SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ROSSLYN PILLARS AND PILLARS KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN
INCORPORATED IN ANE TEMPLES


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# SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ROSSLYN PILLARS AND PILLARS KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN INCORPORATED IN ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEMPLES

## Abstract.

From Ancient Near Eastern texts, the Bible and archaeological artefacts, we are able to glimpse an over arching belief in a feminine deity. During the occupation of the Temple Mount by the Knights Templars, earlier traditions were "re-discovered" and accepted as a de facto tradition.

William St Clair at the threshold of the Renaissance, mindful of the danger of heresy, was intellectually able to bring together many traditions into a broad Biblically-based theology that recognised the early Israelite traditions as the foundation of Christian belief. All this is evident in Rosslyn Chapel.

## Key Terms

Aniconism;  Apprentice Pillar;  Asherah;  Dome of the Rock;  Dunstaffnage;  Franciscan Cross;  Gate of the Chain;  Knights Templar;  Polytheism a reality in Early Israelite Religion; Rosslyn Chapel.

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# SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ROSSLYN PILLARS AND PILLARS KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN INCORPORATED IN ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEMPLES

## Introduction

*"To smash the idols is to let the symbols speak"*

(Paul Ricoeur in Smith 2001:20)

It is important to take seriously the religious convictions of others. However religious understanding as it is known to those who hold the understanding is elusive to those from outside the tradition.

We know that the ancient, pervasive belief in a feminine deity, throughout the Ancient Near East (ANE) was not absent from Early Israelite religion. Although it is impossible to gauge the full extent of the variety found within this very early religious tradition, we know, particularly from the Ugaritic Texts as well as Old Testament textual studies and archaeological artefacts, that the divine couple El and Asherah were the *de facto* parents of the entire Syro-Palestinian pantheon.

These two deities maintained the order of the cosmos by making ultimate decisions and providing the highest authority on political, religious and judicial matters. Asherah nominated, El established. Both political and religious institutions owed their existence to Asherah and El. Clearly she was not seen as a hypostatic form of El (or Yahweh, or any other god) but was known as an independent goddess of great importance.

*"God (Elohim) takes his stand in the divine assembly,*
*surrounded by the gods he gives judgement"*
(NJB Psalm 82:1).

With the advent of Christianity the meaningful role that the goddess had continued to play throughout the millennia, in the lives of many men and women, suddenly came into the open in the form of Mary, Mother of Jesus. She became an important consideration for the early Church Fathers.

During the occupation of the Temple Mount by the Knights Templars, the earlier traditions which included an asherah were 're-discovered' or 'found' and accepted as a *de facto* tradition.

The Christian Templars with the assistance of the Medieval Kabalists tried to re- interpret this information from their masculine perspective.

William St Clair, certainly an 'international-player' of his day, was, besides being a devout Roman Catholic, a very intelligent man and a keen minded scholar who commissioned others to study and translate important works of that time. Remember the long history of the St Clair clan, his love for his wives and family, his position and wealth; he stood at the threshold of the Renaissance ever mindful of the danger of heresy, intellectually able to bring together many contexts and traditions into a broad Biblically-based theology, that recognised the early Israelite traditions as the heritage and foundation of Christian belief. All these criteria are apparent in Rosslyn Chapel.

Relevant to the issues of this discussion is the question related to Israelite monotheism whether a female deity was venerated along with Yahweh in pre-exilic Israel and concerns the nature of her status. It is not just an historic interest that underlies the focus of this debate because the issue behind the question of whether Yahweh had a consort reflects indirectly on the role of women in the cult in pre-exilic Israel and moves into the realm of the status of women in both synagogue and church.

**Methodology**

The original hypothesis of this dissertation proposed that the Mason's and Apprentice Pillars in Rosslyn Chapel represented the pillars that had stood outside the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. The study showed that exoterically this hypothesis is correct: these pillars in Rosslyn Chapel can be correlated with the Jachin and Boaz of Solomon's Temple, as other scholars have also noted.

However the research led to a second hypothesis: that esoterically the chapel recreates Ancient Israelite theology and that the Chapel represents a *High Place.* This dissertation shows convincingly the strong probability that this second hypothesis is also correct.

My research strategy comprises a comparative study directed towards a comparison of historically seemingly unrelated phenomena. It aims to be a 'typological comparison'. It would **not** be true to say that it proceeds from the 'known' to the 'unknown'.

It proceeds from a textual base and along the way looks at the wider context of Old Testament milieu, Ancient Near East texts, archaeological evidence, myth and tradition, trying to draw together the many strands that made up a religious practice that was not lost, only operating beneath the established order.

If the pictorial evidence that a culture has produced is systematically ignored one cannot expect to recreate even a minimally adequate description of the culture itself.

In keeping with all scholarship in the humanities, argument rarely amounts to proof. The discussion that is presented involves interpretation related to probability and plausibility and allows for considerable disagreement in detail.

Despite reliance on the Ugaritic texts and other mythology this study has been kept within the bounds of the Bible as William St Clair wished his Chapel to be. It attempts to show relatedness – not in any way identicalness or proof.

SPECIAL NOTE: A major concern in presenting this thesis was keeping the interest of the reader. It was important to present evidence within its own context and with sufficient detail for it to be seen as reliable in its own right and not manipulated to favour the hypothesis. Critical threads of the argument have been **emboldened** – certain words or phrases that might have gone unnoticed in an explanation; clues that piece together the argument.

**Synopsis**

Chapter 1 describes the Ugaritic pantheon and establishes Yahweh of the later Hebrew texts firmly within the context this early religious tradition.

Chapter 2 establishes religion in Israelite Society as multi dimensional and polytheism a reality in Ancient Israel.

Chapter 3 considers figuring within a cult in which visual representation was forbidden. Aniconical representation conformed but the little terracotta figurines transcended the prohibition. Kuntillet Ajrûd is discussed.

Chapter 4 establishes Mt Zion and the Temple of Solomon as the *axis mundi*. The pillars Jachin and Boaz bridge the divide between heaven and earth. Chain filigrees symbolically link Yahweh and the People of Israel. Non supportive pillars are found in other contemporary Phoenician Temples, they are not as large or as elaborate as the descriptions of Hiram's pillars. The symbols of the goddess become stylised in the palm tree motif which establishes itself in the Aeolic capital.

Chapter 5. Israelite religion survived the exile due to the experiential faith which endured within the realm of family. New theological thought was couched within this paradigm. The old *High Places* are not found any more; only the little terracotta figurines continued through the catastrophe, the Persian Age and into the Hellenistic period. Zerubbabel rebuilt the Temple.

Herod refurbished the precincts of the Temple in the contemporary architectural style. The Shekinah emerged in post biblical Judaism as a new concept of feminine divinity.

Chapter 6 focuses on Jerusalem from the 1st century CE; war, the razing of the Temple, the presence of Messianic Jews in Jerusalem, Christian Byzantine rule between 4th and 7th centuries and the anomaly of the Dome of the Rock.

Chapter 7. The role of Mary is discussed. From the earliest times she has taken on the role of Asherah within the Christian church. Heresy was regarded as deviant behaviour. After the 4th century it was used effectively by the Church / State to enforce conformity.

Chapter 8 unfolds political, religious and sociological thought of the Crusader period, the rise and fall of the Knights Templar. The Gate of the Chain in Jerusalem is an early example of Templar architecture in the style found in Rosslyn Chapel. Islamic occupation led to banning of Christians from Jerusalem. Eventually the Franciscans were allowed custodianship of Christian Holy Places. The Kabalistic metaphysics of the Middle Ages emphasised the interactive importance of masculine and feminine – dependent upon yet transformed by the other. The ancient Celtic religion of Scotland was grounded in nature, the magical and the dearly loved mother goddesses.

Chapter 9 is a summary of the first eight chapters emphasising the religious background and history of Ancient Israel as it is linked to Rosslyn Chapel.

