

STONES AT WORSHIP

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Despite the influence of a demythologising tendency by reformist theologies on the editing of ancient traditions, there is ample evidence in the biblical record for the use of sacred pillars, or *mazzeboth*, in early Israelite religion. A *mazzebah*, as a cult object, could effect the special presence of God in a sacred place, recalling a theophany and focussing acts of worship.¹ A *mazzebah* could also be used in a covenant ceremony, as a focus for the acts of ratification and as a perpetual witness of the obligations undertaken.² But besides the use of *mazzeboth* at the centre of religious acts, there is evidence for the use of *mazzeboth* in a more subordinate role, as instruments of cult, in some way representing worshippers in a sacred place. It is this last category which is here under study. Recourse will be had not only to the biblical record but to archaeological data as well, for although this will spread the discussion over a wide area and a long span of time, the use of cult stones in general was well established among all Semitic peoples and, given the conservative nature of religious institutions, one may reasonably expect to find certain fundamental notions underlying all such usage. It should be possible to detect a consistent pattern in physical type, disposition, function and meaning, which, while allowing for varying emphasis on one or more elements in particular instances, should be broadly applicable to all or most cases.

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

The clearest biblical record of a cultic setting in which *mazzeboth* occupy a subordinate (rather than a central) place is provided by the Elohist account of the Sinai covenant (Exod. 19; 24). Whether this account describes the actual setting of the covenant ceremony or, as is more likely, reflects a covenant renewal at a later amphictyonic shrine, for the present purpose it is enough to note that the author is describing the scene as a liturgical happening within a recognisable sanctuary. The focal point is the mountain as the throne of God's presence (Exod.

1. Gen. 28:11-22; 31:13; 35:5-15, *et al.*

2. Gen. 31:44-54; cf. Jos. 24:26-27. A covenant relationship is implied in the foregoing, and also in many of the instances which follow: there is an impression that the note of covenant was never far away in all uses of sacred pillars, whether central or secondary to cult.

19:3, 11, etc.), and around it is marked the forbidden *haram* area (19:12). The people are commanded to prepare and consecrate themselves for the great day (19:10-11), then at the sound of a trumpet (19:13, 16) Moses leads the people in procession from the camp to meet God and they take their stand (*yithyazz^{bu}*) at the foot of the mountain (19:17). The J note on smoke enveloping the mountain may suggest incense to some (19:18). When Yahweh has delivered his words through Moses to the people, by acclamation they promise to fulfil them (24:3). Then follows the rite of ratification: "He built an altar at the foot of the mountain and twelve pillars (*mazzebah*) according to the twelve tribes of Israel" (24:4), sacrifices are offered, blood collected in basins for sprinkling on the altar and the people. In the ceremony itself the pillars were not said to perform any role—unless it was on them, as symbols of the people, that the blood of the covenant was sprinkled. But after the ceremony, presumably, they would continue to stand before the mountain throne of God, as it were, perpetuating the liturgical stance of the people. It is not without significance that the word *mazzebah* is cognate to the verb *yazab*, whose hithpael form denotes a sort of ritual standing, whether in liturgy (Jos. 24:1; 1 Sam. 10:19), at court (Exod. 8:16; 9:13) or in the holy war (Exod. 14:13; Jer. 46:4, 14).³ The whole incident is indicative of the disposition of temple apparatus and, in particular, suggests that (a) a group of secondary sacred pillars might stand in spatial relationship to the central cult object, (b) they originate in, and possibly prolong, a covenant ceremony, (c) they are representative of the people of God. In other words, it appears that such pillars in a cultic setting stand as permanent surrogates of the covenanted people, face to face with their God.

Apparently a similar amphictyonic shrine existed at Gilgal, where it is said that Joshua set up twelve stones "according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel" (Jos. 4:1-8, 20, cf. 9-10). Deuteronomic editing, predictably, played down the religious significance of these stones, describing them as mere memorials of the miraculous passage of the Jordan. But that this group, whether originally or subsequently, was invested with a more sacred character might be inferred from a reference to the "idols near Gilgal" (Jud. 3:19, 26).

Not only tribes but individuals also might be represented by pillars. 2 Sam. 12:12 records that "Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up for himself the pillar (*mazzebah*) which is in the King's Valley, for he said, 'I have no son to keep my name in

3. *Mazzebah* is, of course, derived from *nazab*, whose niph'al means "to be set up, appointed (and intransitively) to stand" and therefore denotes something which is upright.

remembrance"; he called the pillar after his own name, and it is called Absalom's monument (*yad*, literally *hand*) to this day." This was not a funerary stone, for it had been set up "in his lifetime", and Absalom's burial place was in Ephraim (2 Sam. 18:6, 17). It was a memorial stone to keep alive his name. In the context of the Deuteronomic tradition, which was accustomed to see Yahweh's name as the vehicle of his presence, this expression suggests that the pillar provided Absalom with a kind of continuing presence. This presence, physically located in the King's Valley, would have had a tenuous spatial relationship to Yahweh's dwelling on Mt. Zion, and in this sense one can speak of its cultic setting, like that of the twelve pillars of Mt. Sinai. Such a monument (*yad*) was set up by Saul at Judaeon Carmel as a memorial of his victory over the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:12)—no cultic setting is mentioned but might be suspected.⁴ Such a *yad* is promised to the faithful eunuch, who like Absalom has none to carry on his name (Is. 56:4-5): "To the eunuchs who . . . hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give an everlasting name which shall not be cut off." One notes the covenantal relationship, as at Sinai, and the function of the monument to perpetuate a person's name in the sanctuary, as with Absalom. The practice of erecting personal monuments in a cultic setting may lie behind Rev. 3:12: "He who conquers, I will make him a pillar (*stylos*) in the temple of my God; and never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, etc." *Stylos* need not mean only a structural column, as is commonly supposed by commentators on this text, but any upright pillar. The word is probably cognate with *stēlē*.⁵ What is stressed here is not the structural function of the pillar, but its permanence in the temple and its inscription. One notes the reference to victory, as with Saul, but here due to the covenantal relationship to which one steadfastly "holds fast" (Rev. 3:8-11). This passage stresses what is implied in the others, namely, such a close identification between pillar and votary that the one

4. Saul's monument recalls a type of archaeologically recorded stele, which commemorates a victory or other achievements of the king, e.g., the Mesha stone, the victory stele of Naram-Sin, and many others from Mesopotamia and Syria. That they were not merely secular memorials is indicated by the thanksgiving formula and divine symbols generally used. The Balawat bronzes show the dedication of the stele of Salmanaser III, with accompanying sacrifices, after his victorious campaigns (cf. A. Parrot, *Assur*, 1961, pp. 138-146). It is not the aim of the present study to investigate further this specialised category—sufficient here to note that they are votive objects of a commemorative and thanksgiving nature.

5. H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexikon*.

somehow perpetuated the presence of the other before the presence of God.

Of all people, a king is most likely to have had his own monument in the temple. Ezekiel 43:7, 9 foresees a time when the temple will no longer be defiled "by the dead bodies of their kings." *Peger* can indeed be translated "corpse", but from the Ras Shamra texts a word of the same root is known to mean "votive offering, stele" (v. *infra*). Lev. 26:30 reads: "I will destroy your high places, and cut down your incense altars, and cast your dead bodies (*peger*) upon the dead bodies (*peger*) of your idols." Translating *peger* by "pillar" makes better sense since the whole context concerns the destruction of cultic apparatus. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the same word would have been used, now literally, now analogically, in such close proximity—rather it is more apt to see both kinds of *peger* as being of the same nature, namely, stone surrogates of worshippers and worshipped. It is not necessary to see them as mortuary objects,⁶ despite etymology, because the Priestly tradition in its hostility to such cultic crudities could be counted on to use a term suggestive of contempt for both the one and the other, especially where *double entendre* was possible.

