Any tree which is worshipped.¹⁶⁵

The discussion which attends these statements in the Talmud confirms the understanding of the asherah as a tree.

¹⁵⁸3:1-5.

¹⁵⁹3:5-10.

¹⁶⁰3:8.

¹⁶¹'Sukkah' in *The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Mo'ed*, trans. by I. W. Slotki, ed. by I. Epstein, London, 1938: chapter 3, folio 31b.

¹⁶²'Abodah Zarah' in *The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Neziqin*, trans. A. Cohen, ed. I. Epstein, London, 1935: chapter 3, folios 45b-46a, 47a, 48a-49b.

¹⁶³'Me'ilah' in *The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Qodashim*, trans. I. Porusch, ed. I. Epstein, London, 1948: chapter 3, folio 14a.

¹⁶⁴'Pesahim' in *The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Mo'ed*, trans. H. Freedman, ed. I. Epstein, London, 1938: chapter 2, folio 25a.

¹⁶⁵'Abodah Zarah, 3:7 in *The Mishnah*, (Danby's translation): 441.

4.I. Conclusions

In this chapter I have examined all forty references to אֲשֵׁרָה in the Old Testament. In the deuteronomistic literature, אֲשֵׁרָה appears as a cultic object which in some cases seems to have been an actual tree, and in other cases an image. Still other cases could possibly refer to some other cultic object. This indicates that the insistence on one kind of object as an asherah may be a modern qualification being read into the actual text. Perhaps at different times and places asherahs, as cultic objects, were found in different forms. A pattern may be discerned which indicates that exilic texts edited by the deuteronomists refer to the asherahs in the masculine plural form. This, I believe, points to an ironic masking of the name of the cultic object which originated from the name of a goddess. Most of the texts in which the masculine plural appears have been determined to be exilic by Old Testament scholars, based on factors outside of the scope of this dissertation.

I have noted that in three (or five) instances in the deuteronomistic literature, אֲשֵׁרָה perhaps refers to a goddess. If the goddess does appear in these texts, they do not tell us much about her nature or character. Grammatically or contextually, it may be argued that Asherah does or does not appear in the Old Testament. In verses with a prefixed preposition, context is our guide. Unfortunately, the context in these verses is open to either interpretation.

Negatively, it may be said that the Old Testament does not lend support to the conception of Asherah as a 'mother-goddess'. This characteristic is built up from outside sources. Neither does Asherah appear in a role as a 'fertility goddess', as far as the texts will allow us to

determine.¹⁶⁶ Nowhere is it stated that the veneration of Asherah had any relationship to fertility, either agricultural or human.¹⁶⁷

The relationship between trees and Asherah appears to be present, but its precise nuances cannot be determined with any certainty. This relationship depends on Asherah being the deity to whom the asherah was dedicated. The question of whether or not this reflects the actual situation has recently been raised.¹⁶⁸ The existence of a goddess with the name Athirat at Ugarit supports the idea that the cultic emblem was dedicated to Asherah; however, the absence of an explicit reference to Asherah in the Old Testament invites scepticism. This point stands to indicate the ambiguity of the Old Testament evidence.

One association, however, which appears both in the Ugaritic literature and the Old Testament is the relationship of Athirat and the asherah/Asherah with the role of the *gēbîrâ* or *rabîtu*. The 'queen mother' apparently determined the heir to the throne (and was the mother of that heir).¹⁶⁹ Athirat appears to have functioned in this role in Ugaritic mythology. The Old Testament connection appears more vague, but is still present. Maakah, Asa's mother, made a horrid thing for the asherah/Asherah. Was this because of her role as the queen mother? Once again, the texts do not provide explicit answers, but the possibility remains for this connection between the two. The arguments of Bernhardt are not

¹⁶⁶See J. A. Hackett, 'Can a Sexist Model Liberate Us?' *JFSR* 5 (1989): 65-76; as well as M. Gruber, 'Hebrew *Qēdešah*': 138.

¹⁶⁷The assertion that Asherah assisted in childbirth (R. Patai, 'Goddess Asherah: 41) is speculative and requires an unwarranted textual emendation.

¹⁶⁸Smith, *Early History*: 93-94. Evidence from 6th-4th century Greece points to the practice of devoting figurines of various deities to the main god of a temple (B. Alroth, 'Visiting Gods-Who and Why' in *Gifts to the Gods, Proceedings of the Uppsala Symposium 1985* (Boreas 15), T. Linders and G. Nordquist, eds., Uppsala, 1987: 9-19.

¹⁶⁹C. Gordon, 'Ugaritic *Rbt* /*Rabtu*' in *Ascribe to the Lord, Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie* (JSOTS 67), L. Eslinger and G. Taylor, eds., Sheffield, 1988: 127-132.

to be ignored.¹⁷⁰ Much time and space do separate Ugarit from ancient Israel. The characteristics of biblical Asherah, if she appears as a goddess, are not pronounced. The grammatical ambiguity of the verses which may mention Asherah render definite conclusions impossible.

¹⁷⁰'Aschera in Ugarit und im Alten Testament': 163-174.

Chapter Five

Mesopotamian, Hittite and South Arabian Evidence

In the previous chapters, material which deals with Athirat or Asherah has been contextualised into units which do not place undue demands across genres or different textual categories. When abundant evidence for the character of a deity is extant, – as at Ugarit, and possibly within the Old Testament as well, the task is not to attempt to combine that which does not belong together. We cannot, for example, take all the evidence available for Athirat/Asherah, ignoring cultural and textual boundaries, to present a composite figure, then claim that this generic character fully represents the goddess. At the outset, a similar caution must be utilised for the Mesopotamian, 'Hittite', and Old South Arabian texts about to be examined. To assert that fragments spread over centuries and scattered across hundreds of miles can begin to furnish us with a picture of a single goddess 'Asherah' would demand far more than the texts will allow. I shall examine each instance of Ashratu/Athirat separately and within its own context.

The syllabic nature of the Akkadian and Hittite texts lends itself to variant spellings of the name which is generally considered to be equivalent to Athirat. In the course of this study I shall examine the names spelled as Ashratu(m), Ashirtu, Ashrat, and Ashiratum, which are possible equivalents of Athirat by normal phonetic rules. Initially I shall present the Mesopotamian evidence for a goddess of the same name as Ugaritic Athirat. When referring to this goddess, I shall use the name Ashratu, unless a specific reference cites a variant form. I shall then look briefly at the Elkunirša myth, which, although written in Hittite, seems to be Canaanite in origin. A short examination of Epigraphic South Arabian

evidence will then follow. At the outset it is important to note that although these sources do mention a goddess bearing the same name as Ugaritic Athirat, they are not major sources for adding to our understanding of the character of the goddess as a whole. We should expect that each occurrence of Ashratu/Athirat in a different cultural context will certainly display cultural idiosyncrasies. They may indeed confirm what we have been able to determine safely above, but when such smaller sources of information contradict the sounder evidence we must interpret the material accordingly.

5.A. Sumero-Akkadian Evidence

What I hope to accomplish with the Sumerian and Akkadian source material is the determination of the characteristics of Ashratu inasfar as the texts themselves will allow. Initially this was simply a compilation of references to Ashratu in Mesopotamian source material. Many of the past studies on 'Asherah' have made use of the Mesopotamian material concerning Ashratu;¹ however, just as 'Asherah studies' are advancing, so are Mesopotamian studies. Each field is becoming specialised to a point that dialogue between them is required to present the evidence clearly. Various publications of the same source materials are cited in different sources on 'Asherah' creating a labyrinth from which only the specialist may hope to

¹Especially W. Reed, *The Asherah in the Old Testament*, Fort Worth, 1949: 72-75; T. Yamashita, *The Goddess Asherah*, Ph. D. dissertation, Yale, 1964: 3-30; E. Lipiński, 'The Goddess Aṭirat in Ancient Arabia, in Babylon, and in Ugarit' *OLP* 3 (1972): 103-106; J. Day, 'Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature' *JBL* 105 (1986): 385-408; W. A. Maier, *ʾAšerah: Extrabiblical Evidence* (HSM 37), Atlanta, 1986: 199-207; W. Louie, *The Meaning, Characteristics and Role of Asherah in Old Testament Idolatry in Light of Extra-Biblical Evidence*, Th. D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1988. Specifically on Ashratu see E. Ebling, 'Ašratu' in *RLA* I: 169.

emerge. Even Oppenheim warned of the difficulties of attempting to reconstruct a Mesopotamian religion:

It is extremely difficult to penetrate to the individuality of the divine figures. The Sumerian custom of speaking of the deity as the lord or lady of the city rather than of mentioning it by name (only rarely was such an individualization of the city's patron and ruler admitted) presents a serious obstacle. The formalization of the god-man attitude and the narrow range of the hymnical terminology which favored an extensive interchange of epithets among deities, blurs still more the individuality of all but the most outstanding and characteristic divine figures.²

In the light of these difficulties, my work in this section will rely heavily upon the advice of specialists in Mesopotamian studies.³ I have attempted to collate the references to Ashratu as cited in past studies of the goddess and to draw some preliminary conclusions. This exercise necessitates the citation of outdated sources on Mesopotamian studies and the consideration of the suggestions of past studies on the goddess. It is hoped that this synthesis of disparate sources will not further confuse the issue, but will provide an outline from which further work may be done.

Assyriologists have long recognised that Ashratu is known as the spouse of Amurru in the Mesopotamian material.⁴ This relationship points

²L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia, Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, Chicago, 1977: 194. Even Oppenheim's observation on the 'most outstanding and characteristic divine figures' meets with difficulties. Lambert has noted that the original characteristics of the more important of the gods are confused by their usurpation of the attributes of other gods (private communication 15 February 1992), thus adding to the general difficulty of this exercise.

³For information throughout this section I am indebted to helpful private communications from Prof. W. G. Lambert of Birmingham University and Dr. S. Dalley of the Oriental Institute of Oxford University. They helped make some sense of the many diverse sources which I had located, and also drew my attention to the more updated versions and editions. I will draw attention to the information which they have generously supplied; however, the interpretation of the material and any mistakes are my own.

⁴P. Jensen, 'Die Götter *Amurru* (*u*) and *Ašratu*' *ZA* 11 (1896-1897): 302-305; H. Zimmern, 'Religion und Sprache' in *Die Keilinschriften und das Alte Testament*, third edition, E. Schrader, ed., Berlin, 1902: 432-434; Ebeling, 'Ašratu': 169. I shall

to Ashratu's Amorite origins. It is from this context that the goddess must be explored.⁵ I am not beginning from the assumption that the Akkadian Ashratu is the same mythological character as Ugaritic Athirat. Since Mesopotamian Ashratu was understood to be an Amorite deity, a connection between Ashratu's and Athirat's origin appears to be virtually certain. Being transferred to a different culture, however, would have led to some adaptation of the goddess to her new culture. This should stand as a caution not to apply specific details of Ashratu's characteristics as they developed in Mesopotamia to Athirat simply because the earliest records attest to the former.⁶ When dealing with the complex Akkadian evidence we must let the texts and contexts inform us of Ashratu's character and nature. I hope that by the end of this exploration, some preliminary hypotheses may be adduced as to the characteristics of the figure Ashratu as she developed in Mesopotamia.

A word should be added about my use of the terms 'Mesopotamian' and 'Akkadian'. Mesopotamia, the land 'between the rivers', originally referred to the region of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. It was approximately comprised of what is now the territory of Iraq. This area was divided into the nations of Babylonia in the south and Assyria in the north.

present the evidence for this relationship in the course of this study. For a detailed study of Amurru see J.-R. Kupper, *L'iconographie du dieu Amurru dans la glyptique de la I^{re} dynastie babylonienne* (Classe des Lettres, Mémoires 55), Brussels, 1961.

⁵I wish to thank Prof. Lambert for drawing my attention to this essential point.

⁶This is a difficulty found in Yamashita's study. He states that:

It is apparent that the position of the goddess Asherah is that of *kallatu* in the Old Babylonian pantheon, because Amurru is the son of the heaven-god, and the goddess Asherah, having come from another land to be his bride, eventually takes the position of the 'crown princess'. In the Ugaritic text II AB I 15-16, IV-V 53-54, Asherah is in parallel with the perfect daughter-in-law... The same epithet is attributed to the Sumero-Akkadian and Ugaritic Asherah. (*The Goddess Asherah*: 13-14.)

This analysis assumes a parallel development between Athirat and Ashratu, without offering further textual support.

The language of these states was Akkadian. The Sumerian culture preceded the Babylonian culture in the south of Mesopotamia. I shall be using 'Akkadian' to designate the various dialects of the written scripts of Babylonian and Assyrian nations. Akkadian is attested from about the middle of the third millennium B.C.E. and although it overlaps with the Sumerian language, it superseded it in many respects. Ashratu is mentioned in both Sumerian and Akkadian sources. She is referred to in materials from the extremities of the empires, as well as in the oldest cities within them.

In this area of study caution is required. Too much caution would eliminate our investigation altogether; yet research unaware of this necessary reminder runs the risk of assuming far too much.⁷ In the course of this study, I shall attempt to keep the difficulties in the forefront, but not to stifle what may be gleaned from extant sources concerning Ashratu.

Initially it should be noted that in the major collections of divine names and epithets from the early part of this century, namely the studies of Deimel⁸ and Tallqvist,⁹ Ashratu does find a mention. Roberts, although he does mention Ashratu in a footnote, does not count her among the

⁷For a reasoned approach to this problem see W. G. Lambert, 'The Historical Development of the Mesopotamian Pantheon: A Study in Sophisticated Polytheism' in *Unity and Diversity, Essays in the History, Literature, and Religion of the Ancient Near East* (The Johns Hopkins Near Eastern Studies), H. Goedicke and J. J. M. Roberts, eds. Baltimore, 1975: 191-200.

⁸A. Deimel, *Pantheon Babylonicum. Nomina Deorum e Textibus Cuneiformibus Excerpta et Ordine Alphabetico* (Scriptal Pontificii Instituti Biblici) Rome, 1914; see also the second edition in *Šumerisches Lexikon*, part 4/1, Rome, 1950.

⁹K. Tallqvist, *Akkadische Götterepitheta, mit einem Götterverzeichnis und einer Liste der prädikativen Elemente der sumerischen Götternamen* (Studia Orientalia Edidit Societas Orientalis Fennica VII), Helsinki, 1938: see especially pages 26, 60, 111, 252, 265, and 318.

members of the 'earliest Semitic pantheon', as she does not appear to be 'attested in Mesopotamia before Ur III'.¹⁰

5.A.i. Sumerian Votive Inscription

One of the most important sources for discovering the attributes and epithets of Ashratu is an inscribed limestone slab from the reign of Hammurabi (B. M. 22,454). This slab contains a Sumerian votive inscription accompanied by a bas-relief of Hammurabi. The provenance is uncertain, but many scholars favour Sippar. Hammurabi's dates are c.1792-1750 B.C.E., according to the middle chronology of his reign. These dates provide a *terminus ad quem* for the inscription. Translations of this text are available in King,¹¹ Sollberger and Kupper,¹² Yamashita,¹³ and most recently in Frayne.¹⁴ This inscription has been the subject of much discussion for many decades.¹⁵ The translation here presented is that of Frayne, with discussion following. Transcriptions of the Sumerian are also found in King, Yamashita, and Frayne.

1-10) For [the goddess Aš]ratum, daughter-in-law of the god An, the one suitable for ladyship, lady of voluptuousness and

¹⁰J. J. M. Roberts, *The Earliest Semitic Pantheon: A Study of the Semitic Deities Attested in Mesopotamia before Ur III*, Baltimore, 1971: 63, footnote 6. The quote is from the title of the book.

¹¹L. King, *Letters and Inscriptions of Hammurabi* (Luzac's Semitic Text and Translation Series 8) vol. 3, London, 1900: 159 (King's number 66).

¹²E. Sollberger and J.-R. Kupper, *Inscriptions royales sumeriennes et akkadiennes* (Littératures Anciennes du Proche-Orient 3), Paris, 1971: 219.

¹³Yamashita, *The Goddess Asherah*: 3-7.

¹⁴D. Frayne, *Old Babylonian Period (2003-1595 B.C.)* (Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods 4), Toronto, 1990: 359-360. I am indebted to Prof. Lambert for directing me to this source.

¹⁵See for example, H. Winckler, *Altorientalische Forschungen*, vol. 2, Leipzig, 1894: 145-146, A. Sayce, 'Recent Biblical Archaeology' *ET* 10 (1898-99): 267-268, M. Stol, *Studies in Old Babylonian History* (Publications de l'Institut historique et archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul 40), Leiden, 1976: 83, as well as Frayne, *Old Babylonian Period*: 359, and the references there.

happiness, tenderly cared for in the mountain, lady with patient mercy, who prays reverently for her spouse, his lady, 11-13) for the li[fe] of Hammu-r[āpi], king of the Amo[rites], 14-20) Itūr-ašd[um], chief of the [S]ilakku canal (district), son of Šubā-il[ān], the servant who re[verences her, set up] as a wonder a protective genius befitting her d[ivi]nity, [in her] beloved residence.¹⁶

This particular inscription was the basis for Yamashita's study of Mesopotamian Ashratu,¹⁷ and indeed, it may be the most important source of information on her found in Mesopotamia. I shall summarise Yamashita's conclusions, then reassess the inscription itself to determine what it may add to our knowledge of Ashratu. Yamashita summarised the information in four points:

1. Asherah is the 'lady of the mountain'.
2. She is the daughter-in-law of the heaven-god.
3. She has the same epithet as Ishtar.
4. She is an Amorite deity.¹⁸

If the characteristics listed by Yamashita are indeed correct, they would point to substantial differences between the development of this goddess and the Ugaritic Athirat. Before any certain statement can be made, however, the epithets contained in this inscription must be considered.

Primarily I shall discuss Yamashita's third point: Ashratu has the same epithet as Ishtar. This, he believes, points to a confusion of the two goddesses. The epithet in question is *nin šà-lá-sù*, which he translates as 'the merciful lady' (Frayne's 'lady with patient mercy'). Although this epithet is also applied to Ishtar, it does not give explicit evidence of any

¹⁶Frayne, *Old Babylonian Period*: 359-360.

¹⁷Yamashita, *The Goddess Asherah*: 3-30.

¹⁸Yamashita, *The Goddess Asherah*: 7.

confusion between Ashratu and Ishtar as Yamashita suggests.¹⁹ The epithet is also applied to Marduk, Ninurta, Nergal, and Sîn;²⁰ and in view of its wide usage, it should not be considered as indicative of confusion. Yamashita supplements this title with evidence from the epithet *bēlit šēri*, also applied to both Ishtar and Ashratu.²¹ This epithet, however, has specific associations for Ashratu as the spouse of Amurru, as I shall discuss below. It is of interest, however, that this epithet has been taken to suggest underworldly connotations for Ashratu.²² It also appears that 'Ashrat of Esagila' and Ishtar were identified in a late mystical text (see below). Caution, however, is necessary. As Oppenheim has noted, the sharing of epithets is a common feature of different deities in Mesopotamian religion,²³ and not necessarily a sign of confusion. Yamashita's third piece of evidence for the confusion of Ashratu and Ishtar is the theophoric names in El-Amarna letters 61-65, although he does note that this does not prove that any confusion necessarily existed between the two.²⁴ In the light of the fact that epithets are often shared by Mesopotamian deities, the sharing of two titles by Ashratu and Ishtar occasions no surprise. The major gods of the Mesopotamian pantheon collected many epithets, and Ishtar is a major deity. I simply note here that Yamashita suggests an identification of the two. We must now turn to the epithets as found in the inscription.

The first title of Ashratu to appear in this inscription names her as the daughter-in-law of the heaven-god, An. There has been a dispute over

¹⁹*The Goddess Asherah*: 19-22.

²⁰Lambert, private communication 15 February 1992.

²¹*The Goddess Asherah*: 20.

²²K. Tallqvist, *Sumerisch-akkadische Namen der Totenwelt* (Studia Orientalia Edidit Societas Orientalis Fennica v 4), Helsinki, 1934: 17-22. See also S. Langdon, *Babylonian Liturgies*, Paris, 1913: 129, n. 5.

²³*Ancient Mesopotamia*: 194.

²⁴Yamashita, *The Goddess Asherah*: 22.

the correct translation of the phrase behind this epithet. King, Sollberger and Kupper, read *é-gi₄-a-an-na* as 'bride of An'.²⁵ Lambert, Frayne and Dalley translate it as 'daughter-in-law of An'.²⁶ The correct understanding of this phrase is important for determining how the Mesopotamian world understood Ashratu. Mesopotamian Ashratu is normally considered to be the consort of Amurru. Is she here the *bride* or the *daughter-in-law* of An? The answer to this question lies in the interpretation of *é-gi₄-a* (= *kallatum*), a term which may denote 'daughter-in-law' or 'bride'.²⁷ The resolution of the difficulty may be that *kallatum* is used in the sense of 'daughter-in-law, i.e. bride chosen by father of groom';²⁸ thus in both translations the daughter-in-law connotation is primary. This term is generally used as 'daughter-in-law' in connection with goddesses.²⁹ In the light of this information and of the consideration of the relationship of Ashratu and Amurru as consorts, this phrase should be understood as 'daughter-in-law'.

The second epithet applied to Ashratu in this inscription is 'the one suitable for ladyship'.³⁰ We should probably not read too much into this title, as it would be an appropriate expression of respect for any goddess.

The epithet 'lady of voluptuousness and happiness' (line 4) may point to an erotic aspect of the goddess. Although Athirat appears to be of a sexually active nature in the Ugaritic Baal Cycle, this does not indicate that she was considered to be an erotic figure there. The phrase *hi-li* (luxury,

²⁵King, *Letters and Inscriptions of Hammurabi*: 196; Sollberger and Kupper, *Inscriptions royales*: 219.

²⁶Lambert, private communication of 15 February 1992; Frayne, *Old Babylonian Period*: 359; S. Dalley, private communication of 23 January 1991.

