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2000 ASHERAH

HWH came from Sinai
and shone forth from his own Seir,
He showed himself from mount Paran.
Yes, he came among the myriads of Qudhsu,
at his right hand his own Asherah,
Indeed, he who loves the clans
and all his holy ones on his left.

Deuteronomy 33.2-3; Asherah's first biblical reference. (EJI, 115.)

Throughout the Near Eastern pantheon, the great composite deity Asherah transitioned with various names, symbols, and attributes, while maintaining the hypostasis of her essential essence. Her various names, symbols, and attributes are especially evident in the Canaanite, 2000–700 BCE artifacts (AGL: 290) and 400 years later in the less prevalent Hebrew including canonical and non-canonical resources. (Hebrew finds are less prevalent as sanctuaries were frequently purged and burned (210).) The discussion in this entry will address the above plus related archaeological discoveries including those from: Kuntillet Ajrud; Khirbet elQom; the Taanach (or Ta'anach) libation stand; the Ekron site; city of Lachish temple site; and the Bronze Age Ras Shamra texts. Goddess Asherah's theophany was her primary indwelling symbol: the immortal, ever alive, life giving tree and grove. (UTI: 129.) The Asherim or biblical *asherahs* (ROA: 2) were synthetic manifestations of Asherah that included the sacred pillar, pole, menorah, and all iconography of the tree of wisdom. (AMST.) (Also see, GGL: 137; YGG: 53-59.) As this was concurrent with the ongoing tree of life theme throughout the Ancient Near East including Iran, Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and Cyprus (UA: 54), pillar cults will also be addressed. (For the Kabbala Tree of Life, Menorah and the Asherah weavings, see separate *Re-Genesis* entries.) Although the focus of this Asherah entry is primarily Canaanite and Hebrew cultures, it will not be limited to monotheistic deities nor theo-retical religion. As Theodore J. Lewis reminds us, no longer can we afford to restrict research of Asherah in **Israelite** religion to male deities (DIAAI: 44). Other symbols include the pubic triangle, small house shrines called *naoi* (singular, *naos*), lions, and doves (ATB: 55-56). (AGL: 210, 290; UTI: 129; DIAAI: 44; and ATB.) *An alternative understanding of Asherim is the masculine plural of Asherah. (DGHW: 64.)

Given new discoveries and translations, post-diaspora Jewish theo-logy was very likely rooted in the emergent religion of the Semitic/semi-nomadic tribes from the land of Canaan, later Israel/Judah (FS: 26, 23). Canaan or the Israelite/Judahite

kingdoms included the area of Syria-Palestine that formed the Fertile Crescent land bridge between Mesopotamia and Egypt. It encompassed the northern area from Ras Shamra to Negreb in the south (AGL: 169). (Other sources limit the Fertile Crescent to current Iran, Iraq, and Turkey.) Around 1200-1000 BCE, Israel became the southern part whereas the northern area extended to coastal Phoenicia. Canaan evolved into a leading culture (FS: 29) that included the advancement of the alphabetic script (FS: 30), significant pottery and sculpture, ambitious building projects including the first temple, and relatively speaking, an overall cosmopolitan life style. Given Canaan's strategic location and advanced culture, it was not only an area of notable trade and travel plus numerous conquests and invasions, but it was also the heartland of a significant religious pantheon that emerged during the 2000-1450 BCE, Middle Bronze Age, Asherah and El worship, (FS: 49) with Jahweh (JHWH) later replacing El. Although well noted that congruent to the rise of Judaic monotheism after the 586-538 BCE exile in Babylonia (LGI: 40) was the expulsion, dishonor, and degradation of former gods and goddesses, especially Asherah, Queen of Heaven (TAB: 18). (See Jeremiah 44.) Despite a strong, on-going anti-goddess harangue, Asherah continued to surface and re-surface. In support this theory, John Day says that biblical Asherah in, Jg 3.7 plus the 'added reference' in the Hebrew Bible, I Kg 18.19 clearly illustrates that she was worshiped as goddess both in ancient Israel—and—that this belief and practice continued well into the postexilic period (YGG: 44-45). (FS: 23, 26, 49; AGL: 169; YGG: 44-45.)