"The king stood by the (or his) pillar" is said in connection with the coronation of Joash (2 Kg. 11:4; 2 Chron. 23:13) and the covenant renewal of Josiah (2 Kg. 23:3; 2 Chron. 34:31), both of which took place in the temple. The expression appears to be a technical one for a solemn religious act by the king, since in each case the Hebrew has (with appropriate changes of tense and case) *amad hammelek 'al-ha 'amud*. It is indicative that the verb and the noun are derived from the same root *'md*, and therefore it seems preferable to see the object as secondary to the action, i.e., the special kind of standing on the part of the king. Hence with de Vaux, we may rather translate the phrase "on the dais"⁷ For the king's platform in the temple, see 2 Chron. 6:13 and 2 Kg. 16:18 (LXX). Otherwise these passages would offer interesting illustrations of the use of royal pillars in the temple.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Comparison has long been drawn between the twelve *mazzeboth* of Sinai and the alignment of pillars excavated by

6. W. F. Albright. *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, Baltimore, 1956, p. 106.

7. R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions (Les Institutions de l'Ancien Testament)*, trans. J. McHugh, London, 1961, pp. 102-103.

Macalister at Gezer.⁸ There were ten pillars, rough and undressed, standing on a pavement of smooth, round stones, running in a straight or slightly curved north-south line (fig. 1). The pillars come in a variety of shapes and sizes (1.6-3.3 m. high) and are irregularly spaced, but it is noticeable from the flattened surface of some of them that they were intended to face west, i.e., in the direction of a large rectangular block, which has a rectangular cavity (85 x 60 x 40 cm.) in its upper surface. Suggestions as to the latter have included (a) an altar—but there are no signs of fire, (b) a laver—but the hole is not plastered, (c) a socket for an *asherah*—but the hole is square and rather large, (d) a socket for a large pillar—Macalister favoured this and put forward a squared block found nearby as the candidate for the position. Further west were two circular walls encircling a pavement of small stones, while to the east was a cistern containing human and animal bones, which may have been a depository for sacrificial refuse. All over the area were discovered jar burials of new-born infants,⁹ as also figurines, “phalli” and limestone cones. These cones were said to have been picked up in “basketfulls”; measuring from 7 to 30 cm. in height, they may have been humbler versions of the great pillars of the alignment. No boundary wall was found. Although there can be no doubt as to the cultic character of the complex, it now seems impossible to form a clear idea of the structure and of the relationship of the elements. A single pillar lying prone beneath the surface of the last phase probably indicated an earlier use of pillars on this site.

Similar alignments have come to light west of the Jordan, at Bab edh-Dhra', Ader, Khirbet Iskander, El Mugheirat and Lejjun.¹⁰ For example, at Lejjun there is a slightly curving, north-south line of 16 rough monoliths, generally about 1.5 m. high. Surface finds of pottery at these sites have suggested an EB-MB date for such alignments. Association with a cult place is demonstrable in most cases. The rough finish and the range in size and

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8. R. A. S. Macalister, *The Excavation of Gezer, 1902-1905 and 1907-1909*, London, 1912, Vol. II, pp. 381-406, 446. Albright, on the basis of datable parallels from Transjordan suggests that the “High Place” was founded in EB IV (=EB-MB) and continued in use till LB (*The Archaeology of Palestine*, 1949, pp. 77-78, 104).
 9. In recent excavations at Gezer, at least one infant burial was found in relation to the stelae (personal communication from R. de Vaux, 10/9/68).
 10. W. F. Albright, *The Archaeological Results of an Expedition to Moab and the Dead Sea*, BASOR XIV (1924), pp. 5-7, 10 (cf. BASOR LIII, 1934, pp. 14-15).
N. Glueck, *Explorations in Eastern Palestine*, AASOR XIV (1933-34), pp. 44-47; XVIII-XIX (1937-39), p. 128f. (cf. BASOR LXXXVI, 1942, p. 14).

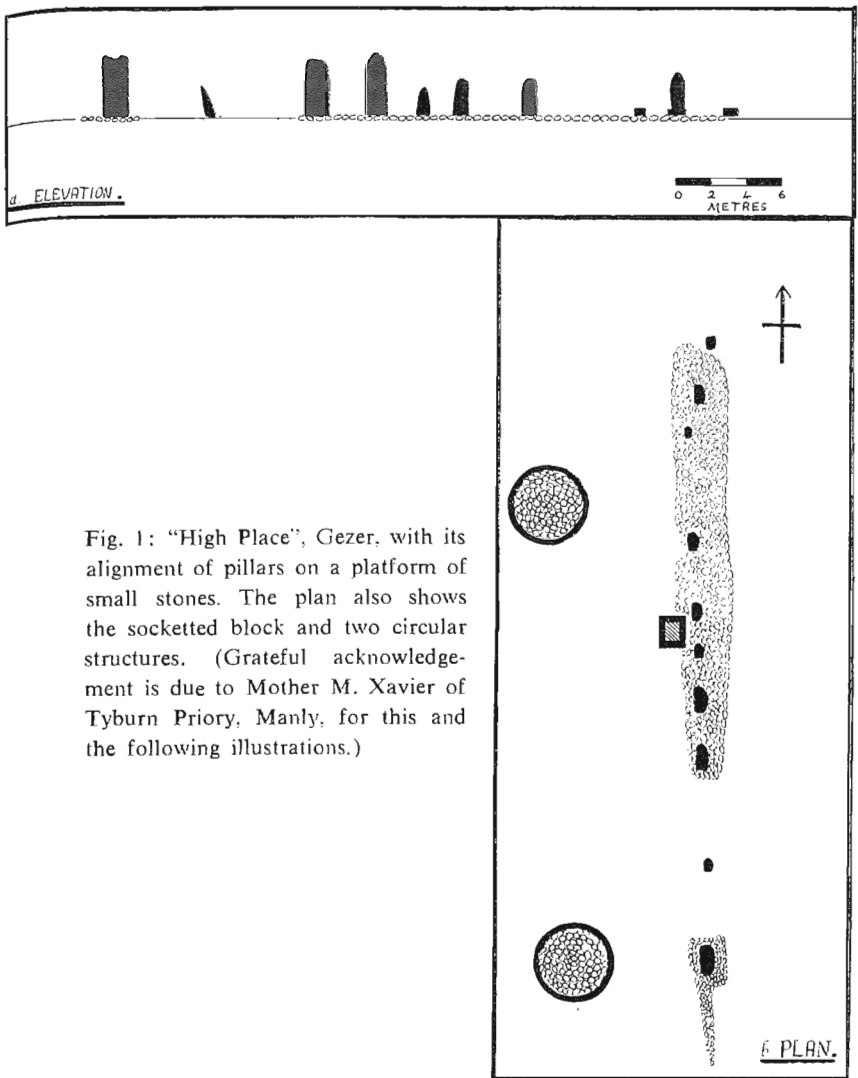


Fig. 1: "High Place", Gezer, with its alignment of pillars on a platform of small stones. The plan also shows the socketted block and two circular structures. (Grateful acknowledgement is due to Mother M. Xavier of Tyburn Priory, Manly, for this and the following illustrations.)