²⁷von Soden, *AHW*: 426, 'Schwiegertochter; Braut'.

²⁸I am indebted to S. Dalley for this information, private communication 23 January 1991.

²⁹*CAD K*, vol. 8: 81-82.

³⁰Frayne's translation, *Old Babylonian Period*: 359.

voluptuousness) also appears in connection with Ashratu in the series Tintir = Bābilu (see below).

Lines 5-6 read 'tenderly cared for in the mountain'.³¹ Sollberger and Kupper render it as 's'occupent tendrement de la montagne'.³² This phrase does indicate a connection with a mountain, as noted by Yamashita.³³ This connection with 'the mountain' also appears in Amurru's epithet *bēl šadī*, 'lord of the mountain'.³⁴ This common association with the mountain supports the consort relationship of Amurru and Ashratu. The phrase probably refers to Ashratu's being looked after by Amurru.³⁵ Her further characterisation as the 'lady with patient mercy, who prays reverently for her spouse' could simply be understood as underscoring Ashratu's divine qualities and faithfulness.

An interesting aspect of this inscription is the dedication of a 'protective genius' (*dīamma*) for Ashratu. Frayne considers the possibility that this limestone slab may have been 'a fragment of a *lamassu* figure'.³⁶

³¹Frayne, *Old Babylonian Period*: 359.

³²*Inscriptions royales*: 219.

³³The Goddess Asherah: 8-11

³⁴Deimel, *Pantheon Babylonicum*: 177; Tallqvist, *Akkadische Götterepitheta*: 251. See G. Reisner, *Sumerisch-Babylonische Hymnen nach Thontafeln Griechischer Zeit* (Mittheilungen aus den Orientalischen Sammlungen X), Berlin, 1896: 139, lines 141-144.

³⁵This aspect was pointed out by Lambert, private communication of 15 February 1992.

³⁶Frayne, *Old Babylonian Period*: 359.

5.A.ii. God Lists

Ashratu appears, to my knowledge, in three of the main god lists which have survived from Mesopotamia.³⁷ The names in these lists are arranged according to various theological or lexical criteria.³⁸

5.A.ii.a. AN = *Anum*

The largest god list known from ancient Mesopotamia is AN = *Anum* (also cited as AN= (*ilu*) *Anum*). This list is based on predecessors from the Old Babylonian period; however, it has been much reworked during the course of its transmission. We are able to determine that Ashratu entered the tradition in post-Old Babylonian times. The format of this list is double column, with the second column offering further information on the deity list in the first. Parts of AN = *Anum* are known in several recensions. The hand copies of King in CT 24 and 25³⁹ were based on the tablets in the British Museum which were known to him. Zimmern published a study of this list in preparation for an edition.⁴⁰ This list is analytically arranged according to seniority in the pantheon of the particular deity, who is followed by his or her family or courtiers.⁴¹ Ashratu does occur in this list as the spouse of Amurru. Unfortunately her list of names is not very

³⁷I do not include epithets in the following exploration unless they are explicitly connected with Ashratu in the lists.

³⁸For a synopsis of the major lists see W. G. Lambert 'Götterlisten' in *RLA* 3 (1957-1971): 473-479.

³⁹L. W. King, *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*, parts XXIV and XXV, London, 1908 and 1909.

⁴⁰H. Zimmern, 'Zur Herstellung der großen babylonischen Götterliste An = (*ilu*) *Anum*.' *BSGW* 63 (1911): 83-125.

⁴¹Lambert 'Götterlisten.': 475.

helpful, as they are obscure.⁴² The relevant section is Tablet VI, lines 251 to 265, which contains the following Semitic epithets of Ashratu: *d*a-ba, *d*a-ba-ba,⁴³ *d*a-na-tum, *d*a-ba-tum, *d*at-ku-pí-tum, *d*ì-lí-ia-tum, and *d*é-kur-ri-tum.⁴⁴ Given the obscure nature of some of these names, they add little to our present knowledge of the goddess Ashratu, other than confirming her place in the pantheon as the spouse of Amurru. The final epithet cited, however, is of some interest. 'Ekurrítum is a feminine adjectival form from Ekurru "temple" or "netherworld".⁴⁵ This is of interest in that Tallqvist associated Ashratu with the realm of the dead by her epithet *bēlit šēri*.⁴⁶

5.A.ii.b. The Weidner List⁴⁷

Besides the well known god list AN = *Anum*, Schroeder published 'a new type of god list from Assur' in 1921.⁴⁸ Schroeder divided the five fragments from Assur which comprise this list into three categories, depending on how much remained of the original text.⁴⁹ Although partially reconstructed on the basis of an El-Amarna fragment, Ashratum appeared in his list.⁵⁰ Weidner worked further on this text, expanding the number of member fragments to eight.⁵¹ His work pushes the date for the origin of this list back to Old Babylonian times.⁵² The list from which these

⁴²Lambert, private communication, 26 May 1991.

⁴³These first two names are not certainly Semitic.

⁴⁴I am indebted to Prof. Lambert for providing me with this information in his letter of 26 May 1991.

⁴⁵Lambert, private communication, 26 May 1991.

⁴⁶Tallqvist, *Sumerisch-akkadische Namen der Totenwelt*: 17-22. This idea is also reflected in Langdon, *Babylonian Liturgies*: 129, n. 5.

⁴⁷This is the name provided for this list by Lambert ('Götterlisten': 474).

⁴⁸O. Schroeder, 'Ein neuer Götterlistentypus aus Assur' *ZA* 33 (1921): 123-147.

⁴⁹Schroeder, 'Götterlistentypus': 126-127.

⁵⁰Schroeder, 'Götterlistentypus': 133, 135.

⁵¹E. Weidner, 'Altbabylonische Götterlisten' *AfK* 2 (1924-25): 1-18, 71-82.

⁵²Weidner, 'Götterlisten': 2-7.

fragments come is now completely preserved and has been published by A. Cavigneaux.⁵³ The context would seem to indicate that at the time of Ur III Ashratu was considered to be the spouse of Amurru. The context, according to Cavigneaux's ordering is:

187	d _{mar} .dú	Amurru
188	d _{AN} .mar.dú	Amurru
189	d _{aš} -ra-tum	Ašratum ⁵⁴

This list is known in several recensions. A late Babylonian edition from Kish was published by van der Meer.⁵⁵ Nougayrol published recensions found at Ugarit (RS 20.175 and 20.121).⁵⁶ Besides informing us of the association of Ashratu with Amurru, these god-lists serve to demonstrate how widely known this particular alternate list to AN = *Anum* was. It was known in at least Kish, Babylon,⁵⁷ Sippar, Assur, Ugarit and El Amarna.⁵⁸ The Mesopotamian lists range from the Old to Late Babylonian periods, whilst the text from Ugarit dates from the Late Bronze Age, the destruction of Ugarit being its *terminus ad quem*. In relation to the Ugaritic understanding of Athirat, it should be pointed out that the scribes of Ugarit had in their possession this list (to them foreign) which denotes Ashratu as the spouse of Amurru. We are at a loss to know if they

⁵³A. Cavigneaux, *Textes scolaires du temple de Nabû ša ḫarê* (Texts from Babylon 1), Baghdad, 1981.

⁵⁴Cavigneaux, *Textes scolaires*: 94, the transcription of the names is according to the rendering of Lambert, private communications.

⁵⁵P. E. van der Meer, *Syllabaries A, B¹ and B with Miscellaneous Lexicographical Texts from the Herbert Weld Collection* (Oxford Editions of Cuneiform Texts 4), Oxford, 1938: 58 (no. 143).

⁵⁶J. Nougayrol, 'Textes suméro-accadiens des archives et bibliothèques privées d'Ugarit' *Ug* 5 (1968): 54, 220.

⁵⁷Cavigneaux points to Babylon as the source of this list.

⁵⁸Lambert has informed me of the Sippar and El-Amarna lists; however, I do not have access to any actual editions of the texts.

considered this unusual in the light of her Ugaritic association as the spouse of El. Perhaps the equation of Ashratu with Athirat was not made by these scribes, or perhaps they equated Amurru with El. Unfortunately, we have no documentation to assist us on this matter.

5.A.ii.c. Nippur God List (CBS 13889)

Among the oldest sources for referring to Mesopotamian Ashratu is a god list from Nippur, published by Chiera in 1929.⁵⁹ In Chiera's text number 122 Rev., Col. V, (text 124 Rev. line 21 seems to be a duplicate list) line 17 reads: *d*aš-*ra-tum*. This text dates from the early centuries of the second millennium B.C.E. Chiera suggested that in regard to this text some added information may be gleaned:

Of special importance in this respect is No. 122, Col. VII. The scribe had already written down all the names of gods preceded by the determinative. In this last column he lists the foreign gods, without determinative. Among these foreigners we find the well-known Ea and Ishtar. ⁶⁰

As Lambert has pointed out, however, the deities in this list are not all foreign, as Chiera had supposed.⁶¹ The context of Ashratu's place in the list is unfortunately not too helpful, as she appears near the end in a disorderly section.⁶² The reconstructed sequence reads:

<i>d</i> imin.bi	The Seven (Pleiades)
<i>d</i> aš- <i>ra-tum</i>	Ašratum

⁵⁹E. Chiera, *Sumerian Lexical Texts from the Temple School of Nippur* (OIP XI), Chicago, 1929: 63. This is the list with which C.-F. Jean was concerned in his article 'Noms divins sumériens listes des élèves-scribes de Nippur' *RA* 28 (1931): 179-194.

⁶⁰Chiera, *Sumerian Lexical Texts*: 1-2.

⁶¹Private communication 15 February 1992.

⁶²As indicated in a private communication of Prof. W. G. Lambert, March 1991.

Such a text naming Ashratu indicates that the priests of Nippur, by their possession of this list, did know of her. The text does not add any characteristics to our understanding of the goddess, or any details indicating from whence she came.

5.A.iii. The Series Tintir = Bābilu

From the ancient series Tintir = Bābilu comes a mention of Ashratu. A recension of this list (K. 3089) was published as early as 1900 by Pinches.⁶⁴ Unger provided a study of this series, as did van der Meer.⁶⁵ Line 17 of Tintir = Bābilu IV reads:

é.ḫi.li.kalam.ma = bīt dāš-ra-tum

Lambert translates this as 'House of the luxury of the land = temple of Ašratum'.⁶⁶ Although there is not much that we can gather from this brief mention, it is clear that Ashratu was a possessor of a temple in Babylon itself, and therefore she presumably had an active cult there. Clay published a calendar which specifies the offerings and rites for Babylonian temples for the months of Marchesan, Kislev, and Tebet.⁶⁷ In his transcription we find dAš-ra-tum É-ḫi-li-kalam-ma,⁶⁸ that is, the same

⁶³Quoted Prof. Lambert's letter, March 1991.

⁶⁴T. Pinches, 'The Temples of Ancient Babylonia I.' *PSBA* 22 (1900): 358-371.

⁶⁵E. Unger, *Babylon, die Heilige Stadt nach der Beschreibung der Babylonier*, second edition, Berlin, 1970 (this is a photo-mechanical reprint of the original 1931 text): chapter 24; P. E. van der Meer, 'A Topography of Babylon' *Iraq* 5 (1938): 55-64.

⁶⁶Private communication, March 1991.

⁶⁷A. Clay, *Babylonian Records in the Library of J. Pierpont Morgan*, part 4, New Haven, 1923: 44, 58.

⁶⁸Clay, *Babylonian Records*: 58 (number 25, line 38).

formula in the previous Tintir = Bābilu listing.⁶⁹ These two pieces of evidence permit us only the privilege of knowing that Ashratu's temple took part in the rites carried out in the general inventory of Babylonian temples and that her temple was known as 'the house of the luxury of the land'.⁷⁰ It is also of interest that the Sumerian term *ḫi.li* used in this expression is the same term used to describe Ashratu as a 'lady of voluptuousness' (*ḫi.li*) in the Sumerian votive inscription discussed in 5.A.i. above.

5.A.iv. Cylinder Seals

Sayce published an Old Babylonian cylinder seal which pairs Ashratu with the god Rammanum.⁷¹ The name Rammanum on this seal is translated as 'rumbler' and is elsewhere explicitly identified with Amurru.⁷² From the reign of Rîm-Sin of Larsa (c. 1822-1763) we possess four administrative documents, the seals of which bear the name *ḏA-šī-ram-tum*.⁷³ This evidence testifies to the fact that she was known in the early second millennium at Larsa. The spelling of her name as 'Ashiratum' also points to her West Semitic origins. Since 'Akkadian does not tolerate 3 short vowels separated by single consonants'⁷⁴ this name would not appear to be East Semitic in origin. With the dropping of the middle *i*, the name

⁶⁹Editions of these two quotations may also be found in E. Unger, *Babylon*: 230, 260-261.

⁷⁰See also E. Unger, 'Babylon' in *RLA* 1: 351.

⁷¹A. Sayce, 'Babylonian Cylinders in the Hermitage of St. Petersburg' *ZA* 6 (1891): 161.

⁷²W. G. Lambert, 'Near Eastern Seals in the Gulbenkian Museum of Oriental Art, University of Durham' *Iraq* 41 (1979): 13; W. A. Maier, *ʿAšerah: Extrabiblical Evidence*: 204, note 6.

⁷³D. E. Faust, *Contracts from Larsa Dated in the Reign of Rîm Sin* (YBT VIII), New Haven, 1941: no. 19, seal, no. 31, seal, no. 45, seal, and no. 72, seal. I am grateful to S. Dalley, private communication, 5 May 1991, for pointing out this reference to me.

⁷⁴Lambert, private communication, 15 February 1992.

becomes the more common form of 'Ashratu'. The Old Babylonian period also coincides with the beginnings of the Amorite influence in the regions of Sumer and Akkad, thus further supporting Ashratu's West Semitic origins.⁷⁵

The index of S. Feigin's *Legal and Administrative Texts of the Reign of Samsu-Iluna* refers to two further documents bearing seals with the name ^dAs̄-ra-tum.⁷⁶ In fact, neither seal clearly reads 'Ashratum', and there is some doubt that she is mentioned in them at all.⁷⁷ In this same collection of texts, a gudu₄-priest of Ashratu is mentioned, testifying to an active cult for her at this period (c. 1749-1712) in the First Dynasty of Babylon.⁷⁸ Other cylinder seals, to which I have no access, also refer to Amurru and Ashratu.⁷⁹ These references add little to our knowledge of Ashratu's character, but they do point to her Amorite origins and indicate various times when she was known.

5.A.v. Ritual Texts

Ashratu appears in at least three ritual texts. One is a ritual of the Seleucid period in Uruk, translated by Thureau-Dangin. The others are ritual texts from the same period published by Reisner. These texts display

⁷⁵I thank Prof. Lambert for explaining this connection to me, private communication, 15 February 1992.

⁷⁶S. I. Feigin, *Legal and Administrative Texts of the Reign of Samsu-Iluna* (YBT XII), New Haven, 1979: 62, the seals are on documents 402 and 462.

⁷⁷Lambert (private communication, 15 February 1992) has demonstrated the difficulties of both impressions to me.

⁷⁸Feigin, *Legal and Administrative Texts*: no. 353, line 26. Dalley, private communication, 5 May 1991, drew my attention to this reference. This is the source of the information for J. Renger's reference to a gudu₄ priest of Ashratu ('Untersuchungen zum Priestertum der altbabylonischen Zeit 2. Teil' ZA 59 (N.F. 25, 1969): 158-159, cited by Louie, *The Meaning, Characteristics and Role of Ashera* : 81).

⁷⁹These sources were drawn to my attention by Lambert, private communication of 15 February 1992.

specialised ritual arrangements which may add to our knowledge of Ashratu at this period.

5.A.v.a. The Uruk Temple Ritual

Thureau-Dangin published ritual texts of the temple of Anu in Uruk from six tablets.⁸⁰ He divided these rituals into four chapters:

1. The daily sacrifices of the temple of Anu
2. The new year festival at Uruk
3. The festival of Ishtar
4. A nocturnal ceremony in the temple of Anu⁸¹

The references to Ashrat occur in the tablets describing the new year festival. The text concerned (VAT 7849) deals with the *aktu* of the month Nisan. Although the text was found in Assur, Thureau-Dangin notes that it probably originated at Warka.⁸² These detailed instructions mention Ashrat three times in a list of other deities in the procession of Anu. The first reference in this text is column I, line 15. Ashrat occurs in the following list of deities: Bêlit-ilê, Šala, the daughters of Anu, Aya, Gula, Nin-eš-gal, Ama-sag-nu-du, Sa-dar-nun-na, Ašrat, and Šarrat-šamê.⁸³ The next reference to her is column II, line 6. Here Ashrat occurs in the same list of deities with the exception of Gula, who is replaced by the names Meme and Bau.⁸⁴ The final reference in column III line 25 maintains the order of deities in column II line 6, with Nin-si-an-na replacing Bêlit-ilê.⁸⁵ These references to Ashrat in the rituals of the temple of Anu at Uruk simply

⁸⁰F. Thureau-Dangin, *Rituels accadiens*, Paris, 1921: 61-125.

⁸¹*Rituels accadiens*: 61.

⁸²*Rituels accadiens*: 99.

⁸³*Rituels accadiens*: 100, 104.

⁸⁴*Rituels accadiens*: 101, 105.

⁸⁵*Rituels accadiens*: 102, 106.

point to the fact that she held a place in the pantheon there and was active in the cult of Anu. Her place in a formulaic listing of other deities informs us little of her character.

5.A.v.b. The Reisner Texts

Text IV of the appendix of G. Reisner's *Sumerisch-babylonische Hymnen nach Thontafeln griechischer Zeit* dates from the Arsacid period⁸⁶ (from the second century B.C.E. into the Common Era). This text is a bilingual hymn giving Akkadian equivalents to Sumerian deities. Among the deities listed is Ashratu. Although the colophon is missing, the text is dated by comparison with similar hymns.

Lines 141-144 of text IV read in both Sumerian and Akkadian:

Amurru, who is lord of the mountain.
Ashratu, the lady of the steppe.⁸⁷

This text equates Gubarra with Ashratu, as do Reisner's text No. 50 (VAT 415)⁸⁸ and a late mystical text (see below). Furthermore, the epithet *bēlit šēri* is also applied to ^d*gú-bar-ra*, spouse of ^d*mar-dú* in this text.⁸⁹ The title *bēlit šēri*, 'lady of the steppe', has led to various considerations of Ashratu's characteristics.

Lambert suggests that the epithets here again demonstrate that Amurru and Ashratu were consorts.⁹⁰ The title 'lord of the mountain' (*bēl*

⁸⁶Pages viii-x. More up-to-date translations can be found in Mark E. Cohen, *The Canonical Lamentations of the Ancient Mesopotamians*, Potomac, 1988 (cited by Lambert, unavailable to me).

⁸⁷Translation based on the reading of Yamashita, *Goddess Asherah*: 8.

⁸⁸*Sumerisch-babylonische Hymnen*: 92.

⁸⁹*Sumerisch-babylonische Hymnen*: 92; see Zimmern, 'Religion und Sprache': 433-434; and Jensen, 'Die Götter Amurru (*u*) and Ašratu': 303-304.

⁹⁰Private communication, 15 February 1992.

šadî) is applied to Amurru. A. Heidel suggested in 1949 that the Akkadian word *šadû* also had connotations of 'steppe' or 'open country'.⁹¹ This meaning is also accepted by *CAD*.⁹² Thus Ashratu and Amurru have similar epithets which relate them to the steppe-land.⁹³

This title of Ashratu was used by Tallqvist to associate her with the underworld.⁹⁴ He notes that 'steppe' is a common designation for the realm of the dead and that the application of this title to Ashratu indicates her association with the netherworld. This association of the steppe and the realm of the dead has much to commend it. However, as it is not the primary meaning of the term *šeru*,⁹⁵ we must not assume that Ashratu was necessarily associated with the underworld on the basis of this epithet.

5.A.vi. Mystical Text (B.M. 34035)

A late mystical text (B.M. 34035) was originally published as planetary tablet Sp. I. 131, by Epping and Strassmaier.⁹⁶ It dates from 138 B.C. and was found in Borsippa. Epping and Strassmaier had classified this tablet as an astronomical work. A. Livingstone, however, has demonstrated that this text is actually a 'mystical explanatory work'.⁹⁷ The key to understanding the information provided in such texts is to understand how Mesopotamian scholars understood their mystical scholarship. Livingstone

⁹¹A Special Usage of the Akkadian Term *šadû* 'JNES 8 (1949): 233-235.

⁹²Š, vol. 17, part I, *šadû* A: 49-59.

⁹³I am indebted to Prof. Lambert for informing me of this association.

⁹⁴Tallqvist, *Sumerisch-akkadische Namen der Totenwelt*: 17-22.

⁹⁵*CAD* vol. 16, S, *šeru* : 138-150.

⁹⁶J. Epping and J. Strassmaier, 'Neue babylonische Planeten-Tafeln.' *ZA* 6 (1891): 241.

⁹⁷*Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, Oxford, 1986: 61-62.

has explored the various methods which composed this intellectual tradition.

It was usual for almost every type of information to be summarized and recorded by listing pairs of associated items, arranged in columns. This technique acquired specialised conventions appropriate to the particular subject matter involved. The principle of expressing information by simple juxtaposition is so universal in the literature that it is sometimes necessary to raise the question of the extent to which the actual thinking of the ancient scholars was influenced by this aspect of their practical methodology.⁹⁸

This mystical text falls into Livingstone's category of philological associations.⁹⁹ On what seems to be a superficial level to modern scholars, the writers of this tablet demonstrated the relationship between Ashrat and Gubarra. I will follow the transcription and translation of Livingstone's study here. Lines 8-13 read as follows:

gú.bar.ra: ^daš-rat : gú: ki-šá-du: bar: za-a-ri
^daš-rat šá é-zi-da šabiṭu (maš.dà) šú-ú u kišād-su zi-i-ri ^daš-rat šá
 é-sag-il
^dšar-ra-ḥi-tu 4: ^dinanna ! : šī-i : šá-ra-ḥi-i-tú : ^daš-rat a-ḥi-i-tu 4
 mul-ṭu u mu-šá-lu šá ina qātē II-šú kak-ku sak-ku šu-ú muš-šu-lu
 šá múl₁adda
 eš.bar pu-ru-us-su-ú : eš: še-la-ša-a 4: bar: meš- li
 ulta (ta) ud.15.kam ^dšar-rat LÁ-ma purussē (eš.bar) i-šak-kan

Gubarra: Ašrat. gú: neck. bar: to hate.