Chapters 10, 11 and 12 are about Rosslyn Chapel. Founded by the Earl of Rosslyn, the Chapel transcends its 15th century context .as well as its visible trappings. The Chapel is a Holy Place of sacred forms and universal symbols, including Centre, Tree and Fertility. A Sacred Space because of the abiding presence of Deity – a time honoured *High Place.*

Chapter 13 discusses the pillars inside the Chapel.

Chapter 14 concludes that the Abiding Presence of *Transcendent Creator* and *Admirable Mother* – in their ancient form – are to be found within Rosslyn Chapel.

# Chapter 1   Pre-Israelite Religion and The Goddess

## 1.1     Neolithic Age   (ca 8500 – 7500 BCE)

During the Neolithic period subsistence changed from food gathering to food production. In the Ancient Near East (ANE) the transition from the gathering phase to fully developed agriculture and pastoralism began around 10 500 BCE and lasted several thousand years. It was accompanied by changes in social organisation and economic activity which expressed themselves in the establishment of settled communities and the eventual rise of ANE civilizations (Mazar 1992:35).

The archaeological record shows that the Neolithic period was a time of peaceful co-existence between small and unfortified villages and a time when the Mother Goddess was worshipped by various Neolithic communities under various names and forms for her providence of the necessities of life (Robertson 2001:19-20).

At the Neolithic site of Hurvat Minah (Munhata) in the Jordan Valley a complete clay figurine was found. The seated woman, probably a fertility goddess is holding her breasts and is depicted with exaggerated hips. It is from the Yarmukian phase ca sixth millennium BCE
(Mazar 1992: 51-53).

A rock carving (height 17 inches) known as *The Goddess of Lausse*, housed in the *Musée d'Aquitaine*, Bordeaux, depicts a female deity also with large breasts and exaggerated hips. She is holding up the moon in her right hand. This sculpture is dated between 22 000 and
18 000 BCE (Robertson 2001:343: Plate 10).

At some stage, aggressive pastoralists began to invade various territories including the Middle East and Mediterranean area. Many Neolithic sites have been found at the fringes of the Transjordan desert – probably communities of hunters.

Robertson is of the opinion that later on, it was these pastoral kings that built and ruled the great cities. They revered a male god whose ethic was the very antithesis of that of the Goddess. The city gods personified the principles of law, order and government whilst the Goddess stood for freedom. A new system of values was thrust upon the people of this region. Competition and warfare between the cities became the norm. These masculine values which were once subordinate began to manifest and eventually overcome the traditional values of the Mother. The

inevitable consequence was that an ideology based upon the principles of co-operation was replaced by patriarchy and tyranny – with a masculine god as its divine champion (Robertson 2001:19-20).

"At the core of the invader's system was the placing of higher value on the power that takes, rather than gives, life" (Eisler 1987:48).

The priests of the imperial city gods, supported by the royal establishments, represented the interest of the burgeoning wealthy class. The Goddess has always represented the liberal end of the political spectrum that celebrates ideals such as freedom from coercion and the basic unity of all people. The priests tried hard to eradicate and suppress the worship of the Goddess. However the masses never entirely submitted, reverence of the Goddess was too deeply entrenched and the essential needs of her followers too profound for her veneration to be eliminated (Robertson 2001:20).

It was the "Neolithic period that saw the beginning of the symbiosis and periodic rivalry between the dwellers of the desert and those of the sown" (Mazar 1992:56).

## 1.2    Canaanite Religion and the Ugaritic Texts

### 1.2.1    Ugarit

Ugarit was rediscovered in 1928 by a Syrian ploughman who accidentally opened a tomb .The site is now called Ras Shamra (Cape Fennel). It is located on the north Syrian coast and was one of the major Canaanite city states during the second millennium BCE. The ancient port city of Ugarit was destroyed by an invasion of Sea Peoples not long after 1200 BCE. Coogan (1978:9) asserts that the city was not a Mycenaean colony as is suggested by the vaulted tombs and painted pottery. The deciphering and translating of the Ugaritic texts has made it clear that this cosmopolitan port was Semitic and the people Canaanite.

Coogan (1978:9) says Canaanite refers to a group of Semitic people who during the Bronze Age occupied most of the area of what is today Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Jordan. The Canaanites were never organised into a single political unit. The relatively independent city states such as Ugarit, Byblos, Sidon, Tyre, Shechem and Jerusalem had a common language and culture (with local idiosyncrasies) which is called Canaanite.

*"By origin and birth you belong to the land of Canaan"*
(Ezekiel 16:3).

**1.2.2     Similarities Between the Ugaritic Texts and the Biblical Texts**

The tablets had been stored in a building near to the Temple of Baal.

O Keel and C Uehlinger (1998:396) assert that the Ugaritic texts are not primary sources for the religious history of Canaan and Israel; however, Mark Smith (2001:16) believes they are extremely important in providing a larger extended background behind the development of Israelite religion.

The ancient Ugaritic literature is much older (1350 – 1150 BCE) and its province far more urban, cosmopolitan and centralised than that of Ancient Israel which was more rural and more diverse topographically and territorially and had a lengthier history of extant literature (ca 1150 -1160 BCE). Although the date of the extant copies of the texts is known, the age of the myths themselves is not.

The Biblical texts are more focused on the relationship between the divine and human beings, even individuals, than on the supernatural or heavenly realm. However there are prose and poetic compositions that quite clearly presuppose knowledge on the part of the audience of a divine realm populated by a monarchical hierarchy of divine beings.

*"I saw Yahweh seated on His throne with the whole array of heaven standing by him, on*
*his right and on his left…A spirit then came forward and stood before Yahweh…"*
(NJB 1 Kings 22:19, 21).

*"One day when the Sons of God came to attend on Yahweh …"*
(NJB Job 1:6 and Job 2:1).

*"God takes his stand in the divine assembly*
*surrounded by the gods he gives judgement"*
(NJB Psalm 82:1).

Ancient Israel lacked a centralized monarchy in Iron 1 period and remained far less centralised even when the monarchies managed to imprint themselves on their agrarian clan-based cultures.

"No matter how the cultural relationship is resolved, the diversity of later reflexes of material in the Ugaritic texts shows that mythic narratives were transmitted in the areas known in the Bible as Canaan and Israel" (Smith 2001:16-17).

Smith continues to argue that Ancient Ugaritic and early Israelite literatures were not completely different, especially in the general parameters of language, social structure, as well as religious terminology and religious practices such as prayer, sacrifice and religious experience including conceptualization of divinity. Although these points of contact are not equivalent nor are they required to be understood as a single or same religion, they do however point to a "larger religious tradition shared broadly by West Semitic peoples, including the Israelites" (Smith 2001:17).

The structure of the verse in both the Ugaritic texts and the Hebrew Bible is often identical. They both make extensive use of parallelism. A single idea is expressed in units of two or three lines – a bi-colon or a tri-colon – by repetition, synonyms or anonyms. Widespread use of these techniques clarifies obscurities.

*"Take a lamb in your hand,*
*A sacrificial lamb in your right hand*
*A young animal in both your hands"*

From *Kirta* in Coogan (1978:16).

Parallelism is impressionistic, not cumulative, and only one lamb is in question. Examples of this type of formula are found within the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible.

*"Behold, your enemies, Yahweh,*
*Behold, your enemies have perished,*
*All evildoers have been scattered"*

(Psalm 92:9)*.*

Proverbs 30:18-31 and Amos 1:3 provide examples of numerical synonymy and are identical to that used in the Ugaritic texts. The equivalent of any number (x) is the next higher unit (x+1) – such as 3 and 4; 7 and 8; 1000 and 10, 000.

Repetitive use of epithets and formulae describe typical actions. Baal is called Rider of the Clouds or The Son of Dagon. El is The Kind, The Compassionate, The Bull, The Father of Time, and The Father of Men.