Fig. 1.

shape of the pillars further invite comparison with the Gezer complex.

Albright compares these alignments with the Stele Rows of Assur.¹¹ There are some 140 stelae, up to 3 m. high, disposed in two rows running east-west. Some are as crude as those of Gezer, some are tanged to fit into sockets, some are furnished with a square niche, one has an image, many are inscribed. From the inscriptions it is clear that they have been raised to the memory of individuals. The northern row consists of 28 stelae bearing the names of kings who ruled from the 15th to the 7th C., the stelae of the southern row bears the names of prominent men. Albright considers that these and similar alignments have a funerary character, but Barrois rightly cautions against too close a comparison and too general an assertion.¹²

In each of these cases the whole context is no longer clear, having suffered from past ravages or modern excavation. It is obvious, however, that the pillars tend to be roughly slab-like and to face a certain direction. The reason for their orientation and their relationship to other cultic apparatus can only be guessed at from other examples. Pillars in a cultic setting are clearly illustrated from the Temple of Obelisks at Byblos, which dates from about the beginning of the 2nd millenium (fig. 2).¹³ More than forty "obelisks" were found grouped in an open court around a cella. The cella enclosed a platform apparently supporting a cult object, which, suggests the excavator, may have been the large block found lying down in a secondary position in the court to the north of the cella. Of the other standing stones, some were true obelisks with square section and pointed top, but most were tapering slabs, often quite rough. Height ranged from .4 to 3.5 m. Most were arranged in groups or alignments. Some groups of 3 or 5 are symmetrical. The largest obelisk of the asymmetric group north of the cella bore a dedicatory inscription to the god Reshef by King Abishemu (probably a contemporary of Ammenemes II). The main north-south alignment, containing the highest pillars, was faced by a rectangular offering table and a circular pit against the back wall of the cella. The complex included offering tables, basins, niches (for offerings?) and offering deposits. The temple structure, which

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11. W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, Baltimore, 1956, pp. 105-6.
 12. W. Andrae, *Das Wiedererstandene Assur*, Leipzig, 1938, pp. 103-108.
 13. W. F. Albright, *ibid.*, see also "The High Places in Ancient Palestine", *Supplement to Vetus Testamentum IV* (1957), pp. 242-258.
- A.-G. Barrois, *Manuel d'Archéologie Biblique II*, Paris, 1953, pp. 361-2.
13. M. Dunand, *Fouilles de Byblos*, Vol. II, Paris, 1950, pp. 644-652, 895-898.

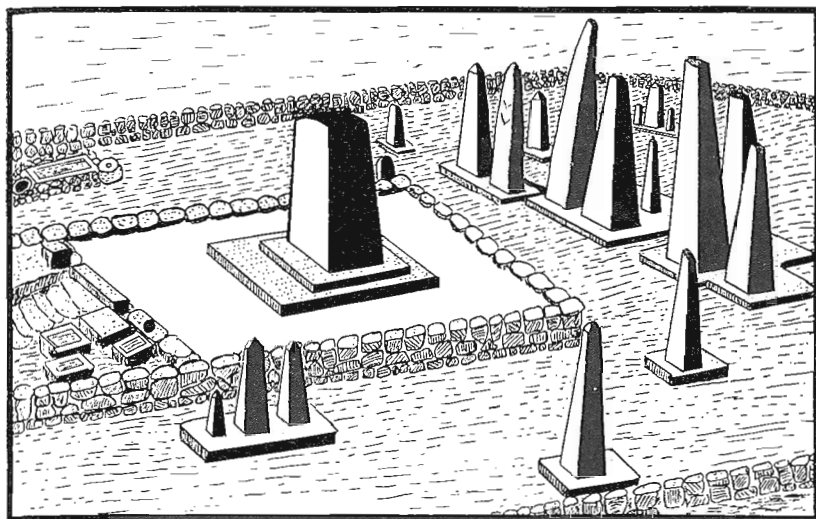
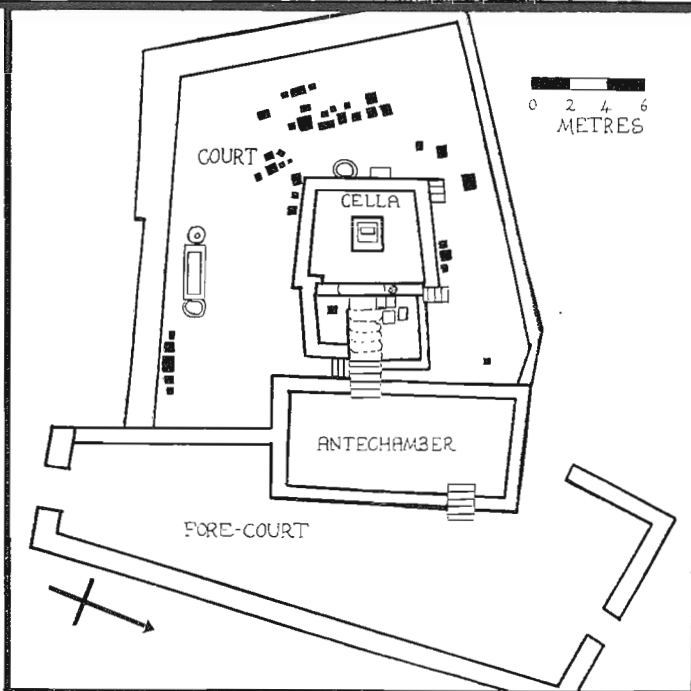


Fig. 2. Temple of Obelisks, Byblos. Upper: Artist's impressions of pillars grouped about large black, according to excavator's suggestion. Lower: Simplified plan of temple.



the excavator characterised as poor in construction, incorporated several re-used obelisks, presumably deriving from the earlier temple on the same spot. This, too, had a court and a cella in the same positions, but the cella was flanked by two smaller cellas. The main cella, like its successor, had a base in the centre. At least two obelisks were found in this temple and were indicative of their general use in the earlier as in the later phase. However, the marked difference in number between the two phases would suggest that many of the stones of the original temple had been re-installed in the later phase.