Ašrat of Ezida is a gazelle, and she is shunned. Ašrat of Esagila is Šarrāḥītu, Inanna. Šarrāḥītu (the proud one) is Ašrat the foreigner (*ašrat aḥītu*)

The comb and mirror in her hands - it is obtuse and obscure - is a representation of the corpse star.

eš.bar: decision. eš: 30. bar: half.

⁹⁸Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works*: 2.

⁹⁹Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works*: 2-3.

Such a late text can tell us little about the character of Ashratu as it had been in the earlier periods. By the time this text was written, Ashrat (Ashratu) had become associated with the Sumerian goddess Gubarra, and thus shared her epithets. This text also makes an identification of Ashrat of Esagila with Inanna (Ishtar). This identification is not supported for earlier attestations of Ashratu in Mesopotamian texts; the common epithet cited by Yamashita does not point to an identification of the characters at that early period.¹⁰¹ In the course of the development of her character, however, she was identified with Ishtar by the second century B.C.E. Since the mystical nature of the identifications here presented is not fully understood, we must be careful when building upon them. In consideration of the epithet *ekurrîtum* in the god list AN = *Anum*, the association of Ashrat here with the 'corpse star' may provide slight support for an underworldly connection for Ashratu.

¹⁰⁰Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works*: 61.

¹⁰¹See the discussion under section 5.A.1. Sumerian Votive Inscription.

5.A.vii. Theophoric Names

Thureau-Dangin published two separate contracts on which the personal name *Ashratum-ummi*, 'Ashratum is my mother', appears.¹⁰² Both of these contracts date from the reign of Hammurabi. They testify to the use of Ashratu's name in a theophoric personal name, but only tell us that the parents of this individual apparently worshipped her.

I also include the Tell El-Amarna letters which mention Abdi-Ashirta in this chapter since they were written in Akkadian, although the subject matter actually concerns Egypt and Amurru. The El-Amarna tablets provide little further information concerning Ashratu. Some 52 tablets from El-Amarna contain the name of a prince of Amurru called Abdi-Ashirta, 'servant of Ashirta'.¹⁰³ His name occurs some 92 times, and it is spelled variously as *abdi-a-ši-ir-ta*, *abdi-a-ši-ir-ti(te)*, *abdi-aš-ra-tum*, *abdi-iltu aš-ra-tum*, *abdi-aš-ra-ti*, *abdi-iltu aš-ra-ti*, *abdi-aš-ra-ta*, *ab-di-aš-ta-ti*, *abdu-iltu aštarti*, *ad-ra-aštarti*.¹⁰⁴ Some of the differences in spelling can be accounted for by the vicissitudes of the syllabic Akkadian script; however, when the name occurs as Abdu-Ashtarti, a certain confusion appears to be present. Was the goddess Ashratu confused with

¹⁰²F. Thureau-Dangin, *Lettres et contrats de l'époque de la première dynastie babylonienne* (Musée du Louvre - Département des Antiquités Orientales [Textes Cuneiformes 1]), Paris, 1910: numbers 89, line 7; 98, line 8; and 99, line 8. Number 99 is the envelope for number 98.

¹⁰³For editions of the El-Amarna correspondence see H. Winckler, 'Die Thontafeln von Tell-El-Amarna' in *Sammlung von assyrischen und babylonischen Texten im Umschrift und Übersetzung* (Keilinschriftliche Bibliothek V), E. Schrader, ed., Berlin, 1896; J. A. Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln* (Reihenfolge des Erscheinens der Vorderasiatischen Bibliothek 2), 2 vols., Leipzig, 1915; S. A. B. Mercer, *The Tell El-Amarna Tablets*, 2 vols., Toronto, 1939; and W. L. Moran, in collaboration with V. Haas and G. Wilhelm, *Les lettres d'El-Amarna* (Littératures Anciennes du Proche-Orient 13), Paris, 1987.

¹⁰⁴The spellings follow the rendering of O. Weber, in Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln*: 1555.

the goddess Athtart by the dictator of the letter, or the scribe? Considering the contemporaneity of the El-Amarna tablets with Ugarit, it would appear unlikely that an Amorite prince would have confused these two goddesses, since Athirat and Athtart were clearly distinguished at Ugarit. Since there are no Egyptian records directly naming the goddess Ashratu (or Athirat), it is perhaps possible that the distinction of the two was unknown in Egypt. Whatever the reason for this confusion of names, we are given no information on the character of the goddess Ashratu, other than the fact that her name was utilised as the theophoric element in the personal name of an Amorite prince.

5.A.viii. The Marriage of Martu

A text published by E. Chiera in 1924 is concerned with the story of the Marriage of Martu.¹⁰⁵ 'Martu' is the Sumerian form of 'Amurru', the consort of Ashratu. Although this text does not directly mention Ashratu, it has long been considered to refer to her in the spouse of Martu.¹⁰⁶ S. Kramer summarised the story in his *Sumerian Mythology*,¹⁰⁷ but did not name Martu's spouse as Ashratu. The story relates how Martu came to be married. Observing that all his friends had wives, Martu asked his mother to arrange for him to have one as well. She agreed to do this after he built a temple. Martu built the temple and was given the hand of his bride.

¹⁰⁵*Sumerian Religious Texts* (Crozer Theological Seminary Babylonian Publications 1), Upland, Pennsylvania, 1924: 14-23.

¹⁰⁶See Yamashita, *The Goddess Asherah*: 26-28.

¹⁰⁷*Sumerian Mythology, a Study of Spiritual and Literary Achievement in the Third Millennium B.C.* (Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society 21), Philadelphia, 1944: 98-101.

Kramer has recently published this myth as well.¹⁰⁸ According to Kramer, the bride is called *d.ad-ní-ki-šar*.¹⁰⁹ In AN = *Anum* VI 261, among the epithets of Amurru's spouse is the name *dad-NÍGⁿⁱ-ki-šáršar*.¹¹⁰ In this same list Ashratu is named as the spouse of Amurru, thus equating the two goddesses. By deduction, therefore, we find a reference to Ashratu in this text. Unfortunately, although this text confirms Ashratu's status as the spouse of Amurru, it does not add any further information to our understanding of her character.

5.A.ix. The Taanach Letter

One further piece of evidence must be included under the heading of Sumero-Akkadian sources, although the tablet in question was actually found in the Palestinian tell Taanach.¹¹¹ Among the materials discovered at Taanach was a tablet written in Akkadian cuneiform which mentions Ashratu. Although this text is frequently cited in studies on Asherah, it informs us little of her nature or character. After many years of the acceptance of Hrozný's rendering of the phrase *u-ba-an iluA-šī-rat* (lines 20-21) as 'der Finger der Aširat'¹¹² by many scholars, Albright demonstrated that the reading should be understood as *u-ma(!)-an dA-šī-rat*.¹¹³ He translated this phrase as 'a wizard of Asherah',¹¹⁴ and has been

¹⁰⁸Prof. Lambert has informed me of this publication, which is unavailable to me: S. N. Kramer, 'The Marriage of Martu' in *Bar-Ilan Studies in Assyriology dedicated to Pinhas Artzi*, Bar-Ilan, 1990: 12-27.

¹⁰⁹As cited by Lambert, private communication, 15 February, 1992.

¹¹⁰I am indebted to Prof. Lambert for pointing this connection out to me.

¹¹¹E. Sellin, *Tell Ta'annek* (Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse L), Vienna, 1904. The letter (number 1) was transliterated and translated by F. Hrozný in 'Keilschrifttexte aus Ta'annek' in the same volume, pages 113-114.

¹¹²'Keilschrifttexte': 114.

¹¹³W. F. Albright, 'A Prince of Taanach in the Fifteenth Century B.C.' *BASOR* 94 (1944): 18.

subsequently followed by many scholars concerned with this text. This letter is addressed to a certain Rewašša, and after the greeting reads:

Further, and if there is a wizard of Asherah, let him tell our fortunes, and let me hear quickly (?); and the (oracular) sign and interpretation send to me.¹¹⁵

This letter dates from the Amarna period, and appears to suggest that Ashirat had a diviner in Taanach. The Ashirat mentioned in this text occurs in the northern part of Palestine during the period in which Ugarit was flourishing. There is no reason to doubt that Athirat is the goddess intended here; her name is spelled according to a standard Akkadian transliteration of the Ugaritic spelling. This letter indicates that Ashirat was known in Palestine at an early period.

5.A.x. Conclusions from the Sumero-Akkadian Materials

The Mesopotamian materials mentioning Ashratu are our earliest sources concerning this goddess. These sources indicate that Ashratu was understood to be an Amorite goddess and the consort of Amurru. Her appearance in the Mesopotamian sources from the Old Babylonian period coincides with the influx of Amorite elements in the area of southern Mesopotamia. Since Ugaritic Athirat appears in a kingdom neighbouring Amurru during the lifetime of the Akkadian-speaking empires, there is no reason to doubt that they were the same character in origin. In each culture, however, the goddess developed to meet the requirements of the individual culture.

¹¹⁴Prince of Taanach': 18.

¹¹⁵Following the translation of Albright, 'Prince of Taanach': 18.

Mesopotamian Ashratu is characterised primarily by her relationship with Amurru. This is demonstrated in the god lists, cylinder seals and in the Sumerian votive inscription from the reign of Hammurabi. The Sumerian inscription is perhaps the most informative piece of information on the goddess. It allows us to conclude that Ashratu was considered to be the daughter-in-law of An; however, the significance of this relationship is lost to us. Her erotic nature may be emphasized in the phrase 'lady of voluptuousness and happiness' (line 4). She is associated with a mountain, and this is probably an indication of her connection with Amurru.

The god lists confirm Ashratu's status as the consort of Amurru. AN = *Anum* provides further Semitic epithets for Ashratu; however, the significance of many of them is lost to us. The title *ekurrġtum* is connected with either 'temple' or 'netherworld', and the latter interpretation may be supported by her epithet *bġlit šġri*. The series Tintir = Bābilu connects Ashratu with the 'luxury of the land' and attests to her having a temple in Babylon.

The ritual texts, theophoric names and Taanach letter do little more than attest to the presence of Ashratu in their various locations. The late mystical text from Borsippa demonstrates a connection between Ashrat of Esagila and Ishtar in the second century. How early this association developed we cannot state with certainty. This text may also point to a connection of Ashratu with the realm of the dead.

Although Athirat and Ashratu most likely share a common origin, differences in development have occurred. Athirat of Ugarit is associated especially with the sea, as demonstrated above. Mesopotamian Ashratu appears to have developed a connection with the plain and mountain. We have no evidence that she was connected to the sea. An original

association with the steppe may appear in Athirat's riding of a donkey in *KTU* 1.4.IV; however, this may be simply a sign of her status.

In the existing Ugaritic tablets, we have no indication that Athirat was associated with the prosperity of the land in particular, nor does Athirat appear to have underworldly associations. These observations point to the differences in the development of the goddess in these two cultures.

One common original characteristic may be present in her status as the consort of a major god. Although Amurru was not a major Mesopotamian deity, he was perceived to be the national god of the region of the Amorites (the west?). Ashratu appears to retain the status of a consort of an important god.

5.B. The Hittite Evidence: The Myth of Elkunirša

Since H. Otten's study of the myth now known as the 'Myth of Elkunirša' was published in 1953,¹¹⁶ scholars dealing with the figure of Athirat/Asherah have taken an active interest in it. The story is contained on four small fragments and it is generally reconstructed along the following lines:

Ashertu¹¹⁷ has attempted to seduce the Storm God (generally assumed to be Baal). The Storm God refuses her advances and reports the matter to Elkunirša, the spouse of Ashertu. Elkunirša hears the report of the Storm God and instructs him to sleep with Ashertu and humiliate her. The Storm God does so, informing Ashertu that he has slain 77/88 of her children. She grieves for seven years. The other episode is generally added after this, although the order of the fragments is not certain.¹¹⁸ This additional fragment relates how Elkunirša and Ashertu plot against the Storm God, but the Storm God is assisted by Ishtar, who listens like a bird on the wall in Elkunirša's bed chamber.

What is immediately striking, upon the realisation that the Hittite scholars show considerable caution with this text, is how readily it is used to support theories about Ugaritic Athirat. In the initial translations of this fragmentary text many key words had been designated as uncertain. Besides the difficulties of applying a text from a different cultural context

¹¹⁶H. Otten, 'Ein kanaanäischer Mythos aus Boğazköy' *MIO* 1 (1953): 125-150.

¹¹⁷I follow the spelling of the name of this goddess as used by H. A. Hoffner, Jr. (*Hittite Myths* (SBL Writings from the Ancient World 2), Atlanta, 1990). The name presented in the texts appears with various spellings (^dA-še-er-du-uš, ^dA-še-er-tum, and ŠA ^dA-še-er-ti); H. A. Hoffner, 'The Elkunirsa Myth Reconsidered' *RHA* 76 (1965): 6, note 5; compare Otten, 'Kanaanäischer Mythos': 126, (Bo 2567 I) line 10.

¹¹⁸Hoffner, 'Elkunirsa Myth': 9.

directly to the mythology of Athirat, we are here faced with a text which does not provide us with a certain reading.

Although the text displays the characteristics of a Canaanite myth, we must keep in mind the cultural contexts of both Boghazköy and Ugarit. They indeed influenced each other, but they were not identical. With this in mind, we must consider the identifications of the characters in these mythological fragments with their assumed Ugaritic counterparts.

Elkunirša (^d*el-ku-ni-ir-ša*) has been generally assumed to be a rendering of the Semitic ʾl qn(y) ʾrṣ, 'El creator of the earth'.¹¹⁹ The difficulties with this association have not yet been resolved. Otten displayed caution with it:

Will man auf eine Deutung des Gottesnamens *Elkunirša* nicht bewußt verzichten, so darf man auf das Götterparr Ascherat-El in den Mythen aus Ugarit verweisen, so daß der Versuch einer Gleichsetzung mit *El qn ʾrṣ* sowohl aus sachlichen wie sprachlichen Gründen durchaus gewagt werden muß.¹²⁰

Goetze, in his translation in *ANET* notes, 'This has been explained as Canaanite *qōnē ʾarṣ* "(El), creator of the earth"; but there are still some details connected with this identification that are not yet clear'.¹²¹

Specifically, the difficulties of explaining away the supposed shift from *šade* to *shin* remain an obstacle to this identification.¹²² Although the name certainly appears to be Semitic, a certain etymology is beyond our ability at this point. The identification of Elkunirša with El is also partially based on his status as the spouse of Ashertu, just as Ugaritic El is the spouse

¹¹⁹See, for example M. Pope 'El' in Pope and H. Röllig, 'Syrien' in *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, ed. H. W. Haussig, Stuttgart, 1965: 280; and W. A. Maier, *ʾAšerah: Extrabiblical Evidence*: 34.

¹²⁰H. Otten, 'Kanaanäischer Mythos': 138.

¹²¹A. Goetze, 'El, Ashertu and the Storm-god' in *ANET Supplement*, Princeton, 1969: [519], n. 1.

¹²²See I. Gelb 'The Early History of the West Semitic Peoples' *JCS* 15 (1961): 43.

of Athirat. We cannot rule out the possibility that Elkunirša was a form of El, but it should be kept in mind that this association is not certain. In the light of these circumstances we should next examine the connection of Ashertu with Athirat.

The name of Elkunirša's spouse in these fragments varies from place to place. The Hittite spelling is *da-še-er-du-uš*. The use of 'Akkadianised' forms would seem to be an indicator of the borrowed nature of the myth. It is curious, however, that the writer used varying forms of a single character's name; this may also point to the borrowing of the myth. The only certain source of information we have on the character of Athirat is the corpus of Elimelek cycles from Ugarit. Does the 'Asherdush' of the Hittite version match the Ugaritic model? A possible interpretation of *KTU* 1.4.III.10-22 (see above) may tentatively support a desire of Athirat for Baal; however, this interpretation of a damaged section of the text must remain tentative. Ashertu's plotting against the Storm God could be reflected in Anat's cry in *KTU* 1.6.I.39-42:

Now Athirat and her sons will rejoice,
the Goddess and the company of her kin,
for dead is Mighty Baal. . .

Again the connection is circumstantial, although what we know of Athirat's character may support such a relationship. The mourning of Ashertu in this text should be considered a standard reaction to any mythological character robbed of his or her progeny. In name Ashertu may match Athirat, and other indicators may point to an overlapping of their characters as well.

The Storm God has been associated with Baal. This connection is problematic for Ugaritic connections. Baal is never pictured as sleeping with Athirat in the Ugaritic corpus. Both the Storm God of this text and Baal

are associated with violent weather, but many storm gods are known from the ancient Near East, sometimes existing side by side.¹²³ The Storm God in the Hittite myth is not named. If the writer intended to convey an Ugaritic tale, why did he not utilise the name or title of one of the chief characters?

The association of the Ishtar of the Elkunirša Myths with Anat (as many scholars suppose) is even more problematic. The name that appears in the text is written as an ideogram $dI\check{S}TAR$.¹²⁴ The connection with Anat is based on the speculation of the apparently Canaanite origin of the text, and the assumption that all the characters match Ugaritic ones. The Canaanite origin of this myth, however, has not been identified overtly as a scenario from Ugarit where Anat plays a major role.

In conclusion, we have seen that the characters of Elkunirša and Ashertu may be connected with El and Athirat of the Ugaritic Elimelek corpus. The cases for associating Baal and the Storm God or Anat and Ishtar are on less firm ground. This myth may indeed be a borrowed Canaanite story, but in the process of translation and transformation to another cultural context, we cannot assume that it remained unchanged. For our purposes, we can state that Ashertu would seem to fit the character of Athirat, but we should not use this fragmentary myth to build a hypothetical scenario to explain difficulties in the Ugaritic mythology. The remark of Otten concerning the Canaanite origin of this text should be kept in mind, 'In Form und Aufbau stimmt die Erzählung mit den sonstigen Mythen aus Boğazköy weitgehend überein.'¹²⁵

¹²³This is the case, for example, in Mari: G. Dossin, 'Le panthéon de Mari' in *Studia Mariana*, A. Parrot, ed., Leiden, 1950: 44-45; see E. Dhorme, 'Les avatars du dieu Dagon' *RHR* 138 (1950): 129-144 where the storm god characteristics of Itour-Mêr are discussed.

¹²⁴See Otten, 'Kanaanäischer Mythos': 142, and Goetze, 'El, Ashertu and the Storm-god': [519] note 5.

¹²⁵H. Otten, 'Kanaanäischer Mythos': 135.

5.C. Epigraphic South Arabian Sources

A further area which is relevant to our study of Athirat is that of Pre-Islamic South Arabia. The initial difficulty of a character study involving Old South Arabian Athirat is the scarcity of material sources. All that we know of the religion of this area has been gleaned from monumental inscriptions dating roughly from the middle of the first millennium B.C.E.¹²⁶ to the middle of the first millennium C.E. Although these inscriptions, given their often dedicatory nature, bear directly upon the religious life of the people, they do not inform us much about the character of this individual goddess.¹²⁷

In the early scholarship concerning South Arabian religion, an all-pervasive astral triad was used to make sense of the confusing profusion of divine names and bi-names.¹²⁸ This triad was thought to consist of a lunar father-god, a solar mother-goddess, and a Venus-god son; a scheme in which Athirat was generally conceived of as a solar deity. According to the secondary literature such a triad is undoubtedly extant, although no agreement has been reached as to which of the many secondary deities belong to it. Athirat is seldom attested, but when she does appear it is sometimes in association with a major deity. The primary deities of the triad are generally understood to be the major god of the individual state and his consort, with Athtar nearly always as the Venus-son. In order to

¹²⁶J. Ryckmans, 'Le panthéon de l'Arabie du Sud préislamique: Etat des problèmes et brève synthèse' *RHR* 206 (1989): 153; see also W. A. Maier, 'Aserah : *Extrabiblical Evidence*: 200; A. F. L. Beeston, 'Vorislamische Inschriften und vorislamische Sprachen des Jemen' in *Jemen*, ed. W. Daum, Innsbruck and Frankfurt, 1988: 102.

¹²⁷W. Caskel, 'Die alten semitischen Gottheiten in Arabien' in *Le Antiche Divinità Semitici* (Studi Semitici 1), S. Moscati, ed., Rome, 1958: 99.

¹²⁸See especially D. Nielsen, 'Zur altarabischen Religion' in *Handbuch der altherabischen Altertumskunde* I, D. Nielsen, ed., Copenhagen, 1927: 206-234; and D. Nielsen, *Ras Samra Mythologie und biblische Theologie* (Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 21, 4), Leipzig, 1936: 9-69.

begin to make sense of the many divine names, a short exploration of the political constitution of ancient South Arabia is necessary.

This region, located at the south-western corner of the Arabian peninsula, consisted of various co-existing nations in the first millennium. The four major states, prior to their unification under the nation Himyar in the fourth century C.E. were Ma' in, Saba, Qataban and Hadramawt.¹²⁹ These realms left inscriptions of enough variation to justify their division into the Sabaean, Minaean, Qatabanian and Hadrami dialects.¹³⁰ In the light of these political divisions, the more recent scholarship on South Arabia tends to discuss 'national deities' rather than attempting to fit all divinities into one of the characters of the stellar triad.¹³¹

Most of the inscriptional material belongs to the region of Saba.¹³² The inscriptions mentioning Athirat, however, generally occur in the realm of Qataban. The relevant texts are *RES* ¹³³ 856; 2886; 3306 A; 3534 B; 3534 bis; 3550; 3689; 3691; 3692; 3902, pl. xiii, fig. 5; 4203 (?); 4274; and 4330.¹³⁴ Also of interest is an inscription on an alabaster plaque published

¹²⁹J. Ryckmans, 'Le panthéon de l'Arabie du Sud': 153.