Tautology should not be regarded as cliché but rather as an excellent technique in communication, well suited to ancient audiences. Whether Canaanite or Greek, people listened rather than read, repetition allowed for a lessening of attention at periodic intervals during the course of the narrative. Repetition and revision are time honoured learning techniques that clarify obscurities, enhance visualisation and improve understanding.

The common motif to measure time is in periods of seven days or seven years. This motif is also found in Egyptian and Mesopotamian sources. Periods of plenty and famine were seven year cycles, the walls of Jericho fell after seven days, seven days is the duration of a wedding feast (Coogan 1978:18).

Examination of parallelism, epithets and formulae clearly show that ancient Semitic poets whether Ugaritic or Israelite were highly conservative – these traditional techniques were preserved with little modification for at least a thousand years.

"The Israelites indebtedness to their Canaanite predecessors was not merely linguistic and literary" (Coogan 1978:18).

Smith (2001:17) also refers to the work of J Day who has shown that specific proper names and terms common to both the Ugaritic and Biblical texts indicate that the Ugaritic texts remain relevant to the study of Ancient Israel, even if Ugarit is neither proximate to Israel nor equivalent to 'Canaanite'.

### 1.2.3   Contextualising Ugaritic Ideas

Following a long line of discussion between the disciplines of Anthropology and Ancient Middle Eastern Studies especially during the 1970s and 1980s, the Assyriologist F A M Wiggermann has applied to the Mesopotamian organization of the cosmos, an important and basic spatial distinction well known in anthropological research: the periphery as opposed to the centre. *(*Smith 2001:27).

At the heart of the centre lies the household which implies not only safety and protection but also domestic conflict. The periphery stands as a transitional zone between the centre and the distant realms of the cosmos lying beyond human experience. Smith (2001:28) applies these categories to divinity and the cosmos in the Ugaritic Texts. Within the centre there is the distinction between home (near) and foreign (far) and within the periphery there is the distinction between

what is experienced by humans and what is not manifested. Thus three zones can be distinguished – centre, periphery and beyond the periphery i.e. beyond the organized cosmos and beyond human experience.

The Ugaritic centre is grounded in its agriculture life *mdrʿ* (sown) and *mdbr* (outback, uncultivated). Fields are subject to both human and divine ownership. The sown is the region of human habitation and cultivation; within this general home of human and divine order lies the realm of cultic activity devoted to beneficial deities. These deities are accorded sacred mountains or cult sites, cosmic enemies are not. Deities inhabit 'near' place whereas monsters and demonic forces do not.

The centre point is Baal's Mountain – Mount Sapan. The Ugaritic texts recognise a distinction between home and foreign deities and home and foreign cult sites. Ugarit was an important trade centre. It was located at a cross road for land and sea trade across the Mediterranean, the Levant and Syro-Mesopotamia. Therefore it is not surprising to see such locales reflected in their mythological presentation of the outer reaches of the zone.

There are four tiers of the pantheon. The highest rank is held by El and his consort Athirat / Asherah. The second tier includes the royal children and older figures of the pantheon. The third level is poorly represented. The figure Kothar wa-Hasis serves the upper two tiers of the royal family – his wisdom is superior to that of Baal, his services extend beyond craftsmanship into spells, advice and wisdom. He was thought to dwell in distant lands, he does not have a distinct personality and is probably a reflection of Canaanite dependence on foreign artisans for both inspiration and execution of the required work (Coogan 1978:14).The fourth level of the pantheon includes minor deities who serve other deities such as the messenger gods whose tasks were to deliver messages from one deity to another. They were not allowed any say in decision making. They had no independent volition beyond the carrying out of a specific task. In the Bible they are presented as subservient creatures who do only the will of Yahweh. They eventually emerge as the angels that have continued into the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions.

It was not the gods as a group who kept order in the universe. The maintenance of the cosmic realms fell within the province of El and Asherah; however they were not actively engaged in the actual work necessary to maintain the universe. The task of the other deities, ideally, was to perform their duties in a way that would keep the universe functioning perfectly in the manner

desired by the highest authority – yet the gods like human beings are portrayed as having weaknesses and rivalries that kept the cosmos from operating smoothly.

J D Schloen (1993:209-20) places the Ugaritic pantheon within the context of typical Near Eastern Joint Families which includes the rivalries among adult sons and daughters. The structure of the divine household is distinctly patriarchal and the language of family relations is central to the Ugaritic texts. The patriarch mediates internal domestic conflict and protects against external threat. The ultimate goals of the patriarchal unit are to preserve the family line, its prosperity, and honour enshrined in reputation (Smith 2001:54).

The patriarchal unit is to be situated within its larger agrarian context. Due to their physical proximity to the elements and the need to cultivate both herds and crops, family units were well attuned to the nuances of the weather and seasonal cycles. The roles of the deities are portrayed as those of a divine royal family who remain bound by social, hierarchy and family ties.

Pantheons of the ANE are not rigidly fixed. A certain 'fluidity of identification' is evident since each local cult would stress those attributes which they most needed. It is probable that this too would have changed with the seasons and with specific needs within the family and community. In times of war, famine, pestilence, drought and flood and well as during the rites of birth and death, illness and crises, people would turn to the ubiquitous Goddess, either within her own right or as the one who could intercede with El.

## 1.3   El

"Divinity involves more than … the economic of blessing and protection …(it) also involves one-ness through relatedness, expressed not only in terms of power but also of care and love…" (Smith 2001:53).

El was head of the Ugaritic pantheon. One of the problems connected with El is the difficulty of assessing his importance in Ugaritic religion. It is noteworthy that no Temple of El has yet been discovered in Ugarit. The two large temples discovered at Ras Sharma are dedicated to Baal and his father Dagon.

### 1.3.1 The Names of El

El is a common noun meaning 'god'. Its precise etymology is uncertain, the two major theories put forward that the word derives from the roots meaning 'strong' or 'first'. The name of the god El is the same as the word for god in many West Semitic languages. This fact might be taken as evidence that as head of the West Semitic pantheon, El was regarded as the pre-eminent god.

The most extensive Bronze Age source about El comes from Ugarit. In these mythological narratives El appears as the divine patriarch par excellence.

El is the Kind, the Compassionate, the Bull, the Father of Time, The Father of Men (Coogan 1978:16).

> *"Yahweh, Yahweh, God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in faithful love and constancy, maintaining faithful love to thousands, forgiving fault, crime and sin…"*

(NJB Exodus 34:6-7a).

Even though El is not the father of all the gods he appears to have been considered the father of the gods in terms of status among the deities.

"El is called *'adn* (1.1 IV 17) and it is clear from parallelism with 'mother' *'um (*1.24.33-34) that *'adn* may connote 'father'" (Smith 2001:59). Also the title *'ab'adm* – father of humanity and *bny bnwt* – is *usually* translated –'creator of creatures'. It is possible that the generic phrase *bn ilm* was intended to be read 'sons of El' rather than 'sons of the gods' (Handy 1994:77).

No creation narrative appears in the extant Ugaritic texts. All Biblical creation stories agree that El was the creator – creating order from chaos and maintaining the established order in the universe. El's role as creator is not portrayed in the Ugaritic texts – from their perspective this activity of his belonged to the distant past.

The Ugaritic narratives refer to El as Owner, a designation that is used for both El and Asherah – in these texts it is not clear what is owned (Handy 1994:76).A West Semitic text written in Hurrian-Hittitite was discovered in Anatolia. This text presents the figure of El under the name El-ku-ni-ir-ša, *'il qny 'ars – El Creator of the earth* – however the root *qny* has been determined to be acquire / own rather than create (Handy 1994:76). This connects the name El with the title *Owner of the Earth.*

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El-Elyon means 'owner of heaven and earth'. "Multiple attestations of this title for El, in several different sources of various times, confirm the thesis that it was a significant and lasting characterization of the god" (Handy 1994:76).

> *"Blessed be Abram by God Most High,*
> *Creator / Owner of heaven and earth"*

(NJB (adjusted) Gen 14:19).