As noted, Middle Bronze Age, 2000-1450 BCE (RDW: 49) ushered in the urbanization of Canaan that included a religious pantheon headed by the father god El and progenitress/creatress of the gods, (UTI: 131) Asherah. Come the 1100-800 BCE dark ages, this region transitioned due to numerous invasions including defeats by the Egyptians from the south and also the Hittites from the north (RDW: 49). From 1200 to the 586 BCE conquests of Judah and Babylonian exile, the Israelites lived, married, and worshiped with the Canaanites, but also integrated and intermingled with the Hittites, Hivites, and Amorites plus other smaller tribes. During this time, Jahweh was introduced into the pre-monarchic court circles, (49) and although Asherah's stature started to weaken, she along with her wooden symbols and groves continued to be worshiped and long before the temples (Jg 3.5-7. UTI: 131). As a result of the patronage of Naamah, Ammonite wife of Solomon, Asherah first penetrated the Jerusalem Temple around 928-911 BCE (HG: 47) and for 236 years of the temple's 370-year existence, she was considered a legitimate religion (50). As many of Asherah's Hebrew artifacts were made of wood, little archaeological evidence remains whereas her abundant artifacts from Canaan, clearly validate her worship as stated by R. J. Pettey (AGL: 209). R. Patai adds that the popular forms of *asherahs* (or trees) and Asherah worship are a clear indication to her heritage from the pre-monarchic Canaanite period (HG: 47). (RDW: 49; UTI: 131; HG: 47, 50; AGL: 209; HG: 47.)

Asherah was the pro-typical mother of the seventy Canaanite gods and known as "*qnyt 'lim*, 'procreatress of the gods' or '*um 'l(m)*, 'mother of the gods' (AMST:

47). The chief goddess of the Canaanite pantheon was also known as Lady Asherah- of-the-Sea, wife/consort of the chief god El and later Ba'l or Baal (CMWE: 184; HG: 36). In addition to being the great mother goddess of all gods and creatures (CMWE: 32), she was also known as the lion lady and lady of the serpent (33). The Ugaritic version of Asherah's name was, Lady Athirat, also El's consort (ATLM: 5). Elat (goddess) was also an Ugaritic name for Asherah. (AMST: 40.) In Ancient Mesopotamia's 2nd mil. Old Babylon period, Asherah was known as Asratum (also Asratu, Asirtu, Asiratum, or Ashratu) (ROA: 2; AEE: 199). From the Hammurabian Dynasty, 1750 BCE, Babylonian texts say that goddess Asratum was the wife of god Amurru and her name comes from *as-re-tum-um-mi*, meaning, *Asratum is my mother* (AEE: 199). The lineage of Ashratu, another version of Asratum, continued down into the ancient South Arabian region of Qataban (ROA: 2) where she was known as Atharath, same name as in the Ugarit tablets (HG: 37). Her Hittite name was Ashertu, (ROA: 3) and in Egypt she was known as Qadesh, *the beloved or the holy one*. On a New Kingdom Egyptian plaque she is: Qudshu (Asherah); Astarte; and Anat. (GHW: 177.) The title, Lady of the Sea also echoes Lebanese later Greek Aphrodite and Syrian Atartgatis (GA: 138). In the Hebrew Bible, there are 40 references to Asherah (plural Asheroth). Ackroyd suggests that the Queen of Heaven reference in Jeremiah 7 and 44 can be assumed to refer to Asherah given the proximity to consort, Yahweh as *God of Heaven* (Ezr 1.2; GWZ: 252). The Kings texts indicate that she was worshiped everywhere (AGL: 206-7). For further biblical passages frequently cited in defense of goddess Asherah reconstruction see: I K 15.13, 18.19; 2 K 21.7, 23.4; Jg 3.7; Jr 2.27; (EHG: 126). Derogatory terms are numerous such as, bosheth i.e. *shame* (ATLM, 3). (AMST: 40, 47; CMWE: 32-33; ATLM: 5; ROA: 2-3; AEE: 199; HG: 37; GA: 138; GWZ: 252; EHG: 126; ROA: 2.)