¹³⁰A. F. L. Beeston, *A Descriptive Grammar of Epigraphic South Arabian*, London, 1962: 6-8. See also A. F. L. Beeston, 'Vorislamische Inschriften': 102.

¹³¹J. Ryckmans, 'Le panthéon de l'Arabie du Sud': throughout; J. Ryckmans 'Die altsüdarabische Religion' in *Jemen*, W. Daum, ed., Innsbruck and Frankfurt, 1988: 111-115. Even in his review of the research on the pantheon in 1947 A. Jamme was able to review and criticise this exclusive view ('Le panthéon Sud-Arabe préislamique d'après les sources épigraphiques' *Le Muséon* 60: 57-60. G. Ryckmans noted in 1951 (*Les religions arabes préislamiques* (Bibliothèque du *Muséon* 26), Louvain: 41) 'L'hypothèse de la triade primitive exclusive de tout autre élément divin est loin d'être vérifiée.'

¹³²Beeston, *Descriptive Grammar*: 6-7; M. Höfner, 'Die vorislamischen Religionen Arabiens' in H. Gese, M. Höfner, and K. Rudolph, *Die Religionen Altsyriens, Altarabiens und der Mandäer* (Die Religionen der Menschheit 10, 2), Stuttgart, 1970: 240. See also J. C. Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic, Sabaean Dialect* (HSS 25), Chico, California, 1982.

¹³³*Répertoire d'épigraphie sémitique, publié par la Commission du Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum* (Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres), 8 vol., Paris, 1900-1968.

¹³⁴Listed according to E. Lipiński, 'The Goddess Aṭirat in Ancient Arabia, in Babylon, and in Ugarit' *OLP* 3 (1972): 101.

by A. Jamme (Jamme 852), which mentions Athirat.¹³⁵ Two or three North Arabian theophoric names may also point to the presence of Athirat. We shall examine each of these inscriptions in turn to learn what may be discerned concerning Athirat's character, and to attempt to discover if a solar nature of Athirat can be defended.

5.C.i. *RES* 856

Text 856 is a votive inscription on stone in the Qatabanian dialect. The four lines of the inscription are translated by Halévy:

1 'bd ḡ l. m' dn. ḡh	‘A] bd ḡ êl Ma' adite de Ha-
2 wf' m. ybn. ḡḡr	ufa' m et Ben-Ḥaḡr ^m
3 m. rd ḡ. l' ḡrt. t	a voué à Athrat
4 s' n. bḡtn. lwfy ¹³⁶	neuf jeunes chamelles, pour le salut. . . (?) ¹³⁷

This inscription seems to indicate that Athirat was known as a goddess in Qataban, although Maier calls this assumption into question. He notes that several of the inscriptions are ambiguous, possibly referring to an ḡrt as 'a structure'.¹³⁸ This dilemma is the same as that which faces us in the Old Testament where Asherah appears sometimes as a cultic object and sometimes as a goddess. As will be demonstrated further below, Athirat appears in some inscriptions with other divinities: this indicates that she was known as a deity. Although the vexed issue of how we are to decide

¹³⁵A. Jamme, 'A Qatabanian Dedicatory Inscription from Hajar Bin Ḥumeid' *JAOS* 75 (1955): 97-99.

¹³⁶I will follow the transliteration of Biella, *Dictionary*: throughout, with the following exception; I substitute ḡ for her x. The pronunciation of the sibilants of Old South Arabian are still uncertain; A. F. L. Beeston, 'Vorislamische Inschriften': 103.

¹³⁷As cited in *RES* II: 231-232.

¹³⁸ḡAsherah : *Extrabiblical Evidence*: 200-201.

between the goddess and a structure here remains, we stand to gain little from resolving it. If the goddess Athirat is intended, the dedication of nine young she-camels to her tells us little about her nature or character.

5.C.ii. *RES* 2886

This inscription is in the Minaean dialect, and consists of four lines with a mention of ʔ*lrt* apparently as a substantive in the construct state.¹³⁹ The inscription appears to be a decree of Ḥufnum Ṣadiq, king of Maʿ in (line 1). Following his personal introduction, the inscription reads:

3 *d* (s)ʿ *d* ʔ *l*. *k* ʔ *y*. ʔ *lrt* [.] *šw* ʿ *nyhn.w*
4 ʔ*wl*. *fl*. ʔ *ḥdh*. ʔ *wl*

By way of translation, Halévy offers 'selon. : les deux prêtres, et. . .' ¹⁴⁰ leaving ʔ*lrt* untranslated. Perhaps ʔ*lrt* is best understood as a 'sanctuary' in this context, a meaning which is attested for this word in Phoenician.¹⁴¹ 'The sanctuary of the two priests' would also be a reasonable translation. This inscription does not attest to either the name or character of the goddess.

¹³⁹*RES* V: 216-217.

¹⁴⁰As cited in *RES* V: 217.

¹⁴¹See J. C. L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions, Volume III, Phoenician Inscriptions*, Oxford, 1982: 120; *KAI* 19, volume II: page 28. See also R. S. Tomback, *A Comparative Semitic Lexicon of the Phoenician and Punic Languages* (SBL Dissertation Series 32), Missoula, Montana, 1978: 36. His translation as 'sacred grove', however, unfortunately hearkens back to the Authorised Version's translation of ʔ*srh* in Hebrew. See below on Phoenician sources.

5.C.iii. RE'S 3306

This inscription also occurs in Minaean, although it displays some peculiarity for that dialect.¹⁴² The text is divided into two columns, of which the right-hand side is the better preserved. The inscription apparently involves instructions for a hieros gamos, involving Athtar and ʔnṯ (*ht*)y, 'women'.¹⁴³ The mention of ʔṯrt is incorporated in the phrase *du-ʔṯrt* 'the one of ʔṯrt' apparently in the context of a month name. Lines 7-8 read:

7 . . . bn. bṯ. lgzz. ḏn. fṯn. ywmnt. fṯn. wmtḃtn. sḏt. ṯ^c n. ḏ ʔ ṯ
8 rt. ḏkbrh. hwf ʔ l. ḏwkl. qdmn. kbrs. . .

This is translated by Rhodokanakis, '. . . sowohl was er (vorher) verkündet hat (davon) als auch das in diesem Erlasse Festgesetzte. Das Datum dieses Erlasses und dieses Reskriptes in der 6 Dū-ṣTRat des Kabirats¹⁴⁴ des HUFṣL, Sippe UKL, in seinem 1 Kabirat; . . .' ¹⁴⁵ What we are able to learn about Athirat from this inscription is limited. It does appear that a month was called 'that of Athirat'; and there appears to be South Arabian evidence for months being named after gods for which festivals were held.¹⁴⁶ Maier believes that a divine name here is not certain.¹⁴⁷ It

¹⁴²Especially in its usage of enclitics, see Beeston, *Descriptive Grammar*: 66-67.

¹⁴³J. Ryckmans, 'Le panthéon de l'Arabie du Sud': 161.

¹⁴⁴On the office of the *kabir*, see A. F. L. Beeston, *Epigraphic South Arabian Calendars and Dating*, London, 1956: 25-35.

¹⁴⁵As cited in RE'S VI: 87-88.

¹⁴⁶Beeston, *Calendars and Dating*: 15; E. Lipiński, 'The Goddess Aṯirat': 102.

¹⁴⁷*ʔAṣerah* : *Extrabiblical Evidence*:201, although the reference to Torrey noted in his footnote (p. 206, n. 27) is based on a footnote in a privately published volume, and is beyond my verification.

is conceivable that the month could be 'that of the sanctuary' or perhaps 'that (of the region) of Athirat'; however, months named after divinities are not uncommon in ancient South Arabia.¹⁴⁸ It is of interest that whilst in Ma^ḥ in a month named for Athirat is attested, no such month name has appeared for Qataban. This may be the result of the accidents of archaeology, but what we learn from this inscription is that Athirat was known and worshipped in this region. Little detail about the nature or character of Old South Arabian Athirat is given here.

5.C.iv. *RES* 3534 B and *RES* 3550

Inscription 3534 B is in the Qatabanian dialect and treats the restoration of the temple of Wadd and Athirat.

... *wkl. mhlk. whḏṭn. byt. wdm. w ʔlrt. wmḥtn. mlkn*

'... and all the fulfilment¹⁴⁹ and he restored the temple of Wadd and Athirat and the Makhtân of the king'

Similarly *RES* 3550 treats the restoration of the temple of these two gods by Yada^ḥ ʔab Dhû-Bayyim (line 1):

... *brm. whrb. wbny. wsḥḏṭ. byt. wdm. w ʔlrt. wmḥtn. . .* (line 4)

¹⁴⁸Beeston, *Calendars and Dating*: 15.

¹⁴⁹*RES* VI: 192, *mhlk* is defined by its Arabic cognate.

' . . . Brm and Hrb. And he [Yada^c 'ab Dhú-Bayyim] built and restored¹⁵⁰ the temple of Wadd and Athirat and the Makhtân. . .'

These inscriptions have led scholars to believe that Athirat and Wadd were considered to be consorts. Once again we are confronted with the question: are deities worshipped together necessarily consorts? We have not found this necessarily to be the case in other ancient Near Eastern religions. The information from ancient South Arabia is scarce and does not permit firm conclusions.¹⁵¹ On the other hand, it is not unusual that the gods should appear with consorts. This issue is of particular importance as Wadd, with whom Athirat is here mentioned, is a moon deity. This has been the basis of the claims that Athirat is a solar goddess. The statement by *RÉS* that Athirat is a 'divinité solaire qatabanite, épouse de Wadd'¹⁵² is based on the work of Nielsen, who advocated the inclusiveness of the astral triad. Now that this triad is no longer considered to be all-embracing, the uncertainty about the character of such a scarcely attested deity as Athirat becomes prominent. We have found in our investigations above that deities mentioned together at one cultic site need not have been considered to be consorts.¹⁵³ This ambiguity remains in Old South Arabian studies. Athirat may have been considered to be the spouse of Wadd; however, their mere mention together at a temple does not prove this.

¹⁵⁰The form is a causative with the normal Qatabanian prefix *s* - (Beeston, *Descriptive Grammar*: 19); the root is therefore *ḥdġ*, 'renew, repair, make newly' (Biella, *Dictionary*: 167).

¹⁵¹J. Ryckmans, 'Le panthéon de l'Arabie du Sud': throughout.

¹⁵²*RES* VI: 192.

¹⁵³The exception to this caution is the Mesopotamian god lists, which are known to have been deliberately arranged according to divine family relationships - see above.

5.C.v. *RES* 3534 bis

This small part of a Qatabanian inscription contains a dedication to Athirat. The inscription reads:

... n. *dhwln. hr. sqny. ʔtrt.* ...

This is translated in *RES* as '... n, de Khaulân-Hûr(?) a dédié à ʔAthirat. . .'¹⁵⁴

Other than demonstrating that Athirat (or a sanctuary) received dedications, this inscription does not add to our knowledge of the goddess.

5.C.vi. *RES* 3689

This Qatabanian text deals with the taxation of the harvest. In line 5 reference is made to the offerings for ʿAmm and Athirat:

... l ʿ *šm. wdm. wbnt. m. wšftm. (l ʿ)m. w ʔ trt.* ...

This is translated by Rhodokanakis as 'davon als gesetzmäßige Abgabe zu leisten "das nicht-obligatorische Opfer" und "das Geschenk" und "das Gelübde" für (den Gott) ʿAmm und die (Göttin) ʔTRT'.¹⁵⁵

This text appears to place Athirat and ʿAmm together in the same way she was placed together with Wadd in *RES* 3534 B and 3550. This and similar inscriptions (see below) have led some scholars to see Athirat as the

¹⁵⁴*RES* VI: 192.

¹⁵⁵N. Rhodokanakis, *Qatabanische Texte zur Bodenwirtschaft* (Sitzungsberichte Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Philosophisch-historische Klasse 194:2) vol. 1, Vienna, 1919: 58.

consort of the moon god ʿAmm. ʿAmm was the national god of Qataban.¹⁵⁶ Although it is conceivable that such a scarcely attested goddess could have been perceived as the consort of two major gods, it is equally likely that she could have been worshipped with them without being their consort. Another possibility is that Wadd and ʿAmm are two manifestations of the moon god, as worshipped in different regions. The implications of these scenarios will be discussed in the conclusions.

5.C.vii. *RE'S* 3691 and *RE'S* 3692

These Qatabanian inscriptions concern the same subject matter as *RE'S* 3689 using similar terminology. Lines 4 - 5 of inscription 3691 and line 3 of inscription 3692 contain the following:

... *l' šm. wdm. wbn̄tm. wšftm. l' m. w ʾ trt*...

translated by Rhodokanakis in the same way as the preceding inscription.¹⁵⁷ It adds nothing new to our discussion of Athirat.

5.C.viii. *RE'S* 3902, pl. xiii, fig. 5, 1

This inscription is taken from the base of a statuette, and is cited by a reference number of a photograph album of a private collection in which it appears. The inscription is broken and it is in the Qatabanian dialect.

sq] ny. ʾ trt

¹⁵⁶M. Höfner, 'Die vorislamischen Religionen Arabiens': 282.

¹⁵⁷Rhodokanakis, *Qatabanische Texte*: 122, 130-131.

... *bhrbt.* ʾ
 ... ʿ *snsn.wmṣ*

This is translated in *RES* as

'... a con] sacré à ʾAthirat
 ... à Haribat...
 ... leur fondement et... 158

Once again we are left without much additional information concerning Athirat. She appears to have had a statuette dedicated to her, but this does not inform us about her character or nature.

5.C.ix. *RES* 4203

This Sabaeen (!) inscription¹⁵⁹ is part of a single mutilated line consisting of two words:

ʾ *trt. bḥtnyhn*

Perhaps this is to be translated '(to) Athirat two votive objects'.¹⁶⁰ This witnesses to Athirat's presence, but nothing more. This inscription is unusually found in the Sabaeen dialect; it is the only known reference to Athirat in that language.

¹⁵⁸*RES* VI: 372.

¹⁵⁹*RES* VII: 138.

¹⁶⁰The ending of *-nyhn* is a Minaean emphatic dual (Beeston, *Descriptive Grammar*: 32-33). The root *bḥt*, means, as an adjective 'pure', and as a noun 'unit of weight' and 'votive object' (Biella, *Dictionary*: 40).

5.C.x. *RES* 4274

RES 4274 is another Qatabanian dedicatory inscription to Athirat.

The two-line inscription reads:

. . . n. *dhwln. hr. sqny. ʔtrt*
bmh] rms. ysl. bht m

RES translates as follows:

' . . . ân, de Khawlân-Hûr a dédié à ʔAthirat
 dans] son [tem] ple de Yasil une offrande pure.'¹⁶¹

Once again, this inscription attests to Athirat's presence, but informs us little about her character or nature.

5.C.xi. *RES* 4330

This Qatabanian inscription concerns the establishment of a well by Nbṭ ʕ m (line 1), *l ʔrds. ddr ʕ t. wd ʔtrt* 'for his land "that of Dr ʕ t" and "that of Athirat"' (line 2). Such usages of the relative pronoun with a proper name to designate an area are common in Old South Arabian. What is of interest to us is that Athirat is here cited as the 'matron' of a region of Qataban. This appears to indicate that she was a relatively important figure, but it does not inform us concerning her character.

¹⁶¹*RES* VII: 175.

5.C.xii. Jamme 852

Whilst excavating the city of Hajar Bin Ḥumeid in what was formerly Qataban, the archaeologists found an alabaster plaque containing an eleven-line inscription. The inscription deals with the installation of priests, including 'procurators of Athirat':

1 *wd* [◌] *l.* *wyšrm.* *bnw.* [◌] *b* [◌] *ns.* *bnw.* *mghmm.* *šḥrw*
 2 [◌] *m.* *ry* [◌] *n.* *wššḥr.* [◌] *ḥysmy.* *nbṭ* [◌] *m.* *wlḥy* [◌] *m.* *w*
 3 *sšḥr.* *yšrm.* *bnyhwh.* *šbḥm.* *wšdqm.* *w* [◌] *bnm.* *q*
 4 *zrw.* [◌] *ṭrt.* *wsqzr.* *wd* [◌] *l.* *bnyhwh.* [◌] *šbm.* *wkl*
 5 *ybm.* *wbny.* *lḥy* [◌] *m.* *wnbṭ* [◌] *m.* *w* [◌] *mkrb.* *qzrw.* [◌]
 6 *ṭrt.* *wwd* [◌] *l.* *wyšrm.* *wšbḥm.* *wšdqm.* *rbyw.* [◌]
 7 *ṭrt.* *b* [◌] *šḥr.* *wršw.* *rbš.* *ḏnhlb.* *wd* [◌] *l.* *wšbḥm*
 8 *sqnyw.* [◌] *m.* *ry* [◌] *n.* *mšndn.* *wkl.* *šr* [◌] *s.* *bn.* *fr* [◌]
 9 *fr* [◌] *w.* *l* [◌] *m.* *rṭdw.* [◌] *m.* [◌] *wl* [*dsm.* *bn.* *m* [◌]]
 10 *ndsm.* *b* [◌] *ṭtr.* *wb.* [◌] *m.* *wb.* [◌] *m.* [*ry* [◌] *n.* *wšḥrm.* *w*]
 11 *b* [◌] *ṭrt.* *w* [◌] *lhy.t* *wd* [[◌] *m.* . . .]

Jamme translates this as follows:

1 Wadd [◌] il and Yašrum, sons of [◌]Ab[◌] anas, of [the family of] Maghûmum, priests
 2 of [◌]Amm Ray[◌] ân; --and [Wadd [◌] il] has made priests the two brothers of both of them, Nabaṭ [◌] amm and Laḥay[◌] amm, and
 3 Yašrum has made priests his sons Šabḥum and Šaduqum and [◌]Abnum, --pro-
 4 curators of [◌]Aṭirat, --and Wadd [◌] il has made procurators his two sons [◌]Ašbum and Kula-
 5 ybum and the two sons of Laḥay[◌] amm, Nabaṭ [◌] amm and [◌]Ammkarib, [as] procurators of [◌]A-
 6 ṭirat, and Wadd [◌] il and Yašrum and Šabḥum and Šaduqum [being] administrators of [◌]A-

7 *ṭirat* in ^ʾAṣḥar, and [Wadd ^ʾil] the priest of [the temple]
 Rabiš, which Wadd ^ʾil and Ṣabḥum have cleared,
 8 have dedicated to ^ʿAmm Ray^ʿ ân this inscription and all his
 due from the first-fr[uits]
 9 [that] they have collected for ^ʿAmm. They have entrusted to
 the care of ^ʿAmm Ray^ʿ ân [their] chil[d] ren [against any who
 would with]
 10 stand them. By ^ʿAṭtar and by ^ʿAmm [Ray^ʿ ân and Ṣaḥarum
 and]
 11 by ^ʾAṭirat and the gods of reconcilia[tion(?)]. . . 162

Here we find reference to 'procurators' *qzrw* and *rbyw* (both construct plurals)¹⁶³ of Athirat. It appears that Athirat is named in the third place of the closing invocation. Although the 'Ray^ʿ ân' of ^ʿAmm Ray^ʿ-ân and 'Ṣaḥarum' are reconstructed because of a break in the lower left-hand corner of the plaque, we do know that Athirat is the final deity properly named. This may be of importance as in Old South Arabian inscriptions it is generally the sun goddess who is cited in last place when the triad is named.¹⁶⁴ Unfortunately the text is broken just as the invocation begins, and does not allow us to declare with certainty that the astral triad is being invoked. This inscription does witness to a substantial cult of the goddess, perhaps indicating that her relatively scarce mention in the epigraphic sources may be due to the accidents of archaeological discovery.

¹⁶²A. Jamme, 'Qatabanian Dedicatory Inscription': 97.

¹⁶³Jamme, 'Qatabanian Dedicatory Inscription': 97-98.

¹⁶⁴Jamme, 'Le panthéon Sud-Arabe préislamique': 101.

5.C.xiii. Theophoric Names

According to E. Lipiński's study on Athirat, he states that the worship of the goddess is attested 'by two or three Thamudic personal names'.¹⁶⁵ The names to which he refers are: Bi-ʔAṭirat, Ṭur-ʔAṭirat, and perhaps M^c d-ʔṭr.¹⁶⁶ The first name was published in A. van den Branden's *Inscriptions thamoudéennes*,¹⁶⁷ the second in his *Histoire de Thamoud*.¹⁶⁸ G. Ryckmans, in *Les noms propres sud-sémitiques*, notes the divine name Athirat, but does not count the names presented above among the proper names.¹⁶⁹ The elements of the first name could be construed as b^ʔ-ṭrt, from the verb *b ʔ*, followed by a personal name *ṭrt*.¹⁷⁰ Ryckmans does not list the element Ṭur^ʔ in his enumeration, nor does he list Ṭur-ʔAṭirat as a proper name. The third name, M^c d ʔ ṭr, lacks a final *t*, and thus is probably not to be understood as referring to Athirat.

Thus two North Arabian proper names may contain the theophoric element Athirat, although this is not certain. In any case, the most we could gain from such references is a witness to Athirat in the northern kingdoms of the Arabian peninsula.

¹⁶⁵'The Goddess Aṭirat': 101.

¹⁶⁶'The Goddess Aṭirat': 101, n. 3.

¹⁶⁷(Bibliothèque du *Muséon* 25), Leuven-Heuerlé, 1950: 286.

¹⁶⁸(Publications de l'Université Libanaise, section des études historiques VI), Beyrouth, 1960: 94.