His authority is expressed in his title king – *mlk.* The same notion could underlie his epithet bull "like the chief and most powerful of animals, El is chief of the deities" (Smith 2001:135).

**1.3.2    El and the Pantheon**

El holds the highest rank in the Ugaritic pantheon. He presides over the pantheon; he issues decrees, especially for establishing corporate decision and actions.

The divine assembly expresses relatedness to the world as well as transcendence. Both Relatedness and Transcendence belong to an order in the cosmos that is a manifestation of the one-ness of divinity. In the Ugaritic texts the word 'assembly' *phr* appears to refer to more restricted groupings of deities (Smith 2001:42). There are references to numerous Assemblies of El, also sometimes referred to as 'the Assembly of the Stars'. This supports the view that the family of El may have been astral in character.

The qualitative wisdom of El is acknowledged over all other gods. The Ugaritic texts give no indication what is meant by ***hkm – the attribution of wisdom to the god,*** but implies having knowledge to run the universe. El's wisdom was in knowing how the cosmos ought to function and how to facilitate this end (Handy 1994:80). As repository of all wisdom and practical knowledge for the general functioning of the universe, he sat as final judge in all matters of justice and dispute, a position through which all other deities could be controlled; although they did possess a certain degree of autonomy, authority and power.

In this mythology the work of the universe was overseen by El but carried out by gods other than El. The process of placing a deity in his or her proper position in the cosmos was the joint work of Asherah and El. They both functioned in the placement of the gods in their respective offices. It was Asherah as the Queen Mother who decided and nominated the child who was to become the legitimate heir to hold a position of authority in the pantheon. Her decision was final and thus

sufficient sanction for El, as owner of heaven and earth to conduct an official act to place the specifically appointed deity in his or her rightful realm. She is able to influence El's decisions and intercedes on behalf of other members of the pantheon; such as her petition to El for him to grant permission for Baal to build his palace. Baal is never regarded as a son of Athirat / Asherah (Handy 1994:85).

El's capacity as ruler of the pantheon expresses his function as patriarch of the family. El and Athirat / Asherah are the divine royal parents of the pantheon. In the texts she has the title of Lady *rbt*.  It has been suggested that Athirat / Asherah is a reflection of the royal wife though not the royal mother. However Athirat / Asherah is also regarded as the mother of the deities *and* humanity.

The dominant deities are generally regarded as their royal children – 'the seventy sons of Athirat'. Seventy is the customary number for a generally large family group.

The Ugaritic texts show that El was seen as the ultimate authority on religious matters. A change in the religious world could not legitimately be made by any deity other than El. When a situation arose in which there was a need that required attention, El did not do the work but instead provided a deity to accomplish the task. He creates a goddess to cure Kirtu's lingering disease (KTU 1.16 V10-13 &V24-28 in Handy 1994:88). The establishment of religious cult was ascribed to El. Construction of temples also had to be cleared through El (Handy 1994:85-86).

The appointment and rule of human office bearers also fell under the auspices of both El and Asherah. When El needed to communicate with kings, he did so by means of dreams or more indirectly through the divine assembly and messengers. "Thus, the wisdom of the highest authority was available to the rulers of the cosmos, from deity to king" (Handy 1994:89).

Human rulers appear to have been treated as children of the God El in much the same way that the gods of the pantheon were considered his children. A monarch became a child of El when it was clear that he was the person who had been chosen to rule (Handy 1994:79).

*"The decree of Yahweh: 'You are my son,*
*today have I fathered you.*
*Ask of me and I shall give you the nations as your birthright,*
*the whole wide world as your possession'."*

(NJB Psalm 2:7).

*"He will cry to me, 'You are my father,*
*my God, the rock of my salvation!'."*

(NJB Psalm 89:26).

Only after the discovery of the Ugaritic texts did the existence of a deity with the name Baal become undisputed. It is recognised that El remained the active head of the Ugaritic pantheon in which Baal served in a position subordinate to El (Handy 1994:100).

Baal's sphere of influence in the natural world was the thunderstorm. Baal brought the rains needed for the maintenance of life on earth. When he failed in this duty, both the divine and mortal worlds were thrown into disarray.

**1.3.3    El and the Goddesses**

There are three female deities in the Ugaritic pantheon: Anat, Asherah (Athirat) and Astarte. They appear regularly in the Ugaritic myths where they always play a supporting character rather than that of the leading role. Ugaritic theology is a reflection of the patriarchal Ugaritic society.

Asherah is El's consort and hence Mother of the Gods, sometimes she is identified with Astarte, the least mentioned of the three goddesses. Anat has a vivid character – she is Baal's' wife and sister.

**1.3.4    Asherah of the Ugaritic Theology**

With the discovery of the narratives from Ugarit, the reality of a specific goddess had to be acknowledged.

Asherah is endowed with her **own wisdom**. Two major forms of wisdom are attributed to her. Firstly Asherah is credited with choosing the individual deities to be established by El in positions of power in the pantheon and secondly as consort to El she knows how to gain his consent, how to manipulate the desired response. The goddess clearly enjoyed favour with El that the other deities did not have. She was also a counsellor to El and therefore the goddess through whom others could influence the decisions of El.

Asherah is called *qnyt ilm.* For a long time this title was treated as *Creator of the Gods.* A closer meaning would be *Owner of the Gods (*Handy 1994:76).

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The prosody of classical Semitic poetry required the Semitic poet to have at his disposal two names for a deity so that he would be able to express the same idea in two parallel sentences using two sets of synonymous words.

> *"He cries to Athirat and her children,*
> *To Elath and the band of her kindred"*

(ANET 131).

Elath means goddess. Athirat also has the title **rbt 'atrt ym** Lady **Athirat of the Sea**. Sea in ancient times was the watery chaos – source of deep and deadly power.

Many people in this area would have been involved in maritime activity. They would have been loyal to *Athirat of the Sea* who offered protection from the watery chaos. Her work was directing her fisherman from whom she received homage. One of her servants was *Qadesh wa-Amrur* which means 'The Fisherman of Lady Asherah of the Sea' (Patai 1990:37). He is also called 'Holy and Most Blessed One' [Baal text: translated Coogan (1978:99)].

Coogan's (1978:96) translation of *Baal (the verses are not numbered)* – random lines are quoted that relate to Asherah:

> *"Asherah and her sons shouted*
> *the goddess and her pride of lions*
> *El's home, his son's shelter*
> *Lady-Asherah-of-the-Sea's shelter"*

(Coogan 1978:97).

> *"Give gifts to Lady Asherah-of-the- Sea*
> *presents to the Mother of the Gods"*

But Lady Asherah- of- the- Sea said:

> *"Why do you give gifts to Lady- Asherah- of- the-e Sea?*
> *You should give gifts to the Bull, El the Compassionate,*
> *and presents to the Creator of All"*

(Coogan 1978:99).

The reply is missing from the ancient text but it can be assumed from the ongoing narrative that it formed part of the request for her to intercede with El on behalf of Baal for a house to be built for him. El immediately agrees. Kothar-wa-Hasis is commissioned to build the palace.

> *"Let a house like the other gods be built for Baal,*
> *a court like Asherah's sons'."*

(Coogan 1978:101).

It is possible that the worship of Asherah (Athirat) was brought to Ugarit from the steppes of northern Syria by the nomadic Amorites who inhabited 'the western lands'. Here she was called Ašratum and was consort to Amurru (Hadley 2000:209). Her title was *Lady of the Steppe* (Hadley 2000:49).The name of her servant *Qadesh wa-Amrur* may reflect that origin.

In the above epic, after Asherah has agreed to intercede with El on Baal's behalf, she instructs her servant to prepare a donkey for her journey to El. A donkey is a strange form of transport for a sea goddess. This connection would explain her preference for a donkey as a means of transport. She then took her place within the Ugarit pantheon as consort of El and goddess of the coastal city of Tyre and perhaps of Sidon.