During the Middle Minoan period, 2000-1450 BCE, the annual creation Phenomena of death-birth-maturation-death was evidenced in Asherah and her numinous tree of life and immortality manifestations. These life giving manifestations of Asherah and Asherim included ritual groves, trees, may poles, temple pillars, primeval forests, and goddess pillar figures with full nourishing breasts (TOL: 32-34, 59). In J. Neusner's translation of *The Mishnah*, any tree that people worship was Asherah and again in the Babylonian Talmud, Asherah was any sacred tree (AMS: 44). Asherah was always a living tree, or grove as her *livingness* was integral to her re-creatix, life giving fertility attributes (AMST: 42). She was the *source*. These trees were frequently trimmed and pruned to a stylized shape. The Asherim were cultic representations such as poles of representating Asherah found in "association with Massebot at Canaanite high places" that were either natural or artificially made (51). A gold lampstand menorah, fashioned on the almond tree, was an antitype of an Asherim (51). E. O. James suggests that the tree was the Goddess embodying the female principle of she who gives life, takes it away, and returns it again (TOL: 103). He adds that these immortality symbols were also closely related to the Mazzeboth in the form of obelisks or stele, plus double axes, sacred waters, horns of consecration, and the omphalos found in the Aegean and Minoan Crete (32-34, 59). During Iron Age II (ca. 930-730 BCE or alternate date, 1100-800 BCE) (GAT: 42-43) pillar figures of Judahite goddess

Asherah presenting her breasts were well known (44). Despite these well known Asherah figures, starting in the eight century BCE, trees were believed to be a threat to pure Yahwism and later a threat to monotheism as well (56). Biblical examples of this 'presumed threat' are noted in, Dt 12: 2-3 demanding the 'complete' destruction of all carved images, temples, poles, and groves plus, Dt 16:21-22 condemned and prohibited all and any tree replanting near a Yahweh altar. "You shall not plant any tree as an Asherah beside the altar of the Lord your God which you shall make. And you shall not set up a pillar, which the Lord your God hates." Dt. 16.21-22. (AMST: 38; HBSRV.) These Deuteronomy texts plus the Genesis story of the fall and banishment of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and the Tree of Wisdom are also telling statements about the widespread recognition and use of the tree, groves, plus tree sanctuaries. (One does not banish a nonexistent threat.) Additional tree examples not previously mentioned include: the Buddha's Bodi-tree; winter solstice fir tree; and the Mamre shrine, adjacent to the Hebron terebinthe/oak sacred grove of the chief priestess Sarah, wife of Abraham. (Gn18:1, 23:17.) (STP: 89-90, 93, 97, and 270). Over the centuries, selected tree rituals included: 8th century CE great tree shrines; 11th century Slavic celebrations around wooden carvings; and the continuation of the May Pole dance (ROM: 210-1). To summarize, tree worship or the pillar cults were wide spread and found throughout the Ancient Far and Middle East, Eastern Mediterranean including Minoan Crete (TPA: 251) and the Aegean, as well as Africa and ancient Arabia (ERE: 666). Bernard Dietrich traces the origins the tree cults, including baetyls and indwelling divine representations back even further to Neolithic Anatolia (TIGR: 8-9). (TOL: 32-34, 59, 103; GAT: 42-44, 56; HBSRV; TPA: 251; ERE: 666; TIGR: 8-9; STCC; and 2 K 17.10-11.)

A selection of significant archaeological finds that continue to be of prime importance includes: Kuntillet Ajrud; Khirbet el Qom; Tel Taanach; Ugarit; Lachish; Ekron; Meggiddo; and Nahariyah. Each location has produced material that is very important to the overall Asherah mosaic, but the Ugaritic texts are in a unique class. Judith Hadley says that there is "no difficulty with the gap of 400 years from the time of Ugaritic texts until the earliest biblical records" as we now have very clear information substantiating that: 1) Athirat/Asherah continued as goddess in the local cults (COA: 10); 2) Hebrew Asherah is a composite deity of Ugaritic Athirat and both are related to Amorite Asratum; and 3) the biblical Asherah and her wooden symbol may both be the goddess herself (COA: 11). In defense of this possibility, it should be remembered that in the ancient near east, it was not unusual for a deity and sacred object or symbol to share the same name and same sacred significance (COA: 7). (COA: 7, 10-11.)