¹⁶⁹(Bibliothèque du *Muséon* 2), vol. 1, Leuven, 1934: 7.

¹⁷⁰*Noms propres*: 50, 283.

5.C.xiv. Conclusions from the Ancient South Arabian Evidence

The consensus among scholars of Epigraphic South Arabian religion still appears to support the concept of an astral triad, although its all-pervasive nature has largely been rejected. Modern scholarship tends to see national deities and minor divinities present in all of the regions. Within this civilisation, inscriptions in three of the four major dialects witness to the presence of a goddess Athirat. She is paired with two lunar gods, although her consort status with either is not certain.

If Athirat is to be considered the consort of Wadd or 'Amm, this would be another instance of a goddess bearing this name occupying the position of the spouse of a prominent god. Although such a scenario may be likely, the question arises whether being the consort of a moon god requires Athirat to be a solar goddess. Without strict adherence to the old triad hypothesis, this does not appear to be a necessary interpretation. Jamme 852 could circumstantially support the solar interpretation by the apparent place of Athirat in the closing invocation; however, the broken state of the plaque prevents this from being certain. These inscriptions do not give us enough information about Athirat to affirm that she has solar characteristics, although this remains a possibility.

5.D. Conclusions to the Chapter

The earliest references to Ashratu come from Mesopotamian sources. In origin the Mesopotamian Ashratu is likely the same figure as Ugaritic Athirat. In each separate culture, however, the goddess developed characteristics to find a place in the pantheon. Unfortunately, we are left with few sources of information on the Mesopotamian goddess. Primarily we have been able to confirm that she is the consort of Amurru; as such she is related to a mountain, or the mountain. She also appears to have been considered a voluptuous character, but this term is also used to designate the luxury of the land in the name of her temple in Babylon. That she had an active cult is amply attested by god lists and ritual texts. Her epithet *bēlit šēri* connects her with the steppe, and is probably a further indication of her origin. This title may have underworldly connections, and this may be reflected in the epithet *ekurrītum*. *Ekurrītum*, however, may equally be connected with the word for 'temple'.

The Hittite myth of Elkunirsa mentions Ashratu. She appears to have a common origin with Ugaritic Athirat in this culture as well. The myth as we have it appears to have been borrowed from a Canaanite source, but it is too brief to provide much information on Ashratu's nature or character.

The South Arabian materials witness to the presence of Athirat. This goddess was mentioned with Wadd and 'Amm, two ancient moon gods. Although we cannot be certain that she was related to them as a consort, this juxtaposition may point to her having developed solar characteristics in this region. The South Arabian Athirat is far-removed from the Ugaritic Athirat in time and distance. The cultures which knew of her adapted her to meet their needs. The area between these realms, the lands of Israel and

Judah, may have known of the goddess as well, thus a connection is possible. What may be said with certainty is that each culture that knew of Athirat/Ashratu perceived her according to their own situation. In the cultures where she appears she is understood to be related to an important deity, often a head of the local pantheon.

Chapter Six

Hebrew, Phoenician and Aramaic Epigraphic Evidence

Perhaps the most controversial pieces of evidence in the recent discussions concerning Asherah are the inscriptions from Khirbet el-Qôm and Kuntillet 'Ajrûd.¹ Here, if the goddess is mentioned, she is cited alongside Yahweh in a blessing formula written in Hebrew of the first quarter of the first millennium B.C.E.² Unfortunately, there are difficulties with the inscriptions from both sites; in the case of Khirbet el-Qôm the stone is badly scratched,³ and in the case of Kuntillet 'Ajrûd, complete editions and photographs of the inscriptions are yet to be published, and their interpretation is complicated by the drawings on the pithoi. Moreover, the inscriptions present difficulties in relation to accepted grammatical standards of classical Hebrew. These inscriptions have often been used as evidence that Asherah was considered to be the consort of Yahweh in the pre-exilic period; however, this hypothesis is still hotly debated. The studies of J. M. Hadley have carefully considered the nature

¹When citing Hebrew inscriptions in this chapter I shall utilise the numeration of G. I. Davies, *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions, Corpus and Concordance*, assisted by M. N. A. Bockmuehl, D. R. de Lacey and A. J. Poulter, Cambridge, 1991. There has been no previously published systematic numbering of the Kuntillet 'Ajrûd inscriptions. For other inscriptions I will give the numeration of both Gibson's *TSSI* and Donner and Röllig's *KAI*. (When citing Gibson, *TSSI* will be followed by the appropriate volume number. To cite his inscription numbers I shall use the form *TSSI* 2, no. 30. To cite his page numbers I shall use the form *TSSI* 2: 148. When citing Donner and Röllig, *KAI* followed simply by a number will indicate the inscription number. *KAI* followed by a number, colon and another number (*KAI* 2: 278) will indicate the volume and page numbers.)

²For the dating of the sites see: for Khirbet el-Qôm, see W. G. Dever 'Iron Age Epigraphic Material from the Area of Khirbet el-Qôm' *HUCA* 40-41 (1969-1970): 163-165; for Kuntillet 'Ajrûd see Z. Meshel 'Kuntillet 'Ajrud [*sic*] An Israelite Religious Center in Northern Sinai' *Expedition* 20 (1978): 50-54; also see his *Kuntillet 'Ajrud: a Religious Centre from the Time of the Judaean Monarchy on the Border of Sinai* (Israel Museum Catalogue 175), Jerusalem, 1978.

³Even if the proposed tree of B. Margalit ('Some Observations on the Inscription and Drawing from Khirbet el-Qôm' *VT* 39 (1989): 371-378) is present, the surface of the stone, as seen from the photographs, is badly scratched; Dever, 'Iron Age Epigraphic Material': 159.

and interpretation of these inscriptions and are a most valuable resource for this evidence.⁴ Further studies have also appeared since her dissertation, which may also aid our understanding. In this chapter I shall re-examine these inscriptions in their separate contexts to attempt to determine what they tell us about the goddess Asherah. I shall also deal with some recently discovered inscriptions from Tel Miqne which mention Asherah,⁵ as well as an Aramaic inscription which appears to refer to her.

In this chapter I shall also briefly consider the Phoenician evidence for the goddess Asherah. Included will be a discussion of the proposed reference to Asherah in the Phoenician inscription in Aramaic script from Arslan Tash in northern Syria, and an examination of inscriptions mentioning *art* as sanctuaries, one of which mentions an *art* of Ashtart. Finally, I shall examine two Aramaic inscriptions which may shed some light on this subject.

6.A. Khirbet el-Qôm

Tomb inscription 3 from Khirbet el-Qôm (Davies's number 25.003) was found shortly after having been robbed from Tomb II of that site and was subsequently published by W. Dever.⁶ On paleographic grounds, the inscription was dated to about the middle of the eighth century B.C.E. Dever translated it, very tentatively, as:

⁴J. M. Hadley, 'The Khirbet el-Qom Inscription' *VT* 37 (1987): 50-62; 'Some Drawings and Inscriptions on Two Pithoi from Kuntillet 'Ajrud' *VT* 37 (1987): 180-213; and *Yahweh's Asherah in the Light of Recent Discovery*, Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 1989: 121-201.

⁵'Cultic Inscriptions Found in Ekron', W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research, Jerusalem *BA* 53 (1990): 232.

⁶'Iron Age Epigraphic Material': 146, 158-168.

(Belonging to) ʔ Uriyahu. Be careful of his inscription!
 Blessed be ʔ Uriyahu by Yahweh.
 And cursed shall be the hand of whoever (defaces it)!
 (Written by) ʔ Oniyahu.⁷

Seven years following its publication the inscription was examined in an article by A. Lemaire, who found a mention of asherah in it.⁸ Although Dever himself later wrote that he had thought of reading the inscription with Asherah mentioned, he has not yet retranslated the Khirbet el-Qôm inscription to reflect this.⁹ This reference to Asherah/asherah was reinforced by similar inscriptions found at Kuntillet 'Ajrûd by Z. Meshel,¹⁰ and many scholars soon joined the debate over the meaning of these inscriptions.

Despite the enthusiasm for this debate, a clear reading for the Khirbet el-Qôm inscription has yet to appear. The soft rock surface on which the inscription was engraved was apparently striated before the inscription was written, the letters were carved with varying degrees of pressure, and some were inscribed more than once, causing several ghost letters.¹¹ A thorough review of the previous scholarship on this inscription is presented by Hadley.¹² I shall therefore present the previous arguments considered by Hadley only when they contribute to

⁷'Iron Age Epigraphic Material': 159.

⁸'Les inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qôm et l'asherah de Yhwh' *RB* 84 (1977): 595-608.

⁹W. Dever 'Asherah, Consort of Yahweh? New Evidence from Kuntillet 'Ajrud' *BASOR* 255 (1984): 22.

¹⁰Z. Meshel, 'כנתילת-עג' רוד - אתר מתקופת המלוכה בנבול סיני' *Qadmoniot* 9 (1976): 118-124; 'Kuntillet 'Ajrud An Israelite Religious Center': throughout.

¹¹Z. Zevit, 'The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription Mentioning a Goddess' *BASOR* 255 (1984): 39. Margalit, however, upon his examination of the stone, concluded that some of the striations were carved after the inscription ('Some Observations': 376, n. 2).

¹²*Yahweh's Asherah*: 121-142.

difficulties which still remain in the interpretation of the text. Hadley's own reading of the text is based on her personal examination of the inscription. Her reading is:

1. ʔryhw. h ʿšr. ktbh	Uriyahu the rich wrote it.
2. brk. ʔryhw. lyhw	Blessed be Uriyahu by Yahweh
3. wmšryh lʔšrth hwš ʿlh	For from his enemies by his (YHWH's) asherah he (YHWH) has saved him.
4. lʔnyhw	by Oniyahu
5. lʔšrth	and by his asherah
6. wlʔ[rth	his a[she]rah ¹³

As may be gleaned from Hadley's prolonged discussion of this inscription, many difficulties remain. Unfortunately I have not been able to examine this inscription personally; however, my scrutiny of the published photographs independently produced the same letters as read by Hadley for lines 1 - 4. The translation of lines 2 and 3 is the crux, and it is still in question. Hadley explains the difficulties in these lines as the result of 'an idiom similar to hendiadys', thus: 'if we treat these two lines as a verbal hendiadys (or at least a "compound linguistic stereotype" which has been broken up), they can be translated "Blessed be Uriyahu by Yahweh (and) by his asherah, for from his enemies he has saved him"'.¹⁴ The text, however, reads *wmšryh* before *lʔšrth hwš ʿlh*, with the conjunctive *waw* attached not to 'his asherah' but to *mšryh*. One of the persistent difficulties in dealing with this text is the supposition that the *lʔšrth* is an agent of

¹³Translation in 'The Khirbet el-Qom Inscription': 51, with her most likely renderings of the inscription in *Yahweh's Asherah*: 139.

¹⁴*Yahweh's Asherah*: 133, 134.

blessing or savaion. This difficulty was also noticed by B. Margalit (commenting on the interpretation of Miller¹⁵):

Miller, pp. 361 ff., who, while conceding that Lemaire's emendation makes for a 'smoother' reading (n. 15), objects, that 'even if there is a displacement. . . we have two essentially poetic lines creating a psalm of thanksgiving'. Notwithstanding the qualification 'essentially', this statement begs the notoriously moot question of criteria for determining poetry from prose [*sic*] in ancient Hebrew literature, and is further totally dependent on one's understanding of the term... (*l*^ʔ*šrth*). But Miller chooses to avoid this question (n. 18), as does Hadley when she labels the phrase 'a verbal juxtaposition. . . a "paired set"'. The fact remains that in Ugaritic literature, for example, one never finds Baal-Anat or El-Asherah used in synonymous parallelism. 'Fixed pairs' tend to be either verbal synonyms or two parts which together make up one whole.¹⁶

Margalit himself offers a poetic explanation which calls for hypothetical missing words, and leaves the troublesome *l*^ʔ*šrth* out of the 'upper' inscription:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. <i>ʔryhw. h ʿšr. ktbh</i> | Ur(i)yahu the rich composed it: |
| 2. <i>brk. ʔryhw. lyhwh. <ky.</i>
<i>hšl (h)w. m (kp.) ʔybyh</i> | 'Blessed is Ur(i)yahu unto YHWH-
< For he rescued him from (the hands of)
his enemies >, |
| 3. <i>wmsryh {...} hws ʿ. lh</i> | And from his foes {...} he saved him. ¹⁷ |

He believes, however, that *l*^ʔ*šrth* does belong in the 'lower' inscription, to be translated as 'his consort':

Lower {= lines 5 and 6}

[*lyhwh.*] *wl ʔ <š > rth*

[(Dedicated) to YHWH] and to his consort

¹⁵P. D. Miller, "Psalms and Inscriptions" in *Congress Volume: Vienna 1980* (SVT 32), J. A. Emerton, ed., Leiden, 1981: 311-332.

¹⁶'Some Observations': 377, n. 11.

¹⁷'Some Observations': 373.

(supralinear correction: *l'šrth*)

(Asherah).

It is unfortunate that photographs of the actual place from which this inscription was taken were not published in Dever's initial report; however, Dever did state: 'A recess in the east pillar revealed where Inscription 3 had recently been removed; the lateral dimensions and the smoothly dressed sides of the inscription fit this hole perfectly'.¹⁸ It would not appear that much room remained on the pillar for additional words or letters as required by Margalit's reconstruction. Also, Margalit separates the 'upper' and 'lower' inscriptions (lines 1-4 and 5-6, respectively), and he states that the lower inscription ought to be treated separately from the upper one. Yet when he translates the lower inscription, he inserts *lyhwh* in order that Yahweh may be paired with *l'šrth*, 'his consort'. All of this epigraphic emendation leads to considerable doubt concerning this interpretation.

W. Shea, following on the work of Hadley, has suggested a different interpretation, whilst accepting all of the letters presented above (except that he reads the *ayin* of line one as a second *aleph*).¹⁹ Taking the inscribed, downward-facing hand as integral to the understanding of the writing, Shea translates:

1. Uriyahu was the one who wrote it.
2. Blessed be Uriyahu by Yahweh,
3. And his Egyptian (servant) by his asherah, and here is his handprint:
4. (hand in sunk relief) for Oniyahu.
5. By his asherah
6. And by his a.erah²⁰

¹⁸'Iron Age Epigraphic Material': 146.

¹⁹'The Khirbet el-Qom Tomb Inscription Again' *VT* 40 (1990): 110.

²⁰'The Khirbet el-Qom Tomb Inscription': 110.

Shea understands the awkwardly placed *mšryh* as the usual Hebrew word for 'Egypt' with a gentilic ending and a pronominal suffix. He is not troubled by the Yahwistic name of the Egyptian servant of Uriyahu, Oniyahu.²¹ Shea's solution has the advantage of explaining the troublesome location of the word *wmšryh* immediately following *lyhwh*, which separates it from *šrth* (this unusual word order led Lemaire to suppose that in the darkness of the cave, the engraver mistakenly transposed the words *wmšryh* and *lšrth* ²²). His solution also frees Yahweh from the 'his asherah' since the asherah refers to Oniyahu's dedicatory object. He takes the root of *wš'lh* as *š'l* 'the palm or hollow of the hand'; and thus explains the hand carved in the rock beneath line 3.

Shea's interpretation, however, presents other difficulties. First of all, the reference to 'his Egyptian' is awkward, prompting Shea to add the unwritten word 'servant'. Furthermore, the evidence that he gives for an Egyptian bearing a Yahwistic name fails to provide any other cases of that phenomenon. He cites Jews bearing Babylonian theophoric names, Egyptian slaves bearing Semitic names, and some Asiatic slaves with Egyptian names.²³ He does not, however, provide another example of an Egyptian bearing a Yahwistic theophoric name. Another difficulty is the unanswered question of why a foreign slave is worshipping an asherah which his (Yahwistic) master mentions in the inscription. Finally, Shea's translation of *wš'lh* as 'and here is his handprint' stretches too far the root meaning of *š'l*, which is 'hollowness',²⁴ not 'hand'.

²¹The Khirbet el-Qom Tomb Inscription': 113-114.

²²A. Lemaire, 'Who or What was Yahweh's Asherah?' *BAR* 10 (1984): 44.

²³The Khirbet el-Qom Tomb Inscription': 114.

²⁴BDB: 1043.

M. O'Connor, following the transcription and translation of Zevit, attempts to explain the inscription on poetic grounds.²⁵ Lines 2 and 3, he suggests, are 'an independent verbal clause with a vocative, specifically a double-clause line with three constituents' and 'a double-clause line of four constituents',²⁶ respectively. In support of his analysis of line 2 he cites fourteen examples of Hebrew poetic lines which have the same syntactic elements in three units, although the order of the units varies. The second line of verse (line 3) he notes as being 'a less common sort' and he produces seven examples of this type with four units; again, the order of the units varies. The advantage of O'Connor's interpretation is that it accepts the text without emendation, and his examples from other Hebrew poetic verse illustrate his point well.

There are, however, difficulties in O'Connor's approach as well. He accepts Zevit's explanation of *l'šrth* as a divine name with a 'double feminization'.²⁷ This form of the name, however, is still open to Hadley's criticism of Zevit's suggestion, namely: 'Whereas his examples are all perfectly justified in themselves, there is no evidence for this double feminine on a personal name, as distinct from a place name. Rather, these should probably be taken as instances of an old ending of direction or intention, now used for the sake of poetical emphasis (GK §90 g)'.²⁸ Also, O'Connor's explanation relies on the assumption that a vocative lamed does exist in Hebrew. This assertion is still disputed, and it would be best not to utilise it to explain an unclear inscription until we are certain that it was a part of recognised Hebrew usage.

²⁵'The Poetic Inscription from Khirbet el-Qôm' *VT* 37 (1987): 224-230.

²⁶'The Poetic Inscription': 225 and 227.

²⁷'The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription': 45.

²⁸*Yahweh's Asherah*: 136. See also J. H. Tigay, *You Shall Have No Other Gods, Israelite Religion in the Light of Hebrew Inscriptions* (HSS 31), Atlanta, 1986: 29-30.

R. Hess has recently entered the debate on the question.²⁹ His translation of the inscription combines the Egyptian theory of Shea and the Asherata explanation of Zevit. He translates lines 2 and 3 as: 'Blessed be Uriyahu by Yahweh, and his Egyptian by Asherata. He has delivered him...'³⁰

As noted above, Shea's hypothesis does not sufficiently account for the difficulties in the reading 'his Egyptian', and Hess's translation is also open to the same criticism. Whilst accepting Zevit's vocalisation of Asherata, Hess adds support for this vocalisation from the El-Amarna letters which preserve 'an "a" vowel between the final two consonants'.³¹ He further argues:

The objection that there are not examples of this double feminization in feminine personal names in Biblical Hebrew is not decisive. After all, this is not a feminine personal name but rather a feminine divine name, something which is extremely rare in Hebrew texts. It is likely that this ending may preserve an ancient spelling of the name of the goddess, perhaps simply a 'frozen form' of a name.³²

The fact remains, however, that nowhere outside the inscriptions bearing this proposed emended spelling does this spelling of the name actually occur. Where the Old Testament speaks of the goddess, the name is spelled אֲשֶׁרָה. At Ugarit, the spelling ends in *-t*, not *-tah* (as there is no feminine form *-ah* in Ugaritic).³³ The name found in the newly discovered Tel Miqne inscriptions is simply *ʿsrt*.³⁴ If Asherata is a frozen form, why is it not consistently found?

²⁹R. S. Hess, 'Yahweh and His Asherah? Epigraphic Evidence for Religious Pluralism in Old Testament Times' in *One God, One Lord in a World of Religious Pluralism*, ed. A. D. Clarke and B. W. Winter, Cambridge, 1991: 23-26.

³⁰'Yahweh and His Asherah?': 24.

³¹'Yahweh and His Asherah?': 14.

³²'Yahweh and His Asherah?': 14.

³³C. Gordon, *UT*: 52-53.

³⁴'Cultic Inscriptions': 232.

This short exploration of the solutions offered for this troublesome inscription since Hadley's study highlights Margalit's point that 'no truly satisfactory sense can be made of the Upper Inscription precisely as it stands'.³⁵ I have no alternative translation to offer. Perhaps a solution would be to surrender the standard assumption that Yahweh had an asherah/Asherah. Textually considered, only the Kuntillet 'Ajrûd inscription holds these two deities together, and the understanding of that inscription (although written more clearly than that of Khirbet el-Qôm) is not perfect. Perhaps we should seek a different understanding of the word(s) *l'šrth* which fits what we know of Hebrew grammar and syntax. It may also be that the third line of the inscription actually reads differently than it has been transcribed. Until more certain sense can be made of this inscription, it should not be used to provide evidence that Yahweh had a consort in Judah.

6.B. Kuntillet 'Ajrûd

Several inscriptions were found at Kuntillet 'Ajrûd (modern Ḥorvat Teiman) in the Sinai, by Z. Meshel in the course of his excavations in 1975-1976.³⁶ Apparently this remote site was used as a stop-over or caravanserai, for the benefit of those on journeys through the Sinai desert. The assertion that the site was a sanctuary is still questioned, and Hadley's arguments against such a conclusion are cogent.³⁷ Several inscribed objects were found at the site, among them the pieces of two large pithoi, or storage jars, on which had been painted graffiti. Among the inscriptions

³⁵Some Observations': 372.

³⁶Kuntillet 'Ajrud: Israelite Religious Center': throughout.