Asherah's power and influence are not of her own merit – they derived from her protected and esteemed position and extended beyond the bounds of the sea to the desert area where she gave birth to the gods. There is no extant narrative clearly showing Asherah giving birth to any deity, yet Asherah held the title of Mother to all the gods, regardless of their parentage.

Athirat / Asherah, is clearly the Divine Mother of the main divine family in the Ugaritic myths. The Sons of God in the Old Testament are clearly the Sons of Yahweh and would have regarded as Asherah's offspring in syncretistic circles. Since the Sons of God clearly correspond with the host of heaven (such as Job 38:7) it appears that we may hold that the whole host of heaven were probably regarded as the offspring of Asherah (Day 1986:399-400).

Since the local economies would have extended inland so would the influence of her protection. As Patroness of the inland areas she would have protected the husbandmen in their fields that yielded agricultural produce and also the Traders. It is most likely here that the Israelites encountered Athirat / Asherah. The Israelites were nomads and farmers – they would not have required the services of a sea goddess.

In Israel the first clear evidence of a goddess being associated with Israelite worship comes from the 10ᵗʰ century BCE. The presence of Asherah continues in Israel, in some form or other, until the time of the exile.

Comparisons between goddesses found throughout the Ancient Near East are similar enough to suggest that the *Mother-Goddess* was part of their religious belief. The role and identity of Asherah often overlaps with other goddesses and fertility figures of the pantheon. Astarte was also a fertility goddess – in the Ugarit texts delineation is not always clear and she is often confused with Asherah the nurturing mother.

## 1.3.5   El and His Home

El's home is of interest. It is conceptualised in both terrestrial and cosmic terms. It would appear to lie at the edge between 'near' and 'far' (Smith 2001:30).

"The title *El Shaddai*, often erroneously translated 'God Almighty' means *El of the Mountain* or *El, The One of the Mountain*" (Coogan 1978:19). According to the 'Baal Cycle' it is located in the waters or channels of the 'double-deep' at a mountain – it is unclear whether the home lies at the base or top of the mountain. Of interest is that his residence is described by a series of terms that would suggest a tent (Smith 2001:136).

The interpretation of Coogan (1978:12) is that the Home of El, 'the Creator of All', is a mountain, the 'cosmic mountain' from whose base issue the two rivers that are the source of all the fresh water in the world. There he lives in a tent and it is there that he meets with the 'Son's of El' and presides over this 'Divine Assembly'.

> *"Then Asherah headed toward El,*
> *at the source of the two rivers,*
> *in the midst of the two seas' pools.*
> *She opened El's tent and entered*
> *the shrine of the King, the Father of Time.*
> *At El's feet she bowed down and adored*
> *she prostrated herself and worshiped him"*

(Baal. cf Coogan 1978: 99-100).

El's mountain is surrounded by water. Here, where the waters merge, is the centre of the universe. It was here that authority presided and order was preserved.

Athirat / Asherah has no divine mountain, it is presumed that she shared that of El. She did not dwell in the same house as El – when she desired to see El, she came to him. While this arrangement removed her from the centre of cosmic power it demonstrated that she was not simply an adjunct of El but a primary deity in her own right.

"Asherah's house not only provided access to her, but through her one could obtain the 'ear' of El. Her house was the second most important place for a devotee to petition" (Handy 1994:92).

## 1.4    El and Yahweh

The Hebrew Bible rarely distinguishes between El and Yahweh nor does it present any polemics against El. Western Semitic El lies behind the god of the Patriarchs. "He (Jacob) set up a memorial stone and invoked *El, the God of Israel*" (Gen 33:20). Tradition in Ancient Israel favours Bethel (House of El) as originally being an old cult site of the God El, later overlaid with the cult of Yahweh. Biblical material also points to the cult of El in the Iron I period in Israel. Biblical tradition does not regard El and Yahweh as separate deities.

The character of the God of Israel is composite. Although Yahweh is primarily an El figure, many of the images and formulae that distinguish Him from El are adopted from the theology of Baal. Hence the appeal and consequent syncretistic identification of Yahweh with Baal characteristics can be traced back to language derived from his Canaanite rival.

It is significant that the revelation of the name Yahweh, which symbolised a profound change in Israel's understanding of and relationship with God, is set in the period of the *Exodus and the Conquest*. It was at that time, when Israel adopted a sedentary and eventually urban way of life, that the religion of the semi-nomadic Patriarchs who worshiped El, a patriarchal tent dweller, also evolved under influence from the Canaanite city states and their chief deity – Baal, young, active and living in a house built for him by El.

*"God takes his stand in the divine assembly…"* (NJB Psalm 82:1). The title of Elyon – 'Most High' accords the figure of El supreme position of authority. From the older theology, Yahweh belonged to the second tier, not the top tier of the pantheon.

The collapse of the first and second tiers in the early Israelite pantheon was caused by identifying Yahweh with El. Thus by the $8^{th}$ century, Asherah, as the consort of El, might have

maintained her role in this new order; until later when Yahweh too would assume within himself, her attributes and functions.

The complexity and plurality of the universe was not lost by the radical centralization of divine power and reality into one deity but rather fully integrated into a monistic divine order that ruled a pluralistic cosmic structure.

*"You raised your palace upon the waters"*
**"Look at the sea…here Leviathan, your creature, plays"**

(NAB Psalm 104:25a-26b).

*"At your reproof the waters fled, at the voice of your thunder they sped away…"*

(NJB Psalm 104:7).

Divine rebuke of the waters (battle motif) forms part of the process of creation. No longer are the primordial waters the opposing monster – the chaos before creation. As part of the divine order they now play a beneficial role quenching the thirst of people and animals and providing water for crops, sea routes for ships as well as a home for sea creatures. As creator of the sea monster as well as the sun and the moon, these figures are no longer divinities; they are merely part of the created order; ambiguity is resolved and a monotheistic vision entrenched.

The outermost curtain of the tabernacle was said to have been made of tahaš skins – dolphin hide. Cross says the difficulty is resolved when the connection between the Tent of El and the Tent Shrine of Israel is recognised. "El's abode in the midst of the sea at the fountain of the double deep" provides the proper setting for a tent of dolphin skins. The dolphin was a popular motif in Phoenician art (Cross 1998:89).

## 1.5    The Nature of Yahweh

Yahweh is a god on high, associated with mountain peaks but not with caves, with heavenly bodies but only rarely with trees as in Hosea 14. Because of the ancient perception that everything connected with the life stemming from the earth, from the depth or from the darkness, is associated with transience and death, Yahweh is only exceptionally related to these realms.

*"If I ascend to the heavens, you are there;*
*if I lie down in Sheol, you are there too"*

(NJB Psalm 139:8).

Yahweh is a male deity to whom metaphorical female imagery was occasionally attributed. Fatherly love is seldom represented in the art of ANE. Therefore little attribution of fatherly love to Yahweh is not remarkable.

Motherly love can be attributed to Yahweh only with considerable difficulty *"Can a mother forget her infant? ... I will never forget you"* (NAB Isaiah 49:15).

Yahweh always transcends anthropomorphic attributes expressed by gendered metaphors. Even in Early Israel it was understood that the deity granted or denied progeny. A Psalmist acknowledges that Yahweh shaped and formed him in his mother's womb: *"You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb"* (NJB Psalm 139:13).

In the ANE these processes and their success required the direct intercession and co-operation of the supernatural. Names would frequently include the element *ntn* 'to give' Jonathan – *Yahweh has given.*

The whirlwind motif in Job indicates that Yahweh rules not only the domesticated human sphere but also undomesticated realms, even those unknown to humans. Yahweh was a God that belonged not only to the centre but also to the periphery and well beyond.

## 1.6     The Babylonian Epic – *Enuma Elish*

The Babylonian epic Enuma Elish is named after its opening words '*When on High'*. It is a long poem which describes the assumption of supreme power among the gods by Marduk, the national god of Babylon.