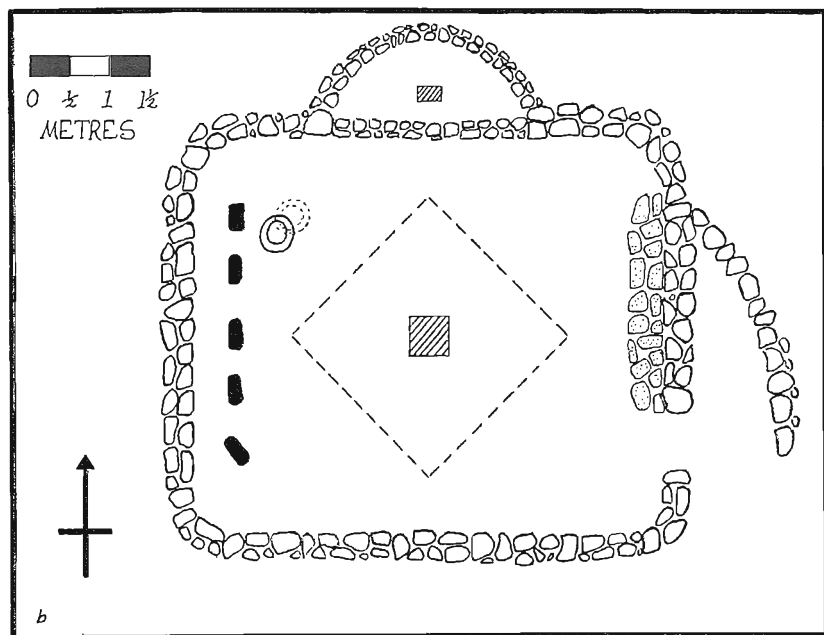
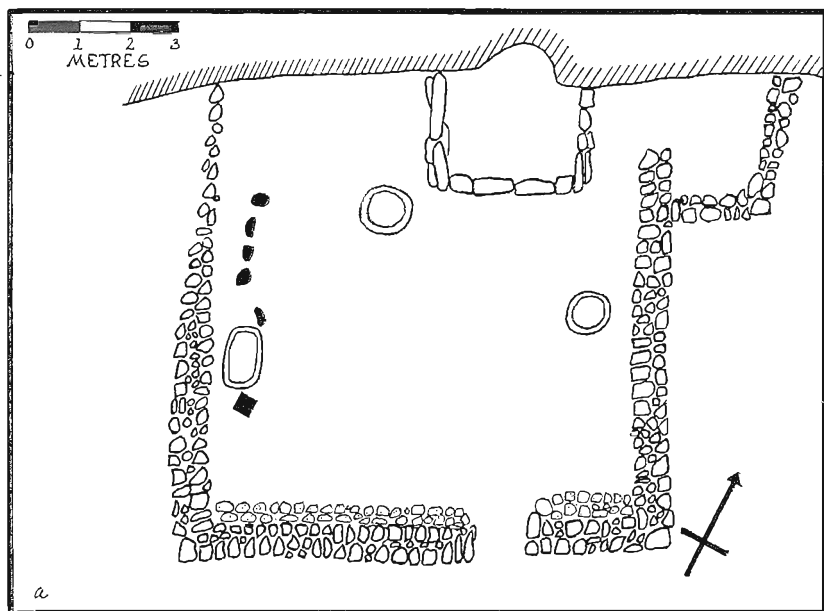
The pillars so far described tended to be tall, slender slabs, rough-hewn and without inscription or image. They were succeeded by cult stones which tended to be smaller, broad, squat slabs, better finished and often, especially in later times, inscribed and figured. An alignment generally showed greater conformity in size between members. This type occurred in places and times of strong Egyptian influence and evidently reflected some degree of Egyptianisation of local Semitic cult. How much this influence introduced theological changes, it would be impossible to say. One might presume that the changes were more stylistic than theological, both because of the powerful conservatism which governs religious matters and because the disposition of such pillars and other temple apparatus otherwise show a marked continuity with earlier practice. Inscribed and figured stelae begin to "speak for themselves" and so what they have to say on the meaning and purpose of secondary stones may be cautiously projected back to their mute, purely Semitic, counterparts.

At Timna, where apparently Egyptians and local Midianites were partners in the exploitation of copper deposits, the two cultures appear to have co-existed peacefully.¹⁴ At site No. 200 were two successive shrines containing evidence of mixed Egyptian and local cult and dedicated to Hathor, or in local parlance, Ba'lat. They were built against one of those remarkable sandstone forma-

14. Accounts of the excavations at Timna by Beno Rothenberg and Alexandru Lupu have appeared in ZDPV, Bd. 82 (1966), pp. 125-135; PEQ, 1964, p. 64, 1966, p. 3 f., 1969, p. 57; RB, LXXIV (1967), p. 80; *Museum Haaretz Bulletin* 9 (June, 1967), pp. 53-70; *Illustrated London News*, Nov. 15, 1969, pp. 32-33, Nov. 29, 1969, pp. 28-29.

Fig. 3 (opposite page): Timna temples (12th C.).

- (a) Second of two temples at site No. 200, showing niche, *naos*, court, three basins, *mazzeboth* (in black), offering bench on either side of entrance).
- (b) Temple at site No. 2, showing two annexes, central base(?), basin, five *mazzeboth* (in black), offering bench (near entrance), position of later square building.



tions called "Solomon's Pillars", in which was cut a man-size niche, probably to house a cult object. About this focal point was constructed a small central chamber and an outer court with an entrance on the opposite or S.E. side. In the court of the first temple (14th-13th C.), west of the *naos*, were found several stelae, while "others were found built into the second temple structure with their inscriptions almost entirely erased." It may be significant (a) that they were considered not so sacred that they could not be re-used as building material, (b) yet it was felt necessary to remove the inscriptions before re-use. After violent destruction and a period of abandonment, a second temple was constructed early in the 12th C. along similar lines, but now enlarged to a square with an additional room to the north (fig. 3a). The equipment included three large basins, altars, offering (?) bench and a row of *mazzeboth*. The southernmost pillar was square-sectioned, 1.2 m. high, bearing a carved representation of Hathor on two sides. One questions whether its position is secondary: its form and proportions conform rather to those of a true baetyl and would permit its occupancy of the focal niche. The remaining pillars appear less than 1 m. high in photographs and are described as "narrow, long, rough, white." They stand in an approximately north-south line, not exactly focussed to the niche, which would be difficult in such a plan dictated by the terrain, but line up like acolytes to the side of the temple axis. Another 12th C. shrine, but of purely local character, was found at site No. 2 (fig. 3b). It was nearly square in shape, with two semi-circular annexes. In the centre stood a large, square, flat-topped stone, 50 cm. high, described as an altar, while another stood in the northern annex. It could be asked whether one or the other "altar" may not in fact have been a base for a cult object, and therefore at the focus of cult. If the northern "altar" were such and the annex a *naos*, the resulting plan is not dissimilar to that of Timna No. 200. Yet there is stronger argument for the central "altar" being a base for a cult object: (a) it is rather low for an altar, (b) a succeeding square building, probably cultic, was centred on the same spot. Standing in line behind this focus, i.e., opposite the entrance, as at Byblos, were five rough-hewn slabs, approximately rectangular in shape (dimensions not given). As at Gezer, Lejjun, Byblos and Timna No. 200, the alignment ran north-south. Timna No. 2 also included a libation bowl and an offering bench.

A similar, but more sophisticated, shrine existed at Hazor, Area C, in the 14th-13th C.¹⁵ It was thought that there had been an

15. Y. Yadin (et al.), *Hazor I, An Account of the First Season of Excavations, 1955, Jerusalem, 1958*, p. 83 ff.

earlier phase and that most of its accessories had been re-installed in the final phase, which was engulfed by the violent destruction of the lower city. It was a single-chambered shrine and in a niche opposite the entrance stood a curved alignment of ten stelae and other objects (fig. 4). The stelae are slab-like, with rounded tops, convex backs and flat fronts, measuring from .2 to .7 m. in height. One of them has a stylised relief of two hands stretched up to a moon symbol, evidently in a gesture of supplication—it is tempting to see in it an illustration of the biblical *yad*. On the extreme right of the group is a statue of a seated man, which the excavators took to be an idol. This is open to doubt, because it is in an inferior position on the edge of the group and because similar statues have been found, not only at Hazor (H and K) but also at Ugarit, where inscriptions show that they are votive offerings of prominent people (*v. infra*). The lion orthostat on the extreme left, supporting one of the stelae, is certainly secondary in this position since its single carved side is obscured by the niche wall to the left. The group also includes small indistinct objects, like statuettes, about 15 cm. high—these recall similar objects (“phalli”) found at Gezer. The alignment stands on an oval platform extending out from the niche. On this platform, immediately in front of the stelae, is a rectangular “offering table”, and in front of that again a circular slab is clearly indicated on the excavation plans without being described. From its position on the platform and from the fact that the stelae are made to face it, this slab obviously marks the focal point of the temple. Consideration might be given to its being the base for some cult object, as was suggested for the Timna No. 2 shrine. Again it is noteworthy that the alignment lies approximately in a north-south line facing east. Seventeen roughly worked stelae were found in the debris outside the shrine, along the southern wall: this may have been a storeroom or an outer *parvis* as at Byblos.