³⁷Hadley, *Yahweh's Asherah*: 145-147, 201.

are several blessings. Since these inscriptions appear to reinforce the blessing formula of 'I bless you by Yahweh... and his asherah' proposed for the Khirbet el-Qôm inscription, many scholars have debated their significance.³⁸ Once again, Hadley's examination contains a thorough consideration of earlier discussion on these inscriptions.³⁹ I shall cite these sources only when they may shed light on our understanding of the inscription.⁵

Meshel originally read inscription 8.017,⁴⁰ from pithos A, as: 'X said to Y and to Z and to Yo'asah and ... [May you be blessed] by the Lord who guards us and his *asherah* [cella, divine representation or the like].'⁴¹ Later, however, Meshel published the inscriptions of Kuntillet 'Ajrûd with Asherah tentatively represented as a divine name, and exploring the possibility that *šmrn* could be read as 'Samaria'.⁴²

Hadley reads inscription 8.017 as: 'X says: say to Yehal[lel'el] and to Yo'asah and [to Z]: I bless you by Yahweh of Samaria and by his asherah'.⁴³ Unfortunately I have not been able to examine the Kuntillet 'Ajrûd inscriptions personally. I have scrutinised the photographs of the published portion of inscription 8.017, and my examination found no

³⁸See M. Gilula, 'ולאשרתה שמרנ ליהוה' *Shnaton* 3 (1978-79): 129-137; Z. Meshel, 'Did Yahweh have a Consort? The New Religious Inscriptions from the Sinai' *BAR* 5 (1979): 24-35; J. A. Emerton, 'New Light on Israelite Religion: The Implications of the Inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud' *ZAW* 94 (1982): 2-20; W. G. Dever, 'Recent Archaeological Confirmation of the Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel' *HS* 23 (1982): 37-43; also his 'Asherah, Consort of Yahweh? New Evidence from Kuntillet 'Ajrûd' *BASOR* 255 (1984): 21-37; M. Weinfeld, 'Kuntillet 'Ajrud Inscriptions and their Significance' *SEL* 1 (1984): 121-130; A. Lemaire, 'Date et origine des inscriptions hebraïques et phéniciennes de Kuntillet 'Ajrud' *SEL* 1 (1984): 133-143; and Hadley, 'Some Drawings and Inscriptions': 180-213.

³⁹*Yahweh's Asherah*: 143-201.

⁴⁰I am here following Davies's numbering system, *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions*: 81.

⁴¹'Kuntillet 'Ajrud An Israelite Religious Center': 52.

⁴²'Did Yahweh have a Consort?': 30-32. His reading of 'Samaria' followed Gilula's article 'ולאשרתה שמרנ ליהוה': 129-137.

⁴³Hadley 'Some Drawings and Inscriptions': 182; see also *Yahweh's Asherah*: 160.

inconsistencies with Hadley's rendering: *ʔmr. ʔ...h...k. ʔmr. lyhl wlyw ʕsh. w... brkt. ʔtkm. lyhwh. šmrn. wl ʔšrth*.⁴⁴ Hadley discusses the reconstructions proposed for the lacunae and the implications of the phrase 'Yahweh of Samaria', and particularly the relevance this phrase has for the hypothetically Canaanite nature of the city.⁴⁵ She concludes that 'asherah' in this inscription most likely refers to a wooden cultic object.⁴⁶

Inscription 8.021, from pithos B, is longer and also mentions *lʔšrth* with Yahweh:

ʔmr ʔmryw ʔmr lʔdny hšlm. ʔt brktk. lyhwh tmn wl ʔšrth. ybrk. wyšmrk wyhy ʕm. ʔd[n]y...k

Hadley translates this as:

'Amaryau says: say to my lord: Is it well with you? I bless you by Yahweh of Teman and by his asherah. May he bless you and keep you and be with my lord...'⁴⁷

She discusses the construction *hšlm. ʔt* and the implications of the phrase 'Yahweh of Teman'.⁴⁸ She also considers a third inscription (8.022), which does not mention *lʔšrth*, before debating the significance of the drawings on pithos A.⁴⁹

Since Hadley's work, Margalit has published a substantial article which deals with the Kuntillet ʕAjrûd inscriptions.⁵⁰ His hypothesis is that the inscription on pithos A cannot be understood without a consideration of the drawing which partially overlaps it. Although my approach to the

⁴⁴Hadley, *Yahweh's Asherah*: 160. I have omitted her reconstruction.

⁴⁵*Yahweh's Asherah*: 160-164.

⁴⁶*Yahweh's Asherah*: 165.

⁴⁷*Yahweh's Asherah*: 165.

⁴⁸*Yahweh's Asherah*: 165-170.

⁴⁹*Yahweh's Asherah*: 171-173.

⁵⁰B. Margalit, 'The Meaning and Significance of Asherah' *VT* 40 (1990): 274-278.

study of Asherah is primarily based on the textual sources, Margalit's discussion requires a brief look at the iconographic material at this site. Margalit states that he does 'not intend to argue here the merits of these conclusions [that the drawings illustrate the inscription] which serve as [his] point of departure.'⁵¹ The difficulty with this assertion is that perhaps the largest obstacle to a clear understanding of the inscription concerned is its relationship to the drawing.

The primary study concerning the iconography of Kuntillet 'Ajrûd, including the figures below inscription 8.017, is the article by P. Beck.⁵² Her detailed study came to the conclusion that the inscription overlapping the headdress of the left hand figure was written after the middle and left characters were drawn (see figure 1).⁵³ She concludes that the figures and the drawing are probably unrelated.⁵⁴ The inscription concerned was painted on the pithos 'using the incised shoulder lines as guidelines',⁵⁵ and in as far as I can determine from the published photographs and drawings, the inscription consists of two lines, the bottom of which overlaps the headdress of the left hand figure. Since a photograph of the full inscription has not yet been published, it is impossible to tell if the blessing was separated into two lines on account of space.

A fact that is sometimes overlooked when dealing with these drawings is that they are not high art. The analyses frequently argue for

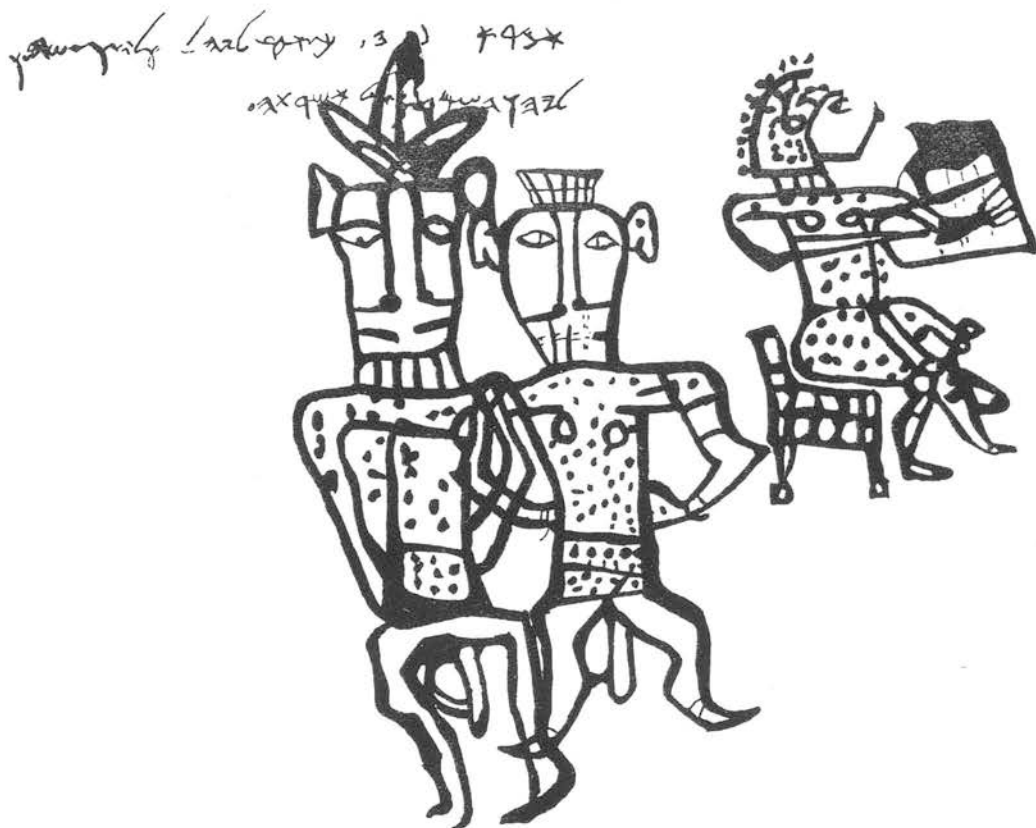
⁵¹'Meaning and Significance': 273.

⁵²'The Drawings from Ḥorvat Teiman (Kuntillet 'Ajrud)' *Tel Aviv* 9 (1982): 3-68.

⁵³'The Drawings from Ḥorvat Teiman': 46.

⁵⁴'The Drawings from Ḥorvat Teiman': 46.

⁵⁵'The Drawings from Ḥorvat Teiman': 45.



S.A.W.

Figure 1.

Inscription and Drawing from Pithos A
 Kuntillet 'Ajrūd
 (after Z. Meshel, *Expedition 20* (1978): 53)

an amount of detail for which the drawings are insufficient.⁵⁷ They are, on the whole, crudely executed and lacking in artistic detail. Given the images as they are, the centre and left hand figures can safely be understood as Bes-figures, as the careful analyses of Beck and Hadley demonstrate.⁵⁸ No other figure suggested can account for the characteristic headdress, tail (or phallus) projecting between the legs, and the posture; all of which are reminiscent of Bes. The lyre player may or may not be related to the overlapping Bes-figures. With these preliminary remarks in mind, we now turn to Margalit's hypothesis.

Margalit translates the two inscriptions discussed above as '... I have blessed you to [= "in the name of"] YHWH-of-Samaria and to his ʾŠRH ' and 'I have blessed thee to YHWH-of-Teman and to his ʾŠRH. May he bless and keep thee and may he be with my lo[r]d.'⁵⁹ He argues that only a divine persona can be the agent of blessing intended by the phrase *brk l-*, and then discusses the grammatical difficulties.⁶⁰ Margalit insists that the etymology of ʾšrh as 'follow behind (in someone's footsteps)' and therefore as denoting 'wife, consort', is necessary to understand this scene correctly.⁶¹ This is graphically represented, he suggests, by the fact that the Bes-figures (whom he takes to be Yahweh (left) and Asherah (right))

⁵⁷For example, W. G. Dever ('Asherah, Consort of Yahweh?': 23) argues that the polka dots on the right hand figure (whom he takes to be Asherah) represent 'a long wig or coiffure of tightly-twisted curls and ringlets'. This same artistic device of polka dots, he argues, may have been used to represent a figure who 'is bare-breasted but wears a long, thick tufted woolen skirt and similar shaw'. The drawing does not admit of that much detail; and as Hadley has shown, it is not certain that this figure is even a female (*Yahweh's Asherah*: 186-192).

⁵⁸Beck, 'The Drawings from Ḥorvat Teiman': 27-31; Hadley, *Yahweh's Asherah*: 175-185.

⁵⁹The Meaning and Significance of Asherah': 275.

⁶⁰The Meaning and Significance of Asherah': 276.

⁶¹The Meaning and Significance of Asherah': 277-284.

overlap, indicating that Asherah is 'following behind' Yahweh.⁶² Margalit has even discerned what he believes the artist intended to be Yahweh's footprint, into which Asherah is about to step.⁶³

There are difficulties with this general interpretation as well as with the particular details of it. First of all, Margalit is unable to produce a Hebrew nominal form ʔsrh which means 'wife' or 'consort'. His evidence from the Ugaritic texts (*KTU* 1.3.I.10-15) leaves itself open to differing interpretations (see above, chapter two), and this one instance of an Ugaritic word should not be counted as decisive for several Hebrew inscriptions or Hebrew lexicography in general. The Semitic root ʔsr does not occur with the basic meaning of 'wife, consort' unless it does so in the character of Asherah. To use 'Asherah' as evidence for this etymology is to beg the question.

Another difficulty lies in Margalit's interpretation of the drawings. He argues against the Bes interpretation of the centre and left hand figures on the grounds that they are bovine rather than leonine. The painted figures are not sufficiently detailed to decide the issue, although I see nothing in their appearance which contradicts leonine attributes. It must also be noted that nowhere does Asherah have bovine characteristics. We have not observed any connection with cows in the Ugaritic texts, nor in the Old Testament, nor in the Akkadian and South Arabian material. El's familiar epithet at Ugarit (*tr il*, 'Bull El') is to be taken metaphorically rather than literally, and thus provides no evidence for bovine characteristics of Asherah.⁶⁴ Since we have no other iconographic

⁶²'The Meaning and Significance of Asherah': 277.

⁶³'Some Observations on the Inscription': 378, n. 18.

⁶⁴El, unlike Zeus in Greek mythology, does not appear to act in the form of a bull in any of the Ugaritic texts as we have them. It is not acceptable to argue the case from the perspective of Baal's occasional appearance as a bull, as Baal is never pictured as Athirat's consort.

material (outside of the proposed interpretation of this inscription) that can certainly be interpreted as representing Yahweh, the assertion that he should appear in bovine form is without evidence.

On the larger issue of the relationship of this drawing to inscription 8.017, the following observations must be taken into consideration. Beck points out that the drawing under discussion has another inscription beside it and one below it as well.⁶⁵ Are these inscriptions also to be taken as commentary on the drawing? This issue has not been addressed by those who wish to see such a connection for inscription 8.017.⁶⁶ Secondly, if there are other inscriptions which mention Yahweh and his asherah, why are they not illustrated as well? This question may raise a moot point, but it serves to show that until all the inscriptions of the pithos are considered in relationship to the various drawings, no firm conclusion may be reached. The publications do not give a proper perspective when they do not show the location of the other inscriptions; generally, the published photographs show the three figures and part of the overlapping inscription. Finally, the inscriptions contain grammatical difficulties; thus we must be careful not to use one of several obscure drawings to 'clarify' a perplexing inscription.

Without the drawing to associate with the inscription, Margalit's main piece of evidence remains unsubstantiated.

J. Tigay, in a brief article, has recently argued for the cultic object interpretation of *šrth* at Kuntillet 'Ajrūd.⁶⁷ He cites the Tannaitic sources

⁶⁵'The Drawings from Horvat Teiman', 45.

⁶⁶This may partially be the result of the method in which the inscription and drawing have been published to date. Generally the photographs (as reflected in figure 1) detail the Bes figures overlapped by part of inscription 1. As far as I am aware, the photographs of the other inscriptions on pithos A have not yet been published.

⁶⁷J. H. Tigay, 'A Second Temple Parallel to the Blessings from Kuntillet 'Ajrūd' *IEJ* 40 (1990): 218.

as recording that the altar was addressed during Sukkoth in the second temple period with the calls 'Praise to you, O Altar' and 'To Yah and to you, O Altar!' Tigay notes that these cultic sayings occasioned surprise then, much as the 'Ajrûd inscriptions do now. He argues that this parallel demonstrates that blessings can be sought by invoking cultic objects, thus there is no need to see a goddess in the Kuntillet 'Ajrûd blessings.⁶⁸

Tigay's evidence does point to a personified cultic object being addressed and praised by worshippers, but it does not parallel the actual blessing by a cultic object at Kuntillet 'Ajrûd. It should also be noted that the parallel cited by Tigay is considerably later than the 'Ajrûd inscriptions; nevertheless, his evidence for a personified cultic object associated with Yahweh is of interest for these inscriptions.

R. Hess has also addressed the inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrûd.⁶⁹ As noted under the discussion of the Khirbet el-Qôm inscription, Hess opts for the 'double feminization' interpretation of the goddess's name in these inscriptions.⁷⁰ He observes the difficulties in understanding a cultic object being in parallel with the divine name Yahweh, noting 'that it would upset the symmetry of ideas such as might be expected in prayers and blessings',⁷¹ This leads to Hess's support of the double feminization as the best option. In this he finds support from the Tel Miqne inscription (see below). He cautiously translates the inscriptions as 'I bless you by Yahweh of Samaria and by Asherata' and 'I bless you by Yahweh of Teman and by Asherata'.⁷²

⁶⁸'Second Temple Parallel': 218.

⁶⁹'Yahweh and His Asherah? ': 11-23.

⁷⁰'Yahweh and His Asherah? ': 16.

⁷¹'Yahweh and His Asherah? ': 19.

⁷²'Yahweh and His Asherah? ': 21.

Hess does add evidence to the 'double feminization' interpretation of the inscriptions; however, this rendering is open to the criticisms of Tigay and Hadley.⁷³ Hess adds the support of the Tel Mique inscription which mentions *l'šrt*, 'to/for Asherata',⁷⁴ noting that the lack of a final he can be accounted for on the basis of variant spellings in Hebrew. The difficulty remains, however, in that no personal or divine names are attested with this 'double feminization'. The inscription from Tel Mique rather indicates that the divine name consist only of *šrt*, and the form attested in the Old Testament is *šrh*.⁷⁵ A number of scholars are now turning to the double-feminine-ending theory to account for the grammatical difficulties in these inscriptions and the one from Khirbet el-Qôm. The problem with this solution is that it suffers the same weakness as the pronominal suffix on a personal name does - neither construction is attested in the Hebrew of the Old Testament.

Another recent attempt to break the inscriptional deadlock is presented by O. Loretz.⁷⁶ On the basis of Wellhausen's well-known reconstruction of Hos. 14.9 as:

Was hat Ephraim noch mit den Götzen ?
 ich bin seine Anath und seine Aschera,
 ich bin ihm wie eine grüne Cypresse,
 bei mir findet sich seine Frucht.

⁷³Tigay, *You Shall Have No Other Gods*: 29-30; Hadley, *Yahweh's Asherah*: 136.

⁷⁴'Yahweh and His Asherah?': 19.

⁷⁵Prof. J. C. L. Gibson has indicated to me that the Tel Mique inscription simply may be the older spelling of the name with the archaic feminine ending found in Ugaritic, Phoenician and occasionally in Hebrew.

⁷⁶'Anat-Aschera (Hos 14,9) und die Inschriften von Kuntillet 'Ajrud' *SEL* 6 (1989): 57-65.

Loretz finds a parallel to the use of a pronominal suffix on the divine names Anat and Asherah.⁷⁷ He notes that Wellhausen's hypothesis has not found a wide following; nevertheless it explains the verse better than other interpretations on 'kolometrisch' grounds.⁷⁸ If Wellhausen's proposal were to be accepted, then the objection to a divine name with a suffix holds no weight.

Loretz's argumentation is well-established; given the premise that Hos. 14.9 reads 'his Anat and his Asherah', there is no trouble in seeing the expression 'Yahweh and his Asherah' at Kuntillet 'Ajrûd. The difficulty is that the reconstruction of Hos. 14.9 is debated, and no consensus has been reached. Also, a grammatical rule should not be based on an emendation. Even if Asherah were mentioned in Hos. 14.9, this would not provide direct evidence that she was to be connected with Yahweh, which the evidence at Kuntillet 'Ajrûd would seem to do.

These inscriptions present us with ambiguities of translation. The actual expression of 'Yahweh of GN' is unparalleled in Hebrew, and at Kuntillet 'Ajrûd the blessings which mention *l'šrth* always add a geographical name after 'Yahweh'.⁷⁹ Meshel's most complete publication of the Kuntillet 'Ajrûd inscriptions (found in Israel Museum Catalogue 175) records inscriptions found at this site which mention Yahweh but do not have a geographical name following his name.⁸⁰ Meshel cites the inscription (8.011) engraved on a large stone bowl: *l'bdyw bn' dnh brk h'lyhw* '(Belonging) to 'Obadyau son of 'Adnah, may he be blessed by

⁷⁷'Anat-Aschera (Hos 14,9)': 61.

⁷⁸'Anat-Aschera (Hos 14,9)': 59.

⁷⁹J. A. Emerton, 'New Light on Israelite Religion': 2-20.

⁸⁰*Kuntillet 'Ajrud: The Inscriptions* (this catalogue has no page numbers). See also Davies, *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions*: 80-81.

Yahwe(h)',⁸¹ and Hadley refers to a third inscription (8.022) which reads *kl ḏšr yš ḏl m ḏš ḥnn... wntn lh yhw klbbh* 'Whatever he asks from a man, may it be favoured...and let Yahw(eh) give unto him as he wishes (according to his heart)',⁸² This is a curious dichotomy: when *l ḏšrth* is mentioned the geographical name follows Yahweh, but Yahweh occurs without the geographical name in other inscriptions. It seems as though the references to the asherah of Yahweh are geographically bound.

As Teman apparently indicates a region of Edom,⁸³ it is of interest that these inscriptions mention Yahweh as being known in both Samaria and Teman, in the north and south. They also attest the presence of 'his asherah' in these two locations as well. As Hadley has noted, the attribution of Yahweh to Samaria casts considerable doubt on the city being regarded as a completely Canaanite city-state.⁸⁴ The reference to Yahweh of Teman recalls Isa. 63.1 ('Who is this coming from Edom, with red garments from Bozrah') and Hab. 3.3 ('God [Eloah] comes from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran').⁸⁵ Both of these verses deal with the wrath of God when he comes from Edom or Teman. 'Teman' can also designate 'south',⁸⁶ but in the light of the reference to Yahweh of Samaria, it is probably best to understand the reference in this inscription likewise to be to a specific area.

In the study of these inscriptions, the category of the blessing referred to may assist in understanding the invocations. C. Mitchell has recently published an up-to-date monograph on the subject of *brk*, 'to

⁸¹'Did Yahweh have a Consort?': 32.

⁸²*Yahweh's Asherah*: 171.

⁸³Emerton, 'New Light on Israelite Religion': 9-13.

⁸⁴Hadley, *Yahweh's Asherah*: 162-163.

⁸⁵Weinfeld, 'Kuntillet 'Ajrud Inscriptions': 125.