The story begins with a creation story. The waters of Tiamat, the sea, mingled with the Apsu, the sweet water. The younger generation of gods were noisy and exuberant. Apsu complained that he was unable to rest. Both day and night his life was being disrupted by their unruly behaviour. He planned to destroy them, however his plans were discovered and he was killed by the other gods. Tiamat was enraged, although she had earlier been unwilling to see her children put to death, she now prepared for battle against her own offspring. The gods feared that no one who

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faced Tiamat in battle could escape with their life. Marduk was strong enough to resist and became the absolute power in heaven and earth. After Marduk had defeated Tiamat, so the story continues in the Enuma Elish, the gods laboured for one year to build him a temple.

Tiamat, whose name means 'sea', was female. She was the Mother of the first generation of the gods and thus the ancestor of them all (Coogan 1978:75-78). In the Canaanite mythology, Prince Sea is male but Asherah is 'Lady of The Sea' and one of Sea's epithets is "El's Darling'. Baal, Marduk and Yahweh engaged in battle against Sea.

*"By his power he has whipped up the sea,*
*by his skill, he has crushed Rahab.*
*...his hand transfixed the Fleeing Serpent"*

(NJB Job 26: 12,13b).

Yahweh is also attributed with mastering the two bodies of water:

*"When Israel came out of Egypt…*
*The sea fled at the sight,*
*the Jordan turned back"*

(NJB Psalm 114:1a, 3) *based on* (Exodus 14:22; Joshua 3:13).

The repetition of the event is rooted in the old poetic formula: sea and river and serpent are aspects of the same reality.

Baal, Marduk and Yahweh are each associated with riding the storms.

*"(you make) the clouds your chariot*
*gliding on the wings of the wind,*
*appointing the winds your messengers,*
*flames of fire your servants"*

(NJB Psalm 104:3-4).

## 1.7    The Great Goddess

"The cult of the Mother transcended the artificial borders of nation and empire and lived perpetually in the minds and hearts of the common people, from prehistoric times" (Robertson 2001:237).

In the Ancient Near East, the great goddess, had various, not dissimilar names inter alia Ishtar, Astarte, Athirat, Ate and Ashtoreth. They shared similar identifying attributes. Each of them wore a crown of horns which is usually thought to represent the crescent moon. In their iconography, lions, serpents and doves are consistently featured (Robertson 2001:116).

Rites that pertained to each of these goddesses also appear to be similar. Cakes made in the shape of the moon were customarily dedicated to each of them in observance of their festivals. They were all called 'Queen of Heaven' or 'Lady of Heaven'.  The epithet of simply 'Queen' or 'Lady' occurs frequently.

***Each of them was associated or equated with the planet Venus as the morning and evening star.*** As such they were considered as possessing a dual nature, having both male and female characteristics (Robertson 2001:117). Watson (1993:432) has researched the etymology of the Amorite word *Ašratum* – the earliest form of the name *Asherah*: he prefers to translate *rbt 'atrt ym* as **'She who determines the Day'.**

In contrast to the great male gods – who represented military and governing dominance of one city over another, constantly creating rivalry and conflict – the worship of the goddess was something the cities had in common– so it was a source of mutual community and peace between the cities.

The Great Goddess was often associated with a particular mountain or mountainous region – or with the High Places, later known as *bamôt.* These sites are well attested within the Hebrew Bible. It is notable that many of the theophanies and manifestations of the divine recorded in the Old Testament seem to have taken place in conspicuous places in the landscape, such as mountains, rivers, wells and trees.

In Syria, at the end of the third millennium and during the first quarter of the second millennium (MB 1 and MB 11A) images of trees, some highly stylized, occur in portrayal of the goddess as her manifestation. Branches and trees function as signs – central elements in their respective symbol systems even when situated in the most varied context possible – they are easily recognizable as *'partes pro toto'.*

Independently, both are representative of the orientation and blessing provided by a complex symbol system. The vagueness of this type of representation is part of the strategy of the genre.

Seals have been found which depict the veneration of trees clearly showing that these trees were considered to be sacred. Other seals portray a close connection between goddess and tree which strongly suggests that the veneration of the tree was actually intended for the life-giving goddess represented by the tree.

The goddess can appear in the form of a palm tree flanked by fish also with caprids: *"...the tree is closely related to water"* (Keel 1998:23).

## 1.8    Asherah of the Biblical Texts

"What should the evidence look like that would allow us to claim unambiguously that an artefact was an Asherah?" (Keel & Uehlinger 1998:18).

**Asherah - the Canaanite Mother Goddess.**

**Asherah – the Tree, symbolising Life and Well-being!**

Before the discovery of the Ugaritic texts (1928 CE), the term asherah in the Hebrew Bible was understood only as an object or a grove. Since then scholars are divided in their opinions as to whether the asherah could indicate both a wooden object and be the name of a specific goddess. There is also much debate over her position within the religion of early Israel.

Since Asherah was the only major goddess surviving in Palestine in the 7th and 6th centuries, it is surely reasonable to assume that the tree, natural or stylized and named after her was connected to her.

There are over forty references to 'asherah' in the Old Testament. From the texts alone it is apparent that originally there was a goddess named Asherah. She was associated with trees and wooded hilltop sanctuaries and would at times be symbolized by a wooden pole or an image of a tree.

> *"They had built themselves high places, and had set up pillars and sacred poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree"*
>
> (NJB 1 Kings 14:23).

Even if exaggerated, this text gives the impression that the worship of Asherah was spread throughout the land of Judah.

From the numerous verb references to asherah in the Hebrew Bible it is reasonable to deduce that the asherah was made of wood. Keel & Uehlinger (1998:19) conclude that the only possible reason for this exclusive use of this material must be to show an explicit relation of asherah to the tree.

> *"You must not plant a sacred pole of any wood whatsoever beside the altar which you erect for Yahweh your God…"*

(NJB Deut 16:21).

Biblical evidence does not support the view that the asherah was a syncretistic or pagan influence originally foreign to the cult of Yahweh. On the basis of his examination of Biblical material, Olyan argues that the asherah was a standard and legitimate part of the cult of Yahweh both in the north and the south, in state religion and in popular religion within non-Deuteronomistic circles (Robertson 2001:121). "There is no evidence that the asherah was opposed by anyone in Israel before the reforming kings, who were following a Deuteronomistic program…" (Olyan 1988:4).

It is well attested that, except for two or three of the Kings, an inclusive theological approach was adopted by the Kings of Israel and Judah. Moses introduced the bronze serpent at the founding of Yahwism and the Asherah had a place in the Jerusalem Temple. This clearly demonstrates that these practices were not only a constant part of the cult of Yahweh but that they had been so from the beginning of Israel's religious history.

There are reasonable interpretations of the presence of the a/Asherah in Yahweh's temple - "… in *all* cases, the original consonantal text can be read either 'the asherah' (the symbol) or as 'Asherah' (the proper name of the Goddess herself)" (Dever 2005:101).

It could have represented the consort of Yahweh and that they were worshipped together in the usual form of ANE fertility cults; yet we are never told of the smashing of any image of Yahweh.

It is possible that the goddess Asherah could have had her image in Yahweh's temple while Yahweh had none because the Temple housed the Name and Presence of Yahweh (refer the commentary on the Taanach cult stand 3.6.1 and Fig 4).

Another possibility is that the a/Asherah, The Tree of Life, may have been a representation of the Presence and Power of Yahweh. As the effigy of the Tree of Life, the asherah stood in the

Temples and groves of Canaan and was worshipped as the Giver of Life or the One who Gives Life – an epithet of Yahweh (Robertson 2001:249).

Elizabeth Gould Davis (1971:67) goes so far as to assert that "Almighty Yahweh, the god of Moses and the later Hebrews, was originally a goddess". When Yahweh proclaims "*I am like an evergreen cypress from me comes your fruit*" (Hosea 14:9) there is a reasonably clear suggestion of equality between Yahweh and Asherah. (Ref 2.2)

One problem with the hypothesis that equates Yahweh with the asherah is that it is extremely unlikely that a symbol which had once been the representation of the Hebrew god would completely disappear. Notwithstanding official suppression and ideological revision, if the asherah as the Tree of Life, the *axis mundi,* had once stood between the cherubim in the Jerusalem Temple, at the centre of *The Centre*, it is difficult to envisage that all traces of such an important religious symbol could be completely erased.