Discoveries made at the archaeological sites of Kuntillet Ajrud in northern Sinai and Khirbet el Qom near Hebron date from 800 to 700 BCE, ancient pre-exilic Israelite era. These discoveries have had significant impact on validating Asherah as a goddess in her own right. In addition to Asherah represented as a seated cathedra deity or *ilhm ksat*, (chair goddesses), (GA: 44, n. 54.) inscriptions "associate Asherah and Yahweh in a cultic capacity" and signify that she was greatly respected and widely revered (AGL: 210). The ancient city Tel Taanach in

Israel is the archaeological cite of a Canaanite libation cult stand. Judith Hadley believes that this Israelite artifact dates from the 10th century BCE (COA: 171) and that it is the clearest evidence to date of the Yahweh and Asherah worship. (208.) The four paneled stand or tiers include remarkable iconographic scenes including a nude goddess with a Hathor headdress (or *Hathor Locks*) flanked by two lions, stylized tree of life and pubic triangles (AGL: 182-3). Rich archaeological discoveries from Ugarit (modern Ras Shamra), include: a palace; two tripartite temples very similar to Solomon's temple in Jerusalem; an immense library and palace; numerous female figures; and a 1300 BCE ivory lion bas relief with a goddess nursing two boys. (Isis as the tree of life nursing her brother, Tuthmosis III, 1479-1425 BCE later illustrates this nursing motif.) Of particular significance are the Bronze Age cuneiform tablets that Judith Hadley says "definitely established the identity of a goddess Asherah" (COA: 7). (AGL: 177.) The tablets contain divine Canaanite myths about father god El and his consort Lady Athirat, the *Ugaritic version of Hebrew Asherah* (ATLM: 8). Additional titles include, Lady Asherah of the Sea (HG: 37) plus *rbt ym* that translates, 'lady who walks on the sea' (ATLM: 8). The Canaanite temple at Lachish dates to around 1500 BCE. Lachish finds include a group of pottery-decorated goblets with the sacred tree, and pubic triangle. There is also an offering inscription to goddess Elath or Asherah from the Baal epoch. (LEA: 214-15; AGL: 181.) A significant Asherah plaque was found on the biblical site of Ekron, or modern Tel Migne, located just west of Jerusalem. Asherah is wearing a Hathor headdress (or Hathor Headdress) and her arms are raised in the KA position holding two snakes. The Hathor headdress coupled with the Egyptian KA position clearly echoes Egyptian influences. (AGL: 181-2.) Additional artifacts from the 2000-1200 BCE early Canaanite site of Meggiddo include 12 goddess figures with conical headgear and in the familiar position of hands on breasts or abdomens (178). The Nahariyah site is on the seacoast just south of Tyre and Sidon. The 1954-1955 excavations uncovered a female deity of Nahariyah that is most likely lady Asherah (Ashrath-Yam, Ashtoreth of the Sea) plus three temple layers similar to Megiddo. (AGL: 179.) (GWZ; CMWE; YGG; ROM; WRSA; COA: 7; 171; 208; ERE; LEA: 214-15; GWT; TOL; JB; GAT; RDW; HSOT; DIAAI; ATLM: 8; AEE; NEB; HG; AGL: 177-179, 181-3, 210; ST; UTI; SAAS; AFE; EHG; FS; STP; EHIP; ROA; GA.)