⁸⁶BDB: 412b.

bless'.⁸⁷ Several points in his study are of interest to our investigation. The first item of interest concerns the agents of blessings. Margalit has suggested that only divine personae are invoked in the blessing formula *brk l-*.⁸⁸ Although not necessarily employing this formula, Mitchell's study refers to non-divine agents of blessing such as Abraham (Gen. 12.2), the ark of the covenant (2 Sam. 6.11), and the loins of the needy (Job 31.20).⁸⁹ As he notes, there is no question but that God is the source of the blessings, but in various circumstances even inanimate objects may be used as agents of blessing. Mitchell also delineates the various uses of blessings in his chapter, 'Man blessing man'. Some of these uses are priestly blessings, prayers for blessings, greetings and farewells, and thanksgiving benedictions. He establishes that *brk* can be used to indicate greetings of the pious or those who wish to appear pious.⁹⁰ In these instances, 'greetings and farewells are social customs that usually have little religious value'.⁹¹ Comparable modern customs may be the use of the phrase 'good-bye'⁹² or saying 'God bless you' following a sneeze. These phrases invoke the language of divine blessing, but they have become simple social conventions. The question of importance here is: into which category of blessing do the Kuntillet 'Ajrûd inscriptions fit? Are they indicative of a religious society at the site which included priests? Are they thanksgiving benedictions for a safe journey? Are they merely greetings? The difficulty is that a context is required to differentiate between these various forms of blessing. The Old Testament, which Mitchell utilises as the

⁸⁷C. W. Mitchell, *The Meaning of brk 'to Bless' in the Old Testament* (SBLDS 95), Atlanta, 1987.

⁸⁸The Meaning and Significance of Asherah': 276.

⁸⁹*The Meaning of brk*: 30, 76, 115.

⁹⁰*The Meaning of brk*: 106-110.

⁹¹*The Meaning of brk*: 106-107.

⁹²Derived from Middle English 'God be with ye'.

basis for his study, often provides the vital clues. At Kuntillet 'Ajrûd, we are left with only the inscriptions and artifacts to help us to determine their meaning. Since Mitchell has demonstrated these various usages of *brk* formulae, caution must be employed if we are seeking what these inscriptions tell us about ancient Israelite religion. If they are mere greetings, they may imply no more about the religion of Israel than 'God bless you' does about the religion of Britain; namely they merely cite to whom the people appealed for blessings. If *l'šrth* in these inscriptions refers to a cultic object or a shrine, we may be able to infer that priests and cultic practices attended it, but it offers no details about the character of the religion.

A third point raised by Mitchell which is of interest to this study is that *bārûk* and *ʾašrê* are synonymous.⁹³ Koch noted this point whilst discussing the presence of Asherah in the Old Testament:

Bemerkenswert an den Stellen ist die Anbindung an das Verb *brk* in drei Fällen. Da der Segen im Alten Testament mit einer durch *ʾašrê* eingeleiteten Seligpreisung in Beziehung steht, legt sich nahe, daß die Israeliten *ʾašerā* mit diesem Lexem 'volksetymologisch' zusammengebracht haben, *ʾašerā* also als eine Art 'Kraft zur Glückseligkeit' angesehen haben.⁹⁴

The noun רשׁת occurs only in plural or suffixed forms in the Old Testament.⁹⁵ The gender of the noun appears to be masculine, thus eliminating the possibility that *l'šrth* of the 'Ajrûd and el-Qôm inscriptions is a form of this word. Since all of these inscriptions employ the use of the word *brk*, it may be considered a possibility that *ʾašrth* refers to a cultic object admitting of a word play with the synonymous *brk*.

⁹³*The Meaning of brk*: 51-52, 180-181.

⁹⁴K. Koch, 'Aschera als Himmelskönigin in Jerusalem' *UF* 20 (1988): 100.

⁹⁵BDB: 80-81.

The inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrûd provide the discussion of Asherah with evidence dating from the monarchic period. If asherah in these inscriptions represents a goddess, then we have a grammatical difficulty with the pronominal suffix appended to her name. If *l'šrth* refers to a cultic object, the parallelism strikes us as unusual. The dilemma is demonstrated by the difference in opinion by two opposing schools of thought. Both have considered the Kuntillet 'Ajrûd inscriptions and come to differing conclusions. J. Emerton's position demonstrates one school's thought: 'the use of a suffix with a personal name is not in accordance with Hebrew idiom as far as we know it, and it is unwise to interpret the newly-found inscriptions in such a way unless there is no satisfactory alternative'.⁹⁶ Hess concurs; 'No one denies that exceptions to any grammatical rule can appear, but the best interpretation should be the one which follows the conventions of the language in which the text is written with a minimum of departures'.⁹⁷ D. N. Freedman, representing the other school, suggests: 'I believe the way to approach a strange grammatical construction is not by invoking a rule that somebody invented in the nineteenth century that says it is impossible but rather by investigating the possible reasons for such an unusual arrangement'.⁹⁸ This view is put even more strongly by Loretz, 'Eine Berufung auf eine hebräische Syntax der zensurierten biblischen Texte dürfte kaum der richtige Ansatzpunkt für die Klärung dieser Frage sein'.⁹⁹ Our knowledge of classical Hebrew comes primarily from the corpus of the Old Testament itself. The possibilities of adding to this knowledge are slim if we do not admit the

⁹⁶'New Light on Israelite Religion': 14-15.

⁹⁷'Yahweh and His Asherah?': 16.

⁹⁸D. N. Freedman, 'Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah' *BA* 50 (1987): 247.

⁹⁹'Anat-Ascherah (Hos 14,9)': 61.

understanding gained from inscriptions, which we have in autograph form, dating from the time when the original documents from the Old Testament were being written. Even GK relies on the Moabite Stone and other extra-biblical sources to explain what occurs in Hebrew.

Our interpretation of these inscriptions should rely on their context, but it is lacking. Considering Tigay's second temple parallel, and Mitchell's indication that the ark of the covenant could be used as an agent of blessing, we should consider the possibility of asherah in these inscriptions as referring to a cultic object. Neither the altar nor the ark were invoked for blessings, but the altar was praised and the ark dispensed God's blessings. These hints may provide a clue as to the meaning of these blessings. In any case, we gain little in our understanding of Asherah's character in the present state of scholarship concerning the Kuntillet 'Ajrūd inscriptions.

6.C. Tel Miqne

Some recently unearthed inscriptions from Tel Miqne (Ekron) have added further textual material to the discussion of Asherah. According to the preliminary reports, fifteen inscriptions have been found, some of which mention 'Asherat'.¹⁰⁰ The published photograph to which I have access clearly reads *l'srt*.¹⁰¹ This inscription attests to the presence of a goddess Asherat in Ekron of the seventh century. The language of the inscriptions is not yet precisely known, although they may be read with a

¹⁰⁰'Cultic Inscriptions': 232; S. Gitin, 'Ekron of the Philistines Part II: Olive-Oil Suppliers to the World' *BAR* 16 (1990): 59, n. 18.

¹⁰¹W. F. Albright Institute, 'Cultic Inscriptions': 232. Also, S. B. Parker, in a private communication of 31 January 1992, comments on seeing a slide of one of these inscriptions: 'It was plain and unambiguous: *qds' l'srt*.'

minimum of difficulty.¹⁰² Was Asherat worshipped in one of the Philistine capitals? The published information is too scanty to provide much information at this point, but further research of the materials may prove to be of importance.¹⁰³

6.D. Arslan Tash (TSSI 3, no. 23 = KAI 27)

The plaque bearing an inscription in Phoenician found at Arslan Tash¹⁰⁴ has been used to support a reference to Asherah at that site. The small plaque appears to be a seventh century apotropaic device against night demons. The plaque portrays a sphinx and a she-wolf on the obverse, and a warrior pictured in Assyrian style on the reverse. The inscription was engraved round the figures, and separate inscriptions were engraved on the actual figures themselves. Both the language and

¹⁰²W. F. Albright Institute, 'Cultic Inscriptions': 232.

¹⁰³This find is also of interest to the Kuntillet 'Ajrūd inscriptions. Some of the clay of which 'Ajrūd pottery was made may have come from the Tel Miqne or Ashdod areas (J. Gunneweg, I. Perlman and Z. Meshel, 'The Origin of the Pottery of Kuntillet 'Ajrūd' *IEJ* 35 (1985): 280). The composition of the clay of the pithoi with the inscriptions and their typology show their provenance to have been Jerusalem (pages 272, 275). What is of interest is that the pottery possibly indicates a connection between Tel Miqne and Kuntillet 'Ajrūd. To assume a direct connection would be premature, as the history of the pots from the southern coastal region is unknown prior to their resting place at Kuntillet 'Ajrūd. The common use of the word *ʾšrt* at both locations should be noted.

¹⁰⁴Le Comte du Mesnil du Buisson, 'Une tablette magique de la région du moyen Euphrate' in *Mélanges syriens offerts à Monsieur René Dussaud*, vol. 1, Paris, 1939: 421-434; W. F. Albright, 'An Aramaean Magical Text in Hebrew from the Seventh Century B.C.' *BASOR* 76 (1939): 5-11; H. Torczyner, 'A Hebrew Incantation against Night-Demons from Biblical Times' *JNES* 6 (1947): 18-29; T. H. Gaster, 'The Magic Inscription from Arslan Tash' *JNES* 6 (1947): 186-188; F. M. Cross, Jr. and R. J. Saley, 'Phoenician Incantations on a Plaque of the Seventh Century B.C. from Arslan Tash in Upper Syria' *BASOR* 197 (1970): 42-49; Z. Zevit, 'A Phoenician Inscription and Biblical Covenant Theology' *IEJ* 27 (1977): 110-118; S. D. Sperling, 'An Arslan Tash Incantation: Interpretations and Implications' *HUCA* 53 (1982): 1-10; J. C. L. Gibson, *TSSI* 3: 78-88; W. A. Maier, *ʾAšerah: Extrabiblical Evidence* (HSM 37), Atlanta, 1986: 173-175; ^{and} W. Louie, *The Meaning, Characteristics and Role of Asherah in Old Testament Idolatry in Light of Extra-Biblical Evidence*, Th. D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1988: 92-97.

translation of the inscription are difficult, and I shall not attempt a full translation here.

Lines 1-8 of the inscription name the offensive demons and pronounce that they are not to enter where the protector enters; on this point there is a consensus. The proposed reading of 'Asherah' appears in line 10, as the maker of a covenant. In line 14 Baal is mentioned, and Horon in line 16. The question which concerns us is whether or not Asherah is actually mentioned.

Albright was the first to suggest that Asher(at?) was to be read for ʔšr in line 10. He read lines 8-11 as:

<i>...k (k ?)</i>	...(for?)
<i>rt.ln.ʔlt</i>	the goddess of eternity, Asher(at?)
<i>ʕlm ʔšr (t ?). krt</i>	hath made a covenant with us, hath made a covenant with us,
<i>ln.wkl bn ʔlm</i>	and (so have?) all the gods ¹⁰⁵

He explained that the final *t* of Asherat must have dropped out 'because of the proximity of other sequences of the letters *r-t*'.¹⁰⁶ The identity with Asherah was based on his reading 'the goddess of eternity', who was the wife of El, the 'father of years'.

Although explaining ʔšr in a different way, F. M. Cross and R. Saley followed Albright's suggestion of considering Asherah as the goddess invoked.¹⁰⁷ Reading the same consonants as Albright they translated the lines as:

The Eternal One has made a covenant with us,

¹⁰⁵'An Amaraean Magical Text': 8.

¹⁰⁶'An Amaraean Magical Text': 8, n. 16.

¹⁰⁷'Phoenician Incantations on a Plaque': 44-45.

They explained the form ʔšr as an unusual spelling for ʔAširo , stating 'Usually the form in Phoenician is ʔAširt '.¹⁰⁹ This is an interesting assertion since Asherah's name is otherwise unattested in Phoenician inscriptions.¹¹⁰ They are followed in reading Asherah here by Maier.¹¹¹

The reading Asherah, however, is not universally accepted. Z. Zevit has offered cogent reasons for not accepting the reference to Asherah. He notes that as Arslan Tash was an Assyrian administrative centre at the period of the inscription, the invocation of Aššur is not unusual.

Furthermore, there are linguistic reasons for not reading Asherah:

In the dialect of this inscription, final *at* did not become *a* as in Hebrew. Thus, Phoenician ʔlt , 'covenant', may be contrasted to its Hebrew etymological equivalent ʔlh (= ʔālā < *ʔalat). Under these circumstances, the Phoenician equivalent of the name which occurs in Hebrew orthography as ʔšrh (= ʔāšērā) should have appeared as ʔšrt , as Albright realized when he suggested the emendment of the inscription.¹¹²

S. Sperling also reads the text as it stands and notes that Aššur here is to be explained as the displacer of an originally Phoenician god. He notes that Aššur displaced Marduk in the Assyrian version of Enuma Elish.¹¹³ H. Donner and W. Röllig, although noting the unusual reference to Aššur , also find difficulties with the rendering ʔšrt .¹¹⁴ J. C. L. Gibson also reads Aššur

108'Phoenician Incantations on a Plaque': 45.

109'Phoenician Incantations on a Plaque': 45, n. 17.

110Gibson, *TSSI* 3: 85.

111 ʔAšerah : *Extrabiblical Evidence*: 174.

112'A Phoenician Inscription': 115.

113'An Arslan Tash Incantation': 7.

114*KAI* 2: 45.

here, and understands the reference as 'an act of deference towards the Assyrian imperial power'.¹¹⁵

I believe that we stand on more solid ground without emendation of the text as it stands. The only way to see Asherah here is to posit a scribal error. In an area strongly influenced by Assyrian rule, it is certainly not unexpected that ^ṽAssūr, the Assyrian national god, should be invoked. As the theology of that period reflected in the Moabite stone appears to indicate, the god of the victorious army was the victorious god.¹¹⁶ If ^ṽAssūr had overcome the local gods of Arslan Tash, surely he could have been invoked against night demons.

6.E. Phoenician Inscriptions Mentioning ʾšrt

Without the evidence of the Arslan Tash inscription, the goddess Asherah is not attested to date in any Phoenician inscriptions. The word ʾšrt does, however, occur in Phoenician with the meaning of 'shrine' or 'sanctuary'. The first such reference is in the Umm El-ʿAmed inscription (number iv: also known as the Maʿṣūb inscription = *TSSI* 3, no. 31 = *KAI* 19). This inscription was engraved on a stone plaque and dates from 222 B.C.E. It was purchased at Maʿṣūb, although it was originally from Umm El-ʿAmed.¹¹⁷ Line 4 of the inscription reads: *l ʿšrt b ʾšrt ʾl ḥmn* 'to Ashtart in the shrine of El Ḥmn'. A divine name for ʾšrt in this context would be

¹¹⁵*TSSI* 3: 85.

¹¹⁶G. L. Mattingly, 'Moabite Religion and the Meshaʿ Inscription' in *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab* (ABS 2), A. Dearman, ed., Atlanta, 1989: 232-234.

¹¹⁷Gibson, *TSSI* 3: 118.

meaningless. This inscription simply commemorates the addition of a portico to the shrine (^všrt) which was dedicated to El Ḥmn.¹¹⁸

A second example of this usage of ^všrt occurs in an inscription published by M. Dothan in 1985.¹¹⁹ This inscription was written in ink on a discarded pottery sherd and it dates to the Persian period: 'the fifth century B.C.E., more specifically to the first half of that century and probably to its early part'.¹²⁰ The subject matter apparently concerns gifts to be given to the overseer of a shrine (^všrt). Lines 1-2 of this seven-line inscription read:

bdt lbn ḥrs ʿa ytn ʿgn k By order: to the guild of (metal?) artisans; they
 shall give a valuable basin
bd lslt ʿs ʿl ʿsrt glnm to slt, the overseer of the shrine(s); (likewise
 they shall give) metal cups
 (golden?)¹²¹

P. K. McCarter has demonstrated by comparison with Hebrew titles that the office mentioned here is that of an overseer of the shrine.¹²² Since the objects listed appear to have been intended for use in a shrine or sanctuary, there is no reason to call this interpretation into question.

One final Phoenician inscription should be considered in this section. The Pyrgi inscription (*TSSI* 3, no. 42 = *KAI* 277) was found in Italy and consists of a 'bilingual'¹²³ Phoenician-Etruscan dedication written on

¹¹⁸See R. S. Tomback, *A Comparative Semitic Lexicon of the Phoenician and Punic Languages* (SBLDS 32), Missoula, Montana, 1978: 36, and P. K. McCarter, 'Aspects of the Religion of the Israelite Monarchy: Biblical and Epigraphic Data' in *Ancient Israelite Religion, Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, P.D. Miller, P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride, eds., Philadelphia, 1987: 145.

¹¹⁹A Phoenician Inscription from 'Akko' *IEJ* 35 (1985): 81-94.

¹²⁰Dothan, 'Phoenician Inscription': 92.

¹²¹The transcription and translation are those of Dothan, 'Phoenician Inscription': 83.

¹²²'Aspects of the Religion': 145. See also Dothan, 'Phoenician Inscription': 85.

¹²³Gibson (*TSSI* 3: 151) observes that from the rendering of the only partially understood Etruscan texts, the three leaves are not exact translations of each other. I use 'bilingual' here in the sense of literally 'written in two languages'.

gold lamina. It dates from the fourth to the fifth centuries B.C.E. The inscription is a dedication of a holy place ($\text{ʔšr } qdš$) to Ashtart. Lines 1-3 read:

$lrbt l \text{ ʔšrt } \text{ʔšr } qdš$	To Lady Ashtart this holy place (is dedicated) ¹²⁴
$\text{ʔz } \text{ʔš } p \text{ ʕl } w \text{ ʔš } ytn$	which was made and which was given (by)
$tbry \text{ ʔ } wlns \text{ mlk. . .}$	Tbry ʔ Wlns, king . . .

In both *TSSI* ¹²⁵ and *KAI* ¹²⁶ it is noted that the Etruscan version names Ashtart as *Unialastres* 'Juno-Ashtart'. That a place is being referred to in this inscription is witnessed by the use of the verbs $p \text{ ʕl}$ 'to do, make'¹²⁷ in line 2, and $bntw$ 'I built it' or 'he built it' (from bny 'to build'¹²⁸) in lines 5-6.

We have evidence, therefore, that $\text{ʔšr } (t)$ denotes 'shrine' in Phoenician.

6.F. Tema (*TSSI* 2, no. 30 = *KAI* 228)

An Aramaic inscription from Tema also contains a proposed reference to Asherah.¹²⁹ This inscription was found on a stele in 1880, and dates from the mid-fifth century B.C.E.¹³⁰ The subject matter concerns the establishment of a new cult under the supervision of a priest named Šlmšzb. The gods of relevant places are cited in lines 2-3 and 16 as Šlm of

¹²⁴Following the suggested meaning of Donner and Röllig, *KAI* 2: 331.

¹²⁵Vol. 3: 154.

¹²⁶Vol. 2: 331.

¹²⁷Tomback, *Comparative Semitic Lexicon* : 267.

¹²⁸Tomback, *Comparative Semitic Lexicon* : 49.

¹²⁹E. Lipiński, 'The Goddess Aīrat in Ancient Arabia, in Babylon, and in Ugarit' *OLP* 3 (1972): 101; Louie, *The Meaning, Characteristics and Role of Asherah*: 89-91.

¹³⁰Gibson, *TSSI* 2: 148; *KAI* 2: 278.

Mḥrm, Šngl³¹, and 'šyr³¹.¹³¹ The spelling of the name of the third deity led to the hypothesis that Asherah was intended here, and this was supported by the plene spelling of her name in the Old Testament. In both occurrences of the name, however, Gibson has indicated that the *r* is an uncertain letter.¹³²

S. Dalley has recently studied the nature of the god Ṣalmu mentioned in this inscription.¹³³ According to a new stele discovered at Tema, the names of the main deities listed are Šngl and 'šym³.¹³⁴ She cites the evidence of the epigrapher A. Livingstone, who worked at the dig.¹³⁵ Livingstone notes:

It can be seen from photographs of the previously discovered Taimā³ stele. . . that the fourth letter in the name previously transliterated 'šyr³ is badly damaged. The present text mentions a deity 'šym³ with all letters clear, and it is certain that 'šyr³ in the previously known text should be corrected to 'šym³.¹³⁶

If this new information is taken into account, then Asherah does not appear in this inscription.

6.G. Sefire I,B

One final Aramaic inscription should be considered here. The inscription entitled Sefire I is engraved on a stele, the pieces of which

¹³¹Gibson, *TSSI* 2: 150; *KAI* 2: 278.

¹³²*TSSI* 2: 149.

¹³³S. Dalley, 'The God Ṣalmu and the Winged Disk' *Iraq* 48 (1986): 85-101. I am grateful to Dr. Dalley for providing me with an offprint of this article, and thus drawing my attention to this reference.

¹³⁴'The God Ṣalmu': 85-86. For further discussion see also B. Aggoula, 'Studia Aramaica II' *Syria* 62 (1985): 61-76, especially page 70.

¹³⁵A. Livingstone, B. Spaie, M. Ibrahim, M. Kamal, and S. Taimani, 'Taimā³: Recent Soundings and New Inscribed Material 1402 AH - 1982 AD' *Atlat* 7 1988: 111.

¹³⁶'Taimā³: Recent Soundings': 111.

were acquired in Sefire.¹³⁷ The stele is dated to the middle of the eighth century B.C.E., and it is inscribed on three sides. The text concerns a treaty between Bar-Ga'yā, king of Katk and Mati' - 'El, king of Arpad. The inscription is of interest to us as it attests to an Aramaic use of ʔšrt as 'sanctuary'. Side B extols the firmness of the treaty between the gods of the cities. Unfortunately this face of the stele is damaged. Line 11 reads: '[All the gods will guard the h]ouse of Gūš and its people with their sanctuaries (ʔšrthm)'.¹³⁸ This meaning of 'shrine' for ʔšrt thus occurs in Phoenician and Aramaic. This meaning is also attested in Akkadian.¹³⁹

6.H. Conclusions

We have seen that in the inscriptions from Arslan Tash (*TSSI* 3, no. 23 = *KAI* 27) and Tema (*TSSI* 2, no. 30 = *KAI* 228) there is no reason to find reference to Asherah. The interpretation of the name ʔšr as Aššur corresponds to what we know to have been the situation of Arslan Tash in the seventh century; also we have no other attested forms of the name Asherah without a feminine ending. At Tema new evidence has demonstrated that the divine name there is spelled ʔšym ʔ, and there is no reference to Asherah.