Successive levels of the temple area of Beisan have yielded several round-topped slabs similar to those of Hazor, but thoroughly Egyptianised in iconography and inscription.¹⁶ An unscribed stela from Level VII (13th c.) depicts a woman standing before a goddess—typically, the figure of the suppliant is smaller than that of the deity and stands in a subservient attitude on the left (fig. 5a). Others include an offering formula, for example, “An-offering-which-the-king-gives to Antit, that she may give all life, prosperity and health to the double (*ka*) of Hesi-Nekht.

16. A. Rowe, *Beth-shan I, The Topography and History of Beth-shan*, Philadelphia, 1930—*Beth-shan II, i, The Four Canaanite Temples of Beth-shan. The Temples and Cult Objects*, Philadelphia, 1940.

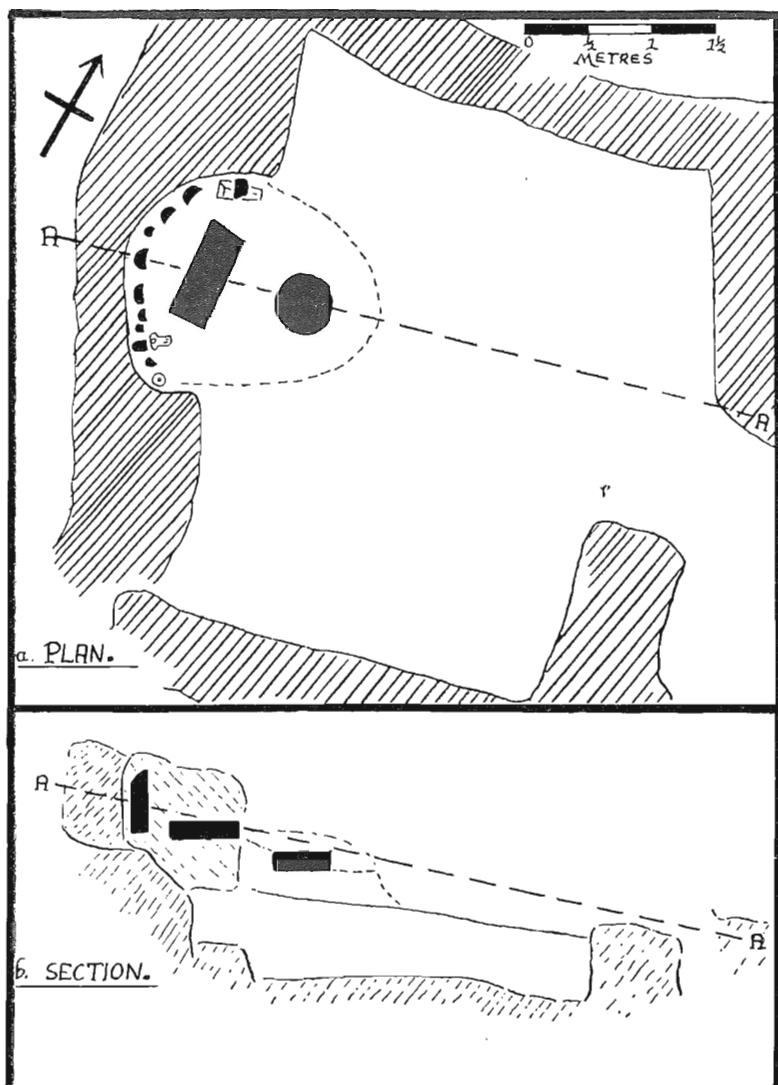
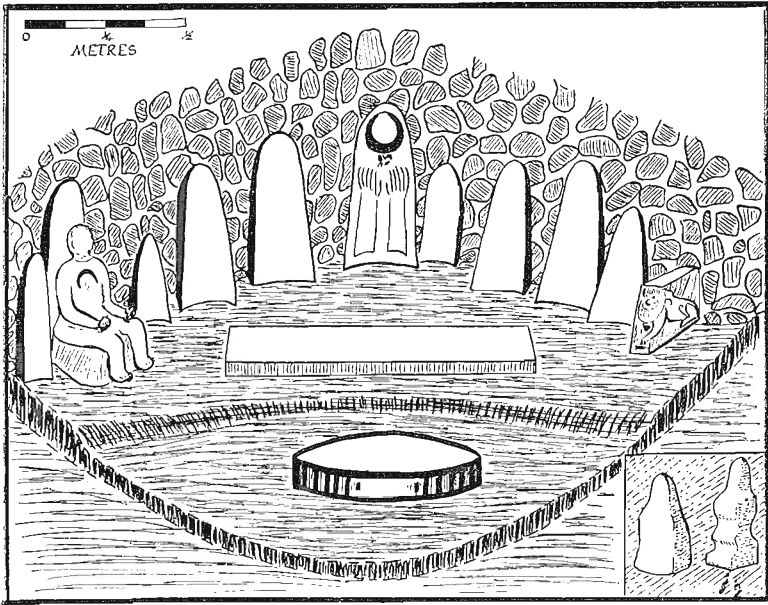


Fig. 4: Hazor, Shrine in Area C.

Plan, section and artist's impression of stele group. (Inset: "statuettes" found with stelae—not to scale.)



Antit, the queen of heaven, the mistress of all the gods.” In others, this basic formula is considerably expanded in the terms of address and intention. Only in Level IX (14th C.) is there any data suggesting the cultic context of such stelae. In one of the rooms of the sprawling courtyard temple a conical column, apparently a baetyl, standing on a base of unhewn stones, was faced by a stele depicting two men standing in adoration before a god. The typical offering formula inscribed on the stone reveals that it was dedicated to Mekal on behalf of Amem-em-apt, a builder, by his son Pa-Ra-em-Heb. A basalt libation bowl shared the context. The Beisan material is interesting on several counts:

- (a) in their form, and in the (admittedly scanty) context of the Mekal Stele, they show contacts with the stelae at Hazor and Timna;
- (b) they illustrate Egyptian influence in the cult of Semitic deities;
- (c) they have been set up by, and on behalf of, living individuals, for present and future needs;
- (d) the religious sentiment they reveal is the desire to have in stone a permanent prayer (or pray-er) before the deity.