For further information on the above and other Levant information see:
Cornelius, Izak. *The Many Faces of the Goddess: The Iconography of the Syro-Palestinian Goddesses Anat, Astarte, Qedeshet, and Asherah C. 1500-1000 BCE*. *Orbis biblicus et orientalis*, 204. Fribourg, Switzerland: Academic Press, 2004. (MFG)
Keel, Othmar, and Christoph Uehlinger. *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998. (GGI)
Stuckey, Johanna H. "The Great Goddesses of the Levant." *Bulletin of the Canadian Society of Mesopotamian Studies* 37 (2002), 127-157. (GGL)
Dever, William G. *Did God Have a Wife?* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005. (GHW)

For information on the transition of goddesses and gods including El Shaddai, Canaanite Baal-Hadad, El, and later Yahweh, see:
Biale, David. "The God with Breasts: El Shaddai in the Bible." *History of Religions*. 21.3 (February, 1982): 240-256. (GWB)

For further information on May Poles and Asherah, see:
Flint, Valerie I. J. *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*.
Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. (ROM: 210-211)
Hestrin, Ruth. "The Lachish Ewer and the Asherah." *Israel Exploration Journal* 37.4 (1987). (LEA: 214.)
Porada, Edith. *Corpus of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in North American Collections: The Collection of the Pierpont Morgan Library*. Vol. 1. New York: Pantheon Books, 1948. (CANE: Plate, 956.)

For further information on the Ekron inscription, see:
Demsy, Aaron. "Discovering a Goddess." *Biblical Archaeology Review* 24.5 (Sept./Oct., 1998): 53-58. (DAG)

For further information in which Asherah is translated as a grove, see: Jg 3.7; 1 K 15.13, 18.19; 2 K 21, 23.4, 6, and 7 in the King James Version. For information about the first Yahweh shrine that Abraham built in an Asherah grove see: Gn 21.33.

For information on the Tree of Life and the Garden of Eden, see BCE entry: 4000, Garden of Eden, Sacred Trees, and Pillar Cults; 3000, Earliest Menorah Finds; and 2400, Lilith and Eve; and 1500, Lachish Ewer, Triangle, and Menorah. Also see CE entry: 16th Century, Kabbalah.

For further information on Asherah see BCE entries: 2200, Bethel, Almond City, and Asherah; 2000-1200, Ras Shamra; 1500, Lachish Ewer, Triangle, and Menorah; 970, First Temple, Menorah, and Weavings; 900, Taanach, Canaanite Libation Stand; 800-700, Kuntillet Ajrud and Khirbet El-Qom; and 600-398, Anat/Asherah and Yahweh, Egypt.

For further information on the Asherah weavings and menorah, see BCE entry: 970, First Temple, Menorah, and Weavings. For further information on the Menorah, see BCE entries: 3000, Earliest Menorah Finds; 2200, Bethel, Almond City, and Asherah; 2200, Nahariyah and Ashrath-Yam; 1500, Lachish Ewer, Triangle, and Menorah; 970, First Temple, Menorah, and Weavings; 900, Taanach, Canaanite Libation Stand; 800-700, Kuntillet Ajrud and Khirbet El-Qom; 586, Destruction of the First Temple, Jerusalem Exile; and 538 BCE –70 CE, Second Temple Period. Also see CE entry: 70, Destruction of Jerusalem Temple.

For further information on Isis and Hathor as nursing tree deities, see BCE entry: 1479-1425 Tuthmosis III, Egyptian King.

For further information on Solomon's Temple see BCE entries: 2000-1200, Ras Shamra; 970, First Temple, Menorah, and Weavings; and 586, Destruction of the First Temple, Jerusalem Exile.

For recommended summary of the Davidic through First and Second Temple historical transitions, see BCE entry: 1000-70, Davidic Kingship, Solomon, Philistines, and Temple Transitions.

For further information on Mamre, see BCE entry: 4000, Garden of Eden, Sacred Trees, and Pillar Cults; 1800, Goddess Sarah and Abraham.

For further tree, baetyl, and pillar cult information, see BCE entries: 7250-6150, Catal Huyuk, Anatolia; 7100-6300, Cathedra Goddess of the Beasts; Garden of Eden, Sacred Trees, and Pillar Cults; 4000-3000, Egypt, Africa, and Cathedra Goddesses; 2613-2494, Hathor's Dendera (Denderah) Temple, Egypt; 1800, Goddess Sarah and Abraham; 1479-1425, Tuthmosis III, Egyptian King; 814, Carthage, Africa, the Goddess Tanit and Sacrifice; 100, Mecca, the Ka'aba and Sacred Stones; 800-700, Kuntillet Ajrud and Khirbet El-Qom. Also see CE entry: 16th Century, Kabbalah.