The inscriptions from Khirbet el-Qôm and Kuntillet 'Ajrûd pose a dilemma. In the light of the Kuntillet 'Ajrûd inscriptions, the reading of the tomb inscription from Khirbet el-Qôm may be seen to refer to Yahweh and his asherah, but we cannot declare this with certainty. The inscription

¹³⁷See Gibson, *TSSI* 2: 18-27 for information on the Sefire inscriptions.

¹³⁸Translation of E. Lipiński, *Studies in Aramaic Inscriptions and Onomastics I* (*Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 1), Leuven, 1975: 51. *KAI* 222 marks the *r* and the *h* of ʔšrthm as uncertain.

¹³⁹For the Akkadian evidence see *CAD* A, vol. 1, part 2.

from Khirbet el-Qôm is damaged, and its reconstructed message must remain hypothetical.

The inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrûd are perplexing. The inscriptions appear to read clearly 'I bless you by Yahweh of Samaria and by his asherah' and 'I bless you by Yahweh of Teman and by his asherah'. Classical Hebrew grammar, as we know it, does not allow a pronomial suffix to be appended to a proper noun. Is the reluctance to modify our understanding of Hebrew based on the implications of these inscriptions, or are the grammatical rules of Hebrew well enough established to insist that another interpretation be found? Does the nature of blessings allow for a cultic object to be invoked? The issue of the category of blessings must also enter the question. What kind of blessing is intended by the phrase *brk lyhwh?* This must be taken into account before considering the 'Ajrûd evidence as formative for our knowledge of Israelite religion. If the graffiti are priestly blessings they indicate a special importance for the site where they were found. If they are merely greetings, then their religious value may have been overestimated. I suggest that further study is needed. Other epigraphic sources need to be explored before Asherah's role (or presence) in the epigraphic material can be clarified.

In this study I have examined the primary source materials concerning Athirat in the first two millennia B.C.E. Her name occurs in several cultural spheres within the ancient Near East. My approach has been to consider the goddess within the separate cultural contexts within which she appears. Since Athirat appears most clearly in the Ugaritic tablets, I understand this to be the primary locus of our information about her. In the course of this study it has become obvious that in different cultural contexts, the goddess developed features appropriate to her role in the 'receptor culture'. My method of considering the references separately was partially in response to the past studies on 'Asherah'. The method of understanding this goddess has frequently been to gather the information from diverse sources and to compile it into a dossier on Asherah. This was a necessary step to initiate studies on the goddess. I believe it is now time to consider the pieces of the puzzle individually, and to see if they actually fit together.

After 'Asherah studies' had progressed a few decades following the discovery of Ugarit, K.-H. Bernhardt cautioned:

Wir haben jedenfalls im phönikisch-kanaanäischen Raum mit einer Fülle von lokalen Göttersystemen und entsprechenden Variationen in den Mythen zu rechnen - eine Fülle, die ungefähr dem politischen Bild der Zersplitterung in zahlreiche Stadtstaaten entsprochen haben mag. Man könnte nun einwenden, daß bei Göttern gleichen Namens und gleicher Funktion an verschiedenen Kultorten die Unterschiede so erheblich nicht gewesen sein können.¹

¹'Aschera in Ugarit und im Alten Testament' *MIO* 13 (1967): 168. See also K. Koch, 'Aschera als Himmelskönigin in Jerusalem' *UF* 20 (1988): 106-107.

It is in the spirit of this caution that I have proceeded. Unlike Bernhardt, however, I do not believe that it is possible to separate completely the references to Athirat and Asherah. The various 'Asherah' figures appear to have a common origin, and it is within their different cultural developments that we begin to observe the distinctions. With the distinction of individual states of the ancient Near East in mind, I have explored the information concerning Athirat.

The Ugaritic mythological tablets of Elimelek are the most important source for gleaning an understanding of the nature and character of Athirat. The conclusions drawn from this cultural sphere permit the comparison of the nature and character of other ancient Near Eastern goddesses sharing Athirat's name. The Ugaritic texts portray Athirat as the mother of the gods and as the wet nurse of royal heirs. These two functions appear to be aspects of her role as the *rabttu*, the 'queen mother' who is responsible for bearing and designating the heir to the throne. In the case of Keret's son Yaššib, where Athirat is not the actual mother to the heir, she legitimates the heir by suckling him. In the Ugaritic myths, Athirat's character reflects facets of earthly women's lives. In this aspect her name occurs in parallelism with *att*, 'woman'.

Athirat's status is evident in her relationship with other gods. She is the consort of El, the head of the pantheon. The gods are her children, and they must entreat her for the sanction of El. Athirat is related in some way to the sea, as is evident from her title *rbt att ym*. The precise nature of this relationship is not detailed by the texts as we have them. Yam is the 'sea god' of Ugarit, thus his domain is probably not encroached upon by that of Athirat.

These are the characteristics of Athirat as presented by the Ugaritic mythological texts. The ritual texts examined in chapter three appear to

confirm the maternal aspects of Athirat; however, they do not add further characteristics to this picture.

In the Old Testament grammatical difficulties attend nearly every reference to אֲשֶׁרָה. These difficulties appear in the form of the word אֲשֶׁרָה itself, as well as in the wording of many of the verses. Despite these difficulties, the context of some of the verses requires the interpretation of אֲשֶׁרָה as a goddess. In general, the references to אֲשֶׁרָה occur in verses which display deuteronomistic influence. The association of Maakah with Asherah/the asherah in 1 Kgs. 15.13 // 2 Chron. 15.16 may reflect a vestige of Athirat's role as the *rabītu* (= *gebirah*).

The Old Testament material also raises the question of the relationship of the goddess Asherah to the cultic object asherah. I do not concur with Olyan that 'naming the cult symbol of the deity is synonymous with naming the deity herself'.² The texts are not explicit about the connection between the cultic objects and the deities. To me it seems unlikely that no connection existed between Asherah and the asherah. It may be that the cultic object outlived the memory of the goddess in ancient Israel.³ We cannot be certain about the nature of the relationship between the asherah and Asherah, but such a relationship is most probable.

To understand the Mesopotamian evidence concerning Ashratu properly, it is necessary to consider her as the spouse of Amurru. Ashratu's relationship to Amurru points to her West Semitic origin. If she was a West Semitic deity, there appears to be no reason to doubt her identity with Athirat. In the course of time in a different culture, however, she developed attributes which do not appear in her character at Ugarit. The

²S. M. Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel* (SBLMS 34), Atlanta, 1988: 32.

³J. M. Hadley, *Yahweh's Asherah in the Light of Recent Discovery*, Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge, 1989: 92.

epithets attested in the Sumerian votive inscription dedicated to Ashratu from the reign of Hammurabi (B.M. 22,454) are primarily indications of her relationship to Amurru. This relationship is also reflected in the god lists, cylinder seals and ritual texts. The other Mesopotamian evidence points to Ashratu's association with a mountain, and also with the steppe. Both of these associations are shared with Amurru. There are hints of a possible connection between Ashratu and the underworld in her title 'Lady of the Steppe' and in a late mystical text. There are no explicit sources concerning this association.

It is generally conceded that the Hittite myth of *Elkunirša* is of Canaanite origin. This myth in which Ashertu plays a role has often been used to fill gaps in our knowledge of the mythology of Ugarit. Even information from myths from the same region cannot be indiscriminately shared between mythological cycles. Although this myth may be Canaanite, it may have been modified as it was transplanted to a different culture and translated into a different language. The character of Ashertu may correspond to Athirat, although the scarcity of information contained in the fragments does not provide much material for comparison.

The witness of the epigraphic South Arabian inscriptions may indicate that in that society Athirat had solar connections. When she appears mentioned with a god, it is generally with the chief deity of a region. In a broad sense, this corresponds to her role as the consort of El, the chief god of Ugarit. Given the nature of the information, little can be inferred of her characteristics.

ʔšrth occurs in Hebrew inscriptional sources from Kuntillet 'Ajrûd and perhaps from Khirbet el-Qôm. Grammatical difficulties with the translation of these inscriptions as well as with the pronominal suffix of *ʔšrth* cause uncertainty as to their implications. The suffix precludes the

mention of a proper name, although this is disputed. Until the difficulties of translation and interpretation are illuminated by further discovery, the use of these inscriptions for understanding ancient Israelite religion may be asserted only cautiously. The goddess Athirat/Asherah is unattested in Phoenician inscriptions, and appears to be absent from the corpus of Aramaic inscriptions prior to the Common Era.

What has this study provided for the understanding of Athirat? I have not attempted to eradicate what previous studies suggested concerning the goddess; rather, I have reassessed the evidence on a basic level. This reassessment has demonstrated that Athirat's characteristics, as demonstrated at Ugarit, do not preclude the presence of this same goddess in other cultures. In other cultures where she appears vividly enough to glimpse her nature, she appears to have been adapted to the situation of the receptor culture. In Mesopotamia she was considered the spouse of the westerner-god, Amurru. In South Arabia she was apparently associated with the sun. These characteristics are not evident at Ugarit.

A common feature of Athirat, however, does appear in the various cultures in which she is found. I have noted that at Ugarit Athirat is primarily considered in relationship to other deities. This appears clearly in her relationship with El; as his consort she may approach him with requests. In the other cultures where she appears, this characteristic remains intact. In Mesopotamia Amurru was not the highest god. He was, however, considered to be the chief god of the Amorites, and Ashratu was his spouse. In South Arabia, when Athirat is mentioned with another deity it is generally the national god of the kingdom. If Asherah was intended in the Kuntillet ʿAjrūd inscriptions, she may have been associated with Yahweh. Her relationship to the chief deity appears to be a constant character trait.

Having considered the nature and characteristics of Athirat, we may briefly consider the question of the etymology of her name.

Etymology

The question of the etymology of the name Athirat is a vexed one. Albright's suggestion of 'Athiratu-yammi' as 'She who Walks on the Sea' has gained a wide following.⁴ The primary difficulty with this interpretation is that the name Ashratu occurs in Mesopotamia half a millennium before the Ugaritic formula.⁵ If 'Athiratu-yammi' was the original form, the absence of the second element of this epithet must be explained. Margalit has recently argued that *atrt* may be 'contextually determined as meaning "wife, consort"'.⁶ This interpretation falters on the linguistic basis that no Semitic nominal form attests this meaning for this word.⁷ A number of other suggestions have been offered based on the various roots of ʔ-š/ṯ-r-h/t in Semitic languages.⁸

⁴W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Ayer Lectures 1941), Baltimore, 1942: 77-78. He is followed in this by F. M. Cross (*Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1973: 32-33), M. H. Pope ('Aṯirat' in *Wörterbuch der Mythologie, Abteilung I: Die alten Kulturvölker*, H. W. Haussig, ed., Stuttgart, 1965: 247), W. A. Maier (*ʔAšerah: Extrabiblical Evidence* (HSM 37), Atlanta, 1986: 194-195), N. Wyatt ('Who killed the dragon?' *AuOr* 5 (1987): 185), and Olyan (*Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh*: 70-71).

⁵J. C. de Moor, 'אֲשֵׁרָה' *TDOT*, vol. 1: 438; J. Day, 'Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature' *JBL* 105 (1986): 388.

⁶B. Margalit, 'The Meaning and Significance of Asherah' *VT* 40 (199): 274.

⁷P. K. McCarter, Jr. 'Aspects of the Religion of the Israelite Monarchy: Biblical and Epigraphic Data' in *Ancient Israelite Religion, Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, P. D. Miller, P. D. Hanson and S. D. McBride, eds., Philadelphia, 1987: 147.

⁸For a summary of suggestions see E. Lipiński, 'The Goddess Aṯirat in Ancient Arabia, in Babylon, and in Ugarit' *OLP* 3 (1972): 111.

One suggestion which has been offered to which neither of the above criticisms apply is an earlier proposal by Albright.⁹ In 1925 he suggested the meaning of 'holy place, sanctuary'. As Day has emphasized, there is Phoenician,¹⁰ Akkadian,¹¹ Aramaic,¹² and Ugaritic¹³ evidence for the root *'tr* meaning 'place'.¹⁴ The deification of places is known elsewhere in the ancient Near East.¹⁵ To me this seems a likely etymology. Unless more direct evidence appears, however, the precise etymology of the divine name Athirat remains speculative.

The nature and character of Athirat as presented at Ugarit is our primary source for further study of the goddess. Although I have not considered iconographic representations of Athirat, such images may nevertheless have existed. Considering the importance of Athirat at Ugarit we should expect some iconographic representations to appear there. When the textual materials have been explored we may begin to seek iconographic representations of Athirat. These images, however, should be consistent with what we know of Athirat from the texts. The texts must also be our touchstone for any proposed further associations of Athirat.

This dissertation is not intended to be the final word on Athirat. Indeed, one of its main purposes has been to caution against theories which

⁹The Evolution of the West-Semitic Divinity 'An-'Anat-'Attâ' *AJSL* 41 (1925): 99-100.

¹⁰R. S. Tomback, *A Comparative Semitic Lexicon of the Phoenician and Punic Languages* (SBLDS 32), Missoula, Montana, 1978: 36; J. C. L. Gibson, *TSSI* 3: 167.

¹¹*CAD* A vol. 1, part 2: 436-439.

¹²Sefire I B 11; see also M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, 2 vols., New York, 1950: 133b.

¹³Day cites the Ugaritic usage of *atr* meaning 'place', see Gibson, *CML*²: 142.

¹⁴'Asherah in the Hebrew Bible': 388.

¹⁵A divine name such as Bethel provides a good parallel; more generally, names such as Amurru ('west'), and Yam ('sea') demonstrate that places could achieve divine status. See also McCarter 'Aspects of the Religion': 147-149.

assert too much based on speculation. The rate at which new resources are appearing indicates that studies of goddesses have much to anticipate. I have reassessed the texts of the first two millennia B.C.E. to determine what they tell us about Athirat. Her nature and characteristics as revealed in these texts are our guidelines for further study of this fascinating goddess in antiquity.

List of Abbreviations

- AAAS* = *Les annales archéologiques arabes syriennes* (Damascus)
AAASH = *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* (Budapest)
 AB = Anchor Bible
 ABS = Archaeology and Biblical Studies (ASOR and SBL series)
AfK = *Archiv für Keilschriftforschung* (later *AfO*)
AfO = *Archiv für Orientforschung* (Horn, Austria, formerly *AfK*)
AHw = *Akkadische Handwörterbuch* (W. von Soden, editor)
AJA = *American Journal of Archaeology* (Boston)
AJBA = *Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology* (Sydney)
AJSL = *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature* (later *JNES*)
 AnOr = *Analecta Orientalia* (Roma)
ANEP = *Ancient Near East in Pictures* (J. Pritchard, editor)
ANET = *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (J. Pritchard, editor)
 AOAT = *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* (Kevelaer and Neukirchen-Vluyn)
 AOS = *American Oriental Series* (New Haven)
ArOr = *Archiv Orientální* (Prague)
ARTU = *An Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit* (J. C. de Moor)
 ASORDS = *American Schools of Oriental Research Dissertation Series*
AuOr = *Aula Orientalis* (Barcelona)
BAIAS = *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society*
BA = *Biblical Archaeologist* (Baltimore)
BAR = *Biblical Archaeology Review* (Washington, D. C.)
BASOR = *Bulletin of American Schools of Oriental Research* (Philadelphia)
 BASORSS = *Bulletin of American Schools of Oriental Research*
 Supplementary Studies
 BDB = F. Brown, S. Driver, C. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon*
 BibOr = *Biblica et Orientalia* (Roma)
BHH = *Biblisch-Historische Handwörterbuch* (B. Reicke and L. Rost, editors)
BHS = *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*
 BKAT = *Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament* (Neukirchen-Vluyn)
 B.M. = British Museum
BN = *Biblische Notizen* (Bamburg)
BSOAS = *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (London)
BZ = *Biblische Zeitschrift* (Paderborn)

- BZAW = Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
(Berlin)
- CAD = *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* (I. Gelb, et. al., eds.)
- CBQ = *Catholic Bible Quarterly* (Washington, D. C.)
- CBQMS = *Catholic Bible Quarterly Monograph Series* (Washington, D. C.)
- CML = *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (G. R. Driver, editor)
- CML² = *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, second edition (J. C. L. Gibson, editor)
- CT = *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*
- CTA = *Corpus tablettes en cuneiformes alphabetiques* (A. Herdner, editor)
- EI = *Eretz Israel* (Jerusalem)
- ET = *Expository Times* (Edinburgh)
- ETR = *Etudes théologiques et religieuses*
- ETSMS = *Evangelical Theological Society Monograph Series*
- GK = *Gesenius-Kautzsch, Hebrew Grammar*
- HAR = *Hebrew Annual Review*
- HR = *History of Religions*
- HS = *Hebrew Studies* (Madison, WI)
- HSM = *Harvard Semitic Monographs* (Harvard)
- HSS = *Harvard Semitic Studies* (Harvard)
- HTR = *Harvard Theological Review* (Harvard)
- HTS = *Harvard Theological Studies* (Harvard)
- HUCA = *Hebrew Union College Annual* (Cincinnati)
- ICC = *International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh)
- IDB = *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (G. A. Buttrick, editor)
- IEJ = *Israel Exploration Journal* (Jerusalem)
- IMJ = *Israel Museum Journal* (Jerusalem)
- JAOS = *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (New Haven)
- JBL = *Journal of Biblical Literature* (Atlanta)
- JCS = *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* (Baltimore)
- JEA = *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
- JFSR = *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (Atlanta)
- JNES = *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (Chicago, formerly *AJSL*)
- JNSL = *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* (Stellenbosch)
- JQR = *Jewish Quarterly Review* (Philadelphia)
- JRAS = *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (London)
- JSOT = *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (Sheffield)

- JSOTS = Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplements Series
(Sheffield)
- JSS = *Journal of Semitic Studies* (Manchester)
- JTS = *Journal of Theological Studies* (Oxford)
- KAI = *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften* (H. Donner and W. Röllig, editors)
- KTU = *Die Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit* (M. Dietrich, O. Loretz and J. Samartin, editors)
- LXX = Septuagint
- MANE = Monographs on the Ancient Near East (Leiden)
- MIO = *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung* (Berlin)
- MLC = *Mitos y Leyendas de Canaan* (G. del Olmo Lete)
- MT = Masoretic Text
- MUSJ = *Mélanges de l'Université St. Joseph* (Beyrouth)
- NCBC = New Century Bible Commentary
- NIC = New International Commentary
- OBO = *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* (Göttingen and Freiburg)
- OIP = Oriental Institute Publications (University of Chicago)
- OLP = *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* (Leuven)
- OTL = Old Testament Library
- OTS = *Oudtestamentische Studien* (Leiden)
- PEQ = *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* (London, Jerusalem)
- PIBI = *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Institute*
- PLMU = Poetic Legends and Myths from Ugarit (C. Gordon)
- PSBA = *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archæology* (London)
- QDAP = *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine*
- RA = *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie Orientale*
(Nendeln/Liechtenstein)
- RB = *Revue Biblique* (Paris)
- RÉS = *Répertoire d'épigraphie sémitique* (8 volumes, Paris)
- RHA = *Revue Hittite et Asianique*
- RHR = *Revue de l'histoire des religions* (Paris)
- RIH = Ras Ibn Hani
- RLA = *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* (Berlin, vol. 1 = 1932, vol. 2 = 1938, vol. 3 = 1957-1971, vol. 4 = 1972-1975, vol. 5 = 1976-1980, vol. 6 = 1980-1983)
- RSO = *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* (Rome)
- RSP = *Ras Shamra Parallels* (L. Fisher and S. Rummel, editors)

- SBL = Society of Biblical Literature (Atlanta)
- SBLDS = Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
- SBLMS = Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
- SBLRBS = Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study
- SEÅ = *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* (Lund)
- SEL = *Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici* (Verona)
- SJOT = *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* (Aarhus, Denmark)
- SOTSMS = Society of Old Testament Study Monograph Series
- SR = *Studies in Religion = Sciences Religieuses*
- SSR = *Studi Storico Religiosi*
- StTh = *Studia Theologica* (Copenhagen)
- SVT = Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum* (Leiden)
- TDOT = *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (G. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, editors)
- ThSt = *Theological Studies* (Baltimore)
- TO = *Textes ougaritiques* (A. Caquot, M. Sznycer, and A. Herdner, editors)
- TO2 = *Textes ougaritiques*, vol. 2 (A. Caquot, J.-M. de Tarragon, and J.-L. Cunchillos, editors)
- TSSI = *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions* (J. C. L. Gibson, 3 vols.)
- TWAT = *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* (Stuttgart)
- TZ = *Theologische Zeitschrift* (Basel)
- UBL = Ugaritisch-Biblische Literatur (München)
- UF = *Ugarit Forschungen* (Neukirchen-Vluyn)
- Ug = *Ugaritica* (Paris)
- UUÅ = *Uppsala Unviversitets Årsskrift* (Uppsala)
- UL = *Ugaritic Literature* (C. Gordon)
- UT = *Ugaritic Textbook* (C. Gordon)
- VAT = Tablets in the collection of the Staatliche Museen, Berlin
- VT = *Vetus Testamentum* (Leiden)
- WBC = Word Bible Commentary (Waco)
- WUS = *Wörterbuch der ugaritischen Sprache* (J. Aistleitner, editor)
- YBT = Yale Oriental Series Babylonian Texts (New Haven)
- YOS = Yale Oriental Series Researches (New Haven)
- ZA = *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* (Weimar, formerly ZK, Leipzig)
- ZAW = *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* (Berlin & NY)
- ZDMG = *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (Wiesbaden)

ZDPV = *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* (Leipzig)

ZK = *Zeitschrift für Keilschriftforschung und verwandte Gebiete* (later ZA)

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