From Ugarit have come a number of votive objects contemporaneous and strikingly similar to those of Hazor and Beisan.¹⁷ Their context within the sanctuaries is uncertain, but Hazor and even Byblos may suggest their original setting. Recalling the central stele at Hazor with its moon symbol is a round-topped slab, about 30 cm. high, without image or inscription, but showing a symbol of the sun above a kind of altar, which projects step-like from the base (fig. 5b). As parallels to the seated figure at Hazor are a number of statues from the Temple of Baal, including a seated statue, about 30 cm. high, with an inscription indicating that it is a votive offering of Princess Chnoumit Nofr Hedj (12th Dynasty). Statuettes also occur. Several round-topped stelae with image and/or inscription are reminiscent of the Beisan examples, and like them show Egyptian (and Hittite) influences on Semitic cult articles. One, 40 cm. high, depicts a suppliant in Egyptian dress standing before a god and the inscription reads: "To the Seth of Sapouna (Baal-Saphon), in favour of the royal scribe and supervisor of the House of Silver of Mami." Baal also figures on a 1.4 m. stele in a war-like pose, brandishing a mace and a spear or lightning shaft, while a small figure in front of him faces the same direction—the latter must be a person of some importance to stand thus, perhaps a king whose power is placed under divine authority or a priest mediating the blessing of Baal (fig. 5c). Deities appear alone on several uninscribed stelae, but these too are probably *ex votos* rather than objects of cult, since in shape they conform to that of votive stelae. One uninscribed stele, 47 cm. high, shows a majestic bearded figure on a throne, probably El, accepting with one hand an offering proffered by an official and blessing him with the other (fig. 5d).

The connection with sacrifice is illustrated by two round-topped stelae found in the Temple of Dagon at Ugarit. They bear inscriptions only, which Albright translates:¹⁸

- (a) "Stele (*skn*) which Aryal(?) has offered to Dagon: a mortuary offering (*pgr*) of a sheep and an ox for food."
- (b) "Mortuary offering (*pgr*) which 'Uzzenu offered to Dagon his lord: a sheep and an ox as an inviolable offering."

17. See C. F. A. Schaeffer's successive reports in *Syria*, XII (1931), pp. 10-14, pls. vi, viii; XIII (1932), p. 22, pl. xiv; XIV (1933), pp. 122-124, pls. xv, xvi; XVIII (1937), pp. 128-138, pl. xvii. Descriptions of these stelae are conveniently found in J. Gray's "Ugarit", *Archaeology and Old Testament Study* (ed. D. Winton Thomas), Oxford, 1967, pp. 145-167.

18. W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, Baltimore, 1956, p. 203, n. 30. See also R. Dussaud, "Deux Stèles de Ras Shamra portant une dedicace au dieu Dagon", *Syria* XVI (1935), pp. 177-180, and C. Virolleaud, "Sur Quatre Fragments alphabétiques trouvés à Ras Shamra en 1934", *Syria* XVI (1935), pp. 183 ff.

The key words *skn* and *pgr* are problematical but the texts suggest a certain equivalence, since both can be made the object of the verb *to offer*. In the Dan'el Epic, *skn* is the object of the verb *nzb* (cf. root of *mazzebah*): "he sets up the stelae of his ancestral spirits in the holy place, the guardians of his family."¹⁹ In the first inscription, where both words are used, a distinction can be drawn between the stele (*skn*) and the sacrifice (*pgr*) which accompanied it. In the second, *pgr* on its own encompasses both elements of the rite, although the durable nature of the act is emphasised in the last word. Hence it would seem that *pgr* can be extended to mean a stele (v. *supra*, Lev. 26, 30), but the funerary character of such stele, deduced by Albright from the fact that cognates of the word in Accadian, Aramaic and Hebrew mean "corpse", is not immediately evident in the inscriptions themselves.²⁰ *Skn*, which Albright derives from Accadian *shiknu*, "image" hence "stele", might rather be related to the common Semitic verb of dwelling^{20a} and so might suggest a stone "housing" a suppliant as a baetyl "houses" a god. Whatever the finer points of semantic speculation, the obvious implication of the two inscribed stelae is that an act of sacrifice, which involves self-giving, can be associated with an equivalent expression in a durable stone monument. Such a votive object comes close to being a personal covenant stone.

In the Phoenician world, stelae are most commonly found in association with a particularly solemn kind of sacrifice, the *molek* or *molk*.²¹ For a grave reason a parent would sacrifice a child, "his own flesh". The rite called for a priest to cut the child's throat and to consign the corpse to a pit of fire before the cult object of the god. Variants of the rite were the substitution of a lamb for the sacrifice (*molchomor*) and the vow to perform the child sacrifice if the god granted the request (*neder*). The ashes of the sacrifice were preserved in an urn, which, together with a stele recording the rite, was set up in the precincts of the tophet—the latter being a biblical term applied by archaeological convention to such sanctuaries, though perhaps more strictly designating only the sacred pit. The typical Phoenician tophet, as far as can be judged from excavation of Phoenician sites and from references by ancient

19. W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, London, 1968, p. 123. This reading, which originally appeared in *BASOR* 94, 35, was followed by H. L. Ginsberg, "The Tale of Aqhat", *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. J. Pritchard, 2nd edition, Princeton, 1955, p. 150.

20. A.-G. Barrois. *op. cit.*, p. 362.

20a. Cf. Virolleaud. *op. cit.*

21. For a recent account of this sacrifice, see J. Fevrier, "Religion—the Child Sacrifices", *Archaeologia Viva*, 1, 2 (Dec. 1968-Feb. 1969), pp. 115-118.

writers (e.g., Diodorus, Siculus, Philo of Byblos), consisted of a sacred enclosure open to the sky, containing an altar, a sacred pit, rows of urns and stelae, and a cult object (perhaps within the temple proper). This combination of cultic elements raises the question whether sanctuaries such as those of Gezer and Byblos may not have been early tophets, particularly in the case of Gezer where infant jar burials have been recorded, at least one in relation to the stele row. That the practice was older and more extensive than Phoenician culture, of which it was so characteristic, is shown by biblical references to it at Jerusalem in 6th and 7th C. (Jer. 32:35; 2 Kg. 23:10), in Israel in 8th and 9th C. (1 Kg. 17:34; 2 Kg. 17:31) and in Moab in 9th C. (2 Kg. 3:27)—the latter is a good instance of the type of circumstances which might prompt the drastic rite.

It has been noted that stelae have not been found in the oldest levels of the tophets at Carthage, Sousse, Su Cardulina and Sulci. At Carthage they apparently begin in 6th C. From this it is concluded that stelae were not a necessary adjunct of *molek* sacrifices. However, in other temples which feature rows of stelae, e.g., at Gezer, Byblos, Timna, Hazor, they are found only in the upper levels. The odd stele found in an earlier phase at Gezer, Byblos and Hazor showed that they were a feature even of the earlier life of the shrines, and in the last case prompted the excavators to consider that the final alignment contained stelae re-installed from the earlier phase. The possibility, then, both for these shrines and for the Phoenician tophets is that stelae had been re-installed in later phases of the sanctuaries. This would be a reasonable thing to do out of consideration for the religious sentiments of previous generations, if, as Fevrier puts it, "the purpose of the stele was to prolong the effect of the *molek* sacrifice."