Hadley (2000:7) says that the only references which we have, in Hebrew, from extra-biblical sources, to a/Asherah, whether as a goddess or as a cult object, occur with Yahweh.

Hadley (2000:80) believes that in Israel, Asherah evolved through the centuries. Initially she was the fertility goddess, however as a male deity Yahweh needed to assume the functions of fertility and nurture and the asherah pole may have become a hypostatization of the goddess whose aspects had been incorporated with those of Yahweh.

"In an ontological system that recognises one ultimate reality there is no genuine other" (Wolfson 1999:122).

The Biblical writers assumed that the readers knew what they were. They were obviously non-Yahwistic and therefore to be condemned. As noted above the original consonantal text can be read either as the symbol or the proper name of the Goddess herself.

Dever (2005:101) suggests that the ambiguity of our biblical texts is due to the ambivalence of their authors and editors as well as the Medieval Masoretic scribes who added the vowel points. The Biblical writers were embarrassed by the notion of a 'Hebrew Goddess' but *she could not be censured without acknowledging her existence.*

The Greek Septuagint translation, which dates from around the 2nd century BCE, was obviously much closer to the original un-vocalised Hebrew text than were the Masoretic scribes. In this translation *ashērîm* is understood as groves being connected with trees. The Greek word used for *ăshērāh* is *alsos* which means a sacred grove or hallowed precinct. There are two occasions when the word tree is used: the Septuagint also translates *bamôt* as *alsos* – a sacred grove (Dever 2005:102).

There are scholars who believe that Asherah was the consort of Yahweh - to mention a few – Meshel, Dever, Pettey and Freedman (Hadley 2000:78).

A difficulty with the view that Asherah was Yahweh's consort is that her name never appears in a Hebrew name as a theophoric element. The same situation is found in Ugarit where her identity as a goddess was well established. It may have been that the theophonic element was only added to the names of women.

In a study of Hebrew, Phoenician and Ugaritic texts, Pardee (1988:119) has shown that "the deities known from ritual, narrative or other documentary sources to be considered the deities most proper for worship and veneration are not those that occur most frequently in proper names".

*Where you cast your glance, the dead awaken, the sick arise;*
*The bewildered, beholding your face, find the right way.*
*I appeal to you, miserable and distraught,*
*Tortured by pain, your servant,*
*Be merciful and hear my prayer!*
*I await you, **my mistress**, my soul turns toward you.*
*I beseech you: relieve my plight.*
*Absolve me of my guilt, my wickedness, my sin,*
*Forget my misdeeds, accept my plea!*

Babylonian Prayer in (Robertson 2001:93).

## 1.9    Wisdom

The female personification of Wisdom (Proverbs 1-9) has been compared to the Tree of Life. The tree of Asherah which appears in the Israelite tradition is a metaphorical expression for Wisdom.

*"She is a tree of life to those who hold her fast"*
*those who cling to her live happy lives"*

(NJB Proverbs 3:18).

Like the symbol of the asherah, wisdom provides life nurturing and happiness.

## 1.10    Tree of Lights and Life

After the exile there is no further mention of the asherah. However there are over 40 biblical references to the Menorah, usually translated as candlestick or lamp stand (Robertson 2001:258).

Similarity of form across culture and through time does not necessarily mean similarity of function. The conception of the tree or Tree of Life as a mother and the personification of the female principle is very old. Early Judaism radically eliminated the tree sprouting from the earth from its religious system.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Asherah represented the Tree of Life which in turn was a symbol for the Great Mother consistent with vegetation and lunar cults throughout the Ancient Near East.

"It has long been recognized that because of the language employed to describe the menorah and because of its assumed appearance as a thickened stem or shaft from which branches project, that the whole shape strongly resembles that of a stylized tree. It is hardly an exaggeration to indicate that the sacredness of vegetation and trees has been a recurrent and integral theme in a wide range of cultures spanning most areas of the globe and most epochs of human history. Indeed, no symbol enjoys such a widespread and influential position as the sacred tree. The sacred tree thus stands at the centre as indication of the *hieros topos*… The widespread association of vegetal life with the generative power of the divinity has resulted in the common phenomenon of the manifestation of deity within or at certain trees… Furthermore, the divinity revealed in the tree is also the source of the hoped-for life without death, to whom *humankind* turns to in search of *their* own immortality. This theophany motif of the sacred tree becomes blended inextricably with the concept of life eternal. The Tree of Life in the sense of immortal life becomes an inseparable aspect of the regenerative principle contained within plant life… The nature of its appearance in certain cultic and mythological contexts indicates that the essence of the divinity itself could be conveyed by this motif" (Meyers 1976: 84, 95-96,170).

During the cultic reformation the wooden asherah was merely refashioned but the symbol of the tree remained. The menorah, Tree of Lights, remains an important symbol of Judaism – whether or not it still retains its ancient symbolism is beyond the scope of this study.
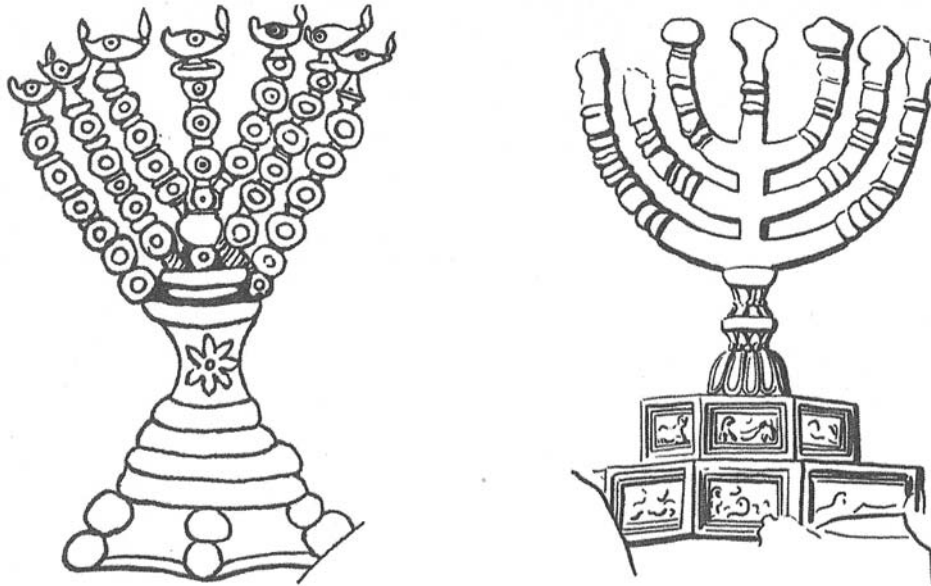


**Figure 1**      **Menorah from the postexilic period and from the Temple of Herod (Keel 1997:166)**

## 1.11    The Rod of Moses

In Ancient Near Eastern thought the rod was a symbol of divine authority and the ability to work wonders. There are many different mythical narratives about the rod and numerous theological ideas about its relationship regarding revelation and tradition which also includes a Messianic dimension.

"The rod appeared as a symbol that radically transformed the significance of biblical time and place" (Poorthuis 1998:264).

According to the Rabbis in the twilight of the last day of creation before the Sabbath some ten attributes that were to play a significant role in the history of Israel were created. The bewildering variety of these attributes is concrete expression of God's care and providence and they were therefore not made by human hands. They remain hidden until the moment when they

are required to play their decisive role. (Included in the list is the 'bizarre presence' of a pair of tongs: in order to make a tong one needs a tong, how could the first tong be made without a tong?) (Poorthuis 1998:231).

Most of the lists include the rod of Moses: "take this staff in your hand; with this you will perform the signs" (NJB Ex 4:17).