For further information on Cathedra Goddesses, see BCE entries: 8300-4500, Sha'ar Hagolan (Sha'ar Ha-Golan); 7250-6150, Catal Huyuk, Anatolia; 7100-6300, Cathedra Goddess of the Beasts; 5400-3500, Ancient Aphrodite: Chalcolithic or Copper Age; 4400, Archaic Hera of the Golden Throne; 4000-3000, Egypt, Africa, and Cathedra Goddesses; 3250, Scorpion Tableau, Earliest Egyptian Proto-Hieroglyphics; 3000-2000, Anatolia, Kubaba, and the Hittites; 2500, Inanna, Holder of the *me*; 800-700, Kuntillet Ajrud and Khirbet El-Qom; 550, Cathedra Goddess Kourotraphos, Megara Hyblaea, Sicily; and 400, Cathedra Goddess Isis. (Spanish, Israeli, French, and Polish cathedra goddesses pending.)

For further Tanaash information, see BCE entry: 900, Taanash. For additional information on Ras Shamra, see BCE entry: 2000-1200, Ras Shamra. For additional information about Kuntillet Ajrud and Khirbet el Qom, see BCE entry: 800-700 Kuntillet Ajrud and Khirbet el Qom.

For information on Hammurabi, see BCE entry: 1750 Hammurabian Dynasty, Babylon, Ishtar, and Inanna. For additional Temple of Solomon information, see BCE entry: 586, Destruction of the First Temple, Jerusalem Exile. For additional Nahariyah information, see BCE entry: 2200 Nahariyah and Ashrath-Yam. For additional information on Canaan, see BCE entry: 7000, Jericho, Canaan/Palestine.

For further triangle/vulval/V information, see BCE entries: 70,000, Blombos Cave; 5300-4300, Climactic Phase And Script In Old Europe; 34,000-28,000, Les Eyzies Vulva Engravings, Dordogne Caves; 31,000, Chauvet Cave and Vulva Engraving; 8000/7000-5000, Early Neolithic; 7000-5000, Early Neolithic Crete; 5500-3500, Cucuteni (Tipolye) Culture, Eastern Europe; 4000-3500, Gavrinis, Brittany,

France; 2000, Asherah; 1790-1700, Goddess of Kultepe, Anatolia; and 1500, Lachish Ewer, Triangle, and Menorah.

For vulva photos examples, see BCE entries: 34,000-28,000, Les Eyzies Vulva Engravings, Dordogne Caves; 30,000-25,000, Aurignacian Age; 30,000-25,000, Goddess of Willendorf; 25,000-20,000, Goddess of Laussel; 5300-4300, Climactic Phase and Script in Old Europe; 3000-2000, Cycladic Goddesses; 2600-2000, Early Bronze Age, Crete, Chthonian; and 400, Celtic Sheela-na-gig. For additional CE information see illustration for the 1510 vulva labyrinth design by Stabius, in *Concerning Maze* (MLW: 85, fig. 127).

For further information on writing plus Vinca- and Tisza sacred script, see BCE entries: 5400-3200; Ancient Aphrodite: Chalcolithic or Copper Age; 5300-4300, Climactic Phase and Script in Old Europe; 5000-4900, Inanna, Uruk, and Mesopotamia; 3400-2900, Mesopotamian Writing from the Protoliterate Period; 3100-2600, Proto Bronze Age Crete, Writing and Heroes; 3000-2000, Anatolia; 3000, First Dynasty, Egypt; 2300, Sumerian Transitions; 2000-1450, Middle Bronze Age Crete; 1900-1800, Dawning of the African Alphabet and Egyptian Aniconic Goddess Triangle; 1600, Mycenaean Dominant on Greek; 1100-800, Iron Age; 1100-800, Mediterranean Dark Ages; 668-626, Sumerian Mythology; and 500-400, Classical Greek Era and Leading Male Authors.

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