One of the oldest stelae found at Carthage bears the inscription: "Stele of *molek* in the place of a child (?), offered by Magon, son of Hammon, to Baal Hammon." Later dedications include mention of Tanit, e.g., "To the Lady Tanit, the Face of Baal, and to the lord Baal Hammon, dedicated by Muttunbaal, wife of Abdmelqart. . . . Because they have heard her may they bless her." A like enigmatic request is made by Baalshillek in dedicating a stele for his son: ". . . may you hear his voice, may you bless him." One forms the impression that Baalshillek wishes to provide a voice for his son, by means of this *ex voto*, such as Muttunbaal has provided for herself.²² In each case the *quid pro quo* anticipated is

22. A striking parallel is afforded by the 9th C. Ben-Hadad Stele from Aleppo: "A stele set up by Barhadad, the son of T[abrimmon, the
Continued on foot of next page



Fig. 5: Figured stelae from Beisan. (a) Ras Shamra (b-d) and Carthage (e-f).

son of Hezion], king of Aram, for his Lord Melqart, which he vowed to him and he (then) heard his voice" (ANET, 501). The round-topped, tanged slab bears a single image (of Melqart ?), like some of the stelae from Ugarit. The Yehawmilk *ex voto* (5th-4th C.) from Byblos, after describing the king's works in the temple, reads: "I, Yehawmilk, king of Byblos, have made (these things) for my mistress, the Lady of Byblos, as I called my mistress, the Lady of Byblos, and she heard my voice and treated me kindly. May the Lady of Byblos bless and preserve Yehawmilk, King of Byblos, and prolong his days and years in Byblos . . ." (ANET, 502).

the divine blessing. Many Punic stelae are connected with the *neder*: "vow sworn by . . .". The *molek* sacrifice is vividly portrayed on an uninscribed 4th C. stele from Carthage, which depicts a priest carrying a child to sacrifice (fig. 5e). Another from Sousse shows three priests carrying a lamb as a substitute sacrifice. As distinct from the earlier Levantine examples, Phoenician stelae tend to be tall and pointed (fig. 5e, f).

Without entering further into the extensive discussion of their typology and iconography,²³ it would be worthwhile to make a few comparisons with the earlier stelae studied. Tophet stelae commonly represent a deity either anthropomorphically or symbolically (e.g., baetyl, "sign of Tanit", empty throne) as frequently do the Levantine examples. A Sousse representation of a suppliant standing before Baal Hammon is reminiscent of a number of figured stelae from Beisan and Ugarit. The disc-and-crescent symbol of Hazor is found in many Carthaginian stelae (fig. 5e) and is possibly one of the components of the so-called "sign of Tanit". Common to both is the symbol of hands upraised in prayer (fig. 5f). These are possible indications of continuity in the religious thinking which underlie the Semitic use of stelae over the centuries.

Cult stones were widely used throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Most of these appear to have been of a funerary nature, whether set up at the place of burial or along tracks and *wadis*.²⁴ Since they do not stand within strictly cultic settings they do not concern us. The "360 idols" (statues and sacred stones) which surrounded the Kaaba at Mecca and which were removed from the sacred area by Muhammed were probably, despite their elevation of divine status in later legend, no different from alignments at Byblos and elsewhere, namely an accumulation of votive objects, standing like worshippers in stone about the sacred black stone, "the House of Allah". A dramatic moment in the life of a temple was caught by the excavators of Hureidha.²⁵ Some time after the 3rd C. the temple had fallen into ruins and nomadic tribesmen had re-established a makeshift cult outside. Materials from inside

23. For a comprehensive survey and a recent bibliography, see A. M. Bisi, *Le Stele Puniche* (= Studi Semitici, XXVII), Rome, 1967. The reader is also referred to W. Culican, *Problems of Phoenicio-Punic Iconography—A Contribution*, in the present issue of AJBA.

24. Cf. Kirkbride and Harding, QDAP, XI, 1-2 (1944), pp. 37-43; PEQ, 1947, p. 7; RB, 1960, pp. 230-235 (for South Transjordanian locations); A. Kammerer, *Petra et la Nabatène*, Paris, 1929, pl. 85, 1 (Sabaeen *ex votos*); W. Thesiger, *Arabian Sands*, 1959, pp. 75-76 (trilithons).

25. G. Caton Thompson, *The Tombs and Moon Temple of Hureidha (Hadhramaut)*, Oxford, 1944.

the temple were re-used, including altars, votive stelae, bowls, and a circular monolith 50 x 22 x 22 cm. (which is approximately the proportions of the Dushara block and several other known baetyls). Two votive stelae mentioning the name of the moon god on their rims were laid out as a kind of a bench behind the monolith, in such a way that the parts of the inscriptions bearing the god's name faced the monolith. A little further off, two more stelae from inside the temple were set up facing in the direction of the monolith. The pathetic scene of restoration illustrates a tendency seen elsewhere, namely, to re-use and re-install even the secondary cult stones in succeeding phases of a temple. This in turn betrays a tendency to regard them as sacred—not so sacred, it is true, that they could not be incorporated into a later temple structure, but sacred nevertheless and that long after the votaries who had set them up had been forgotten. They were meant to stand permanently before the divine presence in the temple, and this intention was respected (cf. Is. 56:4-5; Rev. 3:12).

Light on the use of stelae in a sanctuary comes from a holy place which did not even have them. Petra is well known for its dramatic landscape, its temple, high place and for the spectacular tombs carved out of the cliffs surrounding the valley (fig. 6). Several visits to Petra prompted the thought that, despite the apparently haphazard lay-out of its monuments dictated by the terrain, there is a basic unity in the complex: the whole valley is a great sanctuary, where both rich and poor have desired to leave their funerary monuments gathered around a central cult object. Originally this could well have been a remarkable mountain, such as Umm el-Biyara. The High Place, with its equipment for blood sacrifice, may have been directed towards such a sacred mountain, just as the high place at Khirbet et-Tannur seems to have been directed towards a strange black mountain across the *wadi*. Whatever of this hypothesis, in time the cult object came to be the Dushara block housed in the temple, at a focal point in the valley. Facing it across the valley are the great tombs—although it is not certain that they are all true tombs (i.e., burial places) or rather monumental edifices where funerary rites might be performed. Just as at Gezer, Hazor, Byblos and other shrines, one notices in the range of votive objects the contrast between the great and magnificent (offerings of those who can afford to vie with one another) and the humble and repetitious (revealing the desire of the poor for at least a presence), so Petra enjoyed the same class distinction, on the one hand vast intricate tombs, on the other small standardised obelisks cut in relief in the rock. What links the two in the same line of consideration is the fact that obelisks and pyramids often feature in the more grandiose tombs at Petra and elsewhere (cf.