There is also a tradition that the rod was a branch from the Tree in Paradise. Thus according to the *Malef (48-49* cf Poorthuis 1998:233*),* Adam had this wooden rod in his possession when he was driven from Eden.

"The Midrash of (the rod of Moses) being handed on from one generation to the other contains a sophisticated view of tradition and religious authority in which the balance turns in favour of the institutional and against the charismatic" (Poorthuis 1998:233).

The revelation at the burning bush was new but at the same time it was in harmony with the tradition of the Israelite ancestors. A remarkable tension is maintained between revelation as something without precedent and revelation as the re-establishing of the connection with the old-time religion.

The motif of Seth, son of Adam, which links the rod from Paradise with the cross of Jesus is extremely wide-spread in Christianity (Poorthuis 1998:239). This distinctive idea creates a link between Christianity and the origin of the connection of the rod with the Tree of Life. Jewish, Christian and Islamic texts all endorse the idea of the continuity of salvation history .The rod created in the twilight expresses sudden divine intervention, while the handing over of the sacred rod expresses continuity on the human level.

The rod as the wood of the cross is the intersection between sacred history and the eschatological. Linear time would interpret this as a passage through both past and future history. Cyclical time understands that paradise is both the beginning and the destination. The rod becomes a "fully-fledged vision of history in which creation, revelation and redemption are connected" (Poorthuis 1998:243).

Here in combination with other motifs we discover that of '**the chain of forefathers'.** The symbolism of the chain has become significant in Christianity as a theme in theology, art and architecture. It is found in an elaborate and stylized form in Rosslyn Chapel.

There is another motif attached to the rod that is described as the erotic motif – the connection between the taking of the rod and the marrying of Zipporah. In folklore Zipporah plays a most significant role. When Moses who had been the King of Cush arrives in Midian, Jethro imprisons him and he is left to die. For seven, ten or twelve years his daughter secretly feeds him and after that time she suggests to her father to investigate whether the God of the Hebrews had worked a miracle to save him. He was found alive, standing erect and praying to the God of his Fathers.

After his release he went to pray in the garden behind the house of Jethro. There he saw 'a staff of sapphire fixed in the ground in the midst of the garden.' On it he read the name of the 'Lord of Hosts', or the 'Ineffable Name'. He pulled up the staff which was as light as a twig and which became as a rod in his hand. Many before had tried unsuccessfully to remove the staff since he who would have been successful would have had Zipporah given to him in marriage.

The integrity of Zipporah never falters. She is ranked alongside the righteous matriarchs of Israel. Zipporah was acquainted with the God of Israel and without her crucial role there would have been no Exodus – the perceived foundational event for the establishment of Israel.

The Midrash that tells that Moses, as a much younger man, had been imprisoned in Egypt, and had fled from Egypt to Midian, also includes the Garden motif.

The rabbis tell us that the rod was made of sapphire and its weight was enormous. This stone is reminiscent of the heavenly realm (Exodus 24:10) which underscores the miraculous nature of this rod. The blue colour also associates it with water. Moses, who had struck the River with this rod in order to give the Israelites safe passage out of Egypt is now instructed to strike the rock at Horeb and water would gush out for the people to drink (Exodus 17:6).Rabbi Yose notes that since the rod is of sapphire it can be designated as rock (cf Poorthuis 1998:232). It is a wonder that the rod is not regarded as the source of water rather than the rock!

The Rod which belonged to Aaron had blossomed and fruited before the Tabernacle (Numbers 17:23). Moses had the rod placed permanently before the Ark as a warning to the rebellious. It became the tangible symbol of priestly authority

"Solomon tried to use the tree for the construction of the Temple, but the tree was always too long or too short. He decided to place it **in** the Temple and there it remained"
(Poorthuis 1998:239).

The inability of the rod to be adapted for use in the construction of the temple does not compromise the sacredness of the Temple rather it demonstrates the holiness of the rod. Before Christ only Moses and David were capable of working miracles with the rod.

As late as the first century CE, the legend remained of a Golden Jar of manna which was kept in the Temple as reminder of the Divine bounty in the wilderness. (NAB Hebrews 9:4).

If these three sacred objects had at any time been preserved in Solomon's Temple, they as well as the Ark had disappeared before the Destruction of 587 BCE. "The Talmud expresses a belief **that they were buried** with the Ark for safe keeping and will be restored by the Prophet Elijah in the Messianic Age" (Comway 1975:50).

## 1.12    Summary of Chapter 1

The archaeological record has shown the Goddess as a principal deity well before the Neolithic period Her pivotal role is well established in the Canaanite religion. Asherah appears without explanation in the Biblical texts where she is associated with trees and groves and wisdom until after the exile when she is no longer mentioned in the redacted texts. The menorah appears and the myths of rods and trees are part of the Exodus tradition. Chapter 2 moves to the context and form of religious experience in Early Israel.

# Chapter 2   Religion in Israelite Society

## 2.1     The Context of Religion in Israel

Israel, as a late arrival in the ANE, did not enter a religious vacuum. The Israelites were surrounded by a religious heritage of the very much older cultures, people and states of this region. A sphere in which all fields of life had long been occupied by religious patterns of interpretation.

The features adopted from this pre-existing environment are more prominent at the level of personal piety than at the level of official religion. Family religion shows an amazing similarity to other near eastern religions, going as far back as Sumero-Babylonian religion at the beginning of the second millennium BCE (Albertz 1994a:29). Yahweh religion was built upon this very much older phenomenon.

In Ancient Israelite Society the identity of the individual was subsumed within that of the family. The family formed part of the local clan which in turn constituted Israelite society. During the centuries of Israel's history, three different strata of Israelite religion can be identified. Inextricably intertwined, sustaining and defining the Israelites and their God.

The sub-stratum of *Personal Piety* relates to the individual within the smaller group of the family. *Local Religion* functioned to stabilise and integrate the village community. It operated between the level of the family and that of the *Official Yahwistic Religion* elements. From the beginning Yahweh religion functioned within the wider group of the tribe; even then it had within its structure, markedly dysfunctional elements.

Throughout the pre-exilic period the Israelite family largely preserved its cultic independence. So it is not surprising that this independence was matched by its own set of religious symbols, which were clearly different from those of the (official) Yahweh religion (Albertz 1994a:103).

In Israel, people had their own gods at the family level. This happened not only in the early period before the state, when Yahweh worship had not yet established itself at the tribal level, but it is very probable that this practice occurred for a very long time throughout the whole period of the state" (Albertz 1994a:31-32).

*"For you have as many gods as you have towns, Judah!*
*You have built as many altars … as Jerusalem has streets!*

(NJB Jeremiah 11:13).

Family Piety is related to the rhythm of life and is characterised by the directness and unconditional relationship with the personal god to the family. It is bound to the local sanctuary, a sacred place, in the open air, where the numinous is present, visible and accessible to all. Visible - not hidden in the inaccessible darkness of a *debîr*. The *bamôt* was the place where the whole community would assemble at the great annual feasts. It would have included an altar, a cultic stone or *massebah* and a cultic tree or asherah. This type of consecrated place was more appropriate and near to the culture and economic circumstances of the Israelite population.

"Massebah and asherahs were regarded as symbols of the divine presence" (Albertz 1994a:85).

In the local cults whose ultimate concern was to secure the fertility of their cultivated land, their animals and the continuation of their own families, "**there was a need to supplement Yahweh with a female element**" (Albertz 1994a:85).

In the period before the state, local religion was by and large the official religion of Israel. In 1 Samuel 7:12 & 17 we are told that each year Samuel went on a circuit through Israel. He even erected a stone which he called Ebenezer which signified that 'Yahweh helped us as far as this'.

It would not be correct to interpret that Yahweh was not their God. He was just not their God in the way that the Deuteronomists perceived that He ought to be!

The cult centred around the three great annual festivals which followed the cycle of agricultural production. They were the feast of Mazzoth at the beginning of the grain harvest, the Feast of Weeks at