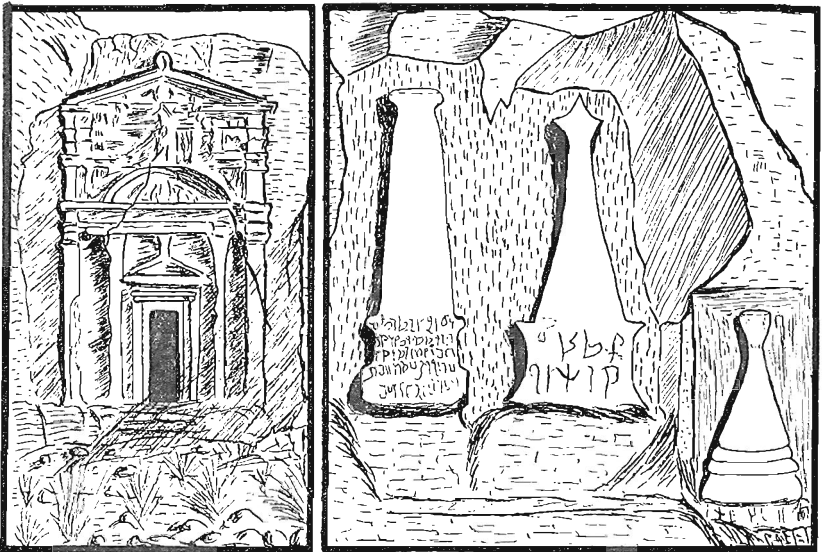
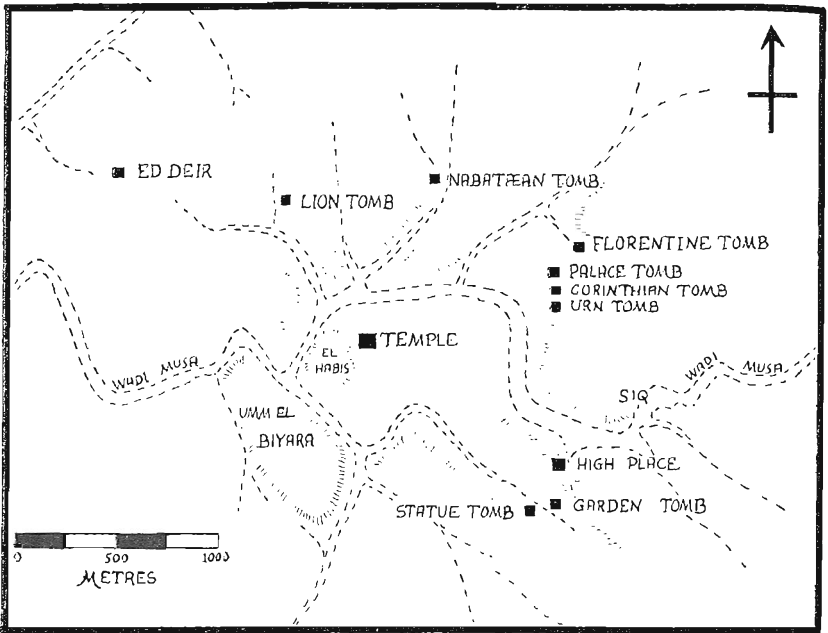


FIG. 6—See Caption on Page 79.

1 Macc. 13:28). An inscription generally designates the relief obelisk at Petra as a *nephesh* (lit. "soul, person"), while in Aramaic, Syriac and Palmyrene the funerary stele is called a *naphsha* and is often in the form of a pyramid or obelisk.²⁶ The *nephesh* is not a tombstone, for only rarely is it associated with a burial, and one *nephesh* inscription notes that its beneficiary died and was buried at Jerash.²⁷ Nor is it merely a memorial to the dead, for, while commemorative graffiti ("to the memory of . . .") abound at Petra, the *nephesh* inscription is quite different and distinctive: "(this is) the *nephesh* of . . ." Hence, and particularly in the light of the primary meaning of *nephesh*, one is led to see in both the great "tomb" and the humble *nephesh* the desire to provide a continuing presence for the dead, a house of the soul, in the presence of Dushara. The same desire could well dictate the use of funerary stelae in other cultic settings.

CONCLUSIONS

In drawing together the conclusions from the above evidence, it must be recalled that this attempt at synthesis is based on a presumption that there was a certain consistency underlying the use of stelae in Semitic cult. Where possible, this presumption has been reinforced by noting other points of similarity between shrines where stelae had been in use, e.g., temple plan, cultic apparatus, iconography. Some of the component details of the synthesis must also remain tentative. But with these qualifications, and making allowance for varying emphasis on elements in particular instances, the following is proposed as broadly applicable in all or most cases.

1. Despite great variation in shape and size, a secondary cult stone tends to have a greater width than depth, i.e., to be slab-like. One broad surface is obviously intended to be the face, whether by reason of being relatively flat, smooth, inscribed or figured. So it is in marked contrast to the baetyl, which, whether it be quadrangular, cylindrical, conical or spherical, is usually as deep as it is wide (and often twice as high), with no obvious back or front. Stelae can be associated with other votive objects, such as statues.

26. Cf. S. A. Cook, *The Religion of Ancient Palestine in the Light of Archaeology* (Schweich Lectures, 1925), London, 1930, p. 19.

27. J. Starcky, *Nouvelle Epitaphe Nabatéenne* RB LXXII (1965), pp. 95-97.

Fig. 6: Petra.

Upper: Map showing relationship of cultic elements.

Lower: Tomb of Sextius Florentinus (legate of Arabia, 2nd C.) and *nephesh* group (not to scale).

2. In a cultic setting they are normally arranged in a straight or curved alignment focussed on the cult object or focal point of the temple. Frequently this alignment runs north to south and often faces east.

3. The temple context often includes offering tables, libation and ablation basins, and pits. Sprinkling blood collected in basins (cf. Exod. 24:6-8; Petra high place) and burning victims in a pit (e.g., *molek* sacrifice) are known to have been associated with the use of stelae.

4. There is strong evidence that in later phases of a sanctuary old stelae have been set up anew or incorporated in the temple structure, which may be taken as recognition of their sacredness (although secondary to that of a baetyl) or intended permanence.

5. Where information is available, all such stelae are known to have stood in relation to men, whether collectively (e.g., Exod. 24:4) or individually. Some were set up for the dead (cf. Assur, Petra), others for the living (as shown in petitions for needs of earthly life).

6. Inscribed stelae reveal the religious sentiments which prompted them: most frequently petition on behalf of the votary's needs, but also thanksgiving for divine help in the past (e.g., victory stelae). These sentiments imply dependence of the votary on the god. It is doubtful whether any stelae are purely commemorative, i.e., preserving the memory of a person or event for prosperity, because of their location in a sacred area, in other words, it seems to have been important to preserve such a memory, by way of petition or thanksgiving, *before the deity* (cf. 2 Sam. 12:12; Is. 56:4-5).

7. Cases are known where stelae have been set up on the occasion of a sacrifice (e.g., Ugarit, Phoenicia, Balawat bronzes, Exod. 24:4), and it is feasible to suppose that usually some religious ceremony attended their erection in the shrine.

8. The evidence associating stele and sacrifice further suggests that the stele served to prolong the sacrifice in a durable form before the divine presence. It is of the nature of votive objects that they stand as a permanent prayer medium in the holy place. The expression of worship, whether by word, image or mute stone, does not cease and the votary expects to benefit while ever the *ex voto* presents his religious sentiment before the god.

9. In many cases, the presence of the name, symbol or image of the deity alone on the stone (representing a man?), or in

juxtaposition with that of the votary, raises the possibility that some covenantal or quasi-covenantal relationship is intended (cf. Rev. 3:12). Votive objects may be viewed as a medium of personal covenant, at least in so far as a *quid pro quo* relationship is implied in a religious act performed in gratitude or in expectation of a divine blessing.

10. Not only the religious act, but perhaps even the very person of the votary may be assured a presence in the temple by means of the sacred pillar. The evidence points, some of it strongly (Petra; Rev. 3:12; Exod. 24:4; cf. C.I.S., i, 115, 119), to an identification between votary and pillar. In all cases, the spatial tension between the cult object and the stelae in the sacred area must have suggested (at least to the simple faithful) that as one was the medium of the divine presence, so the other was the medium for assuring the continued presence of the votary before the god (cf. the use of the same word for both in Lev. 26:30). The idea is vividly illustrated by the 6th-7th c. temenos of Ayia Irini, Cyprus, where thousands of terracotta figures of all sizes cluster around an altar, libation table and an oval stone believed to have been the cult object of the shrine (Cyprus Museum, Rm. IV). So, it is suggested, the votary through his stele desired to stand in worship before his god, unceasingly, in life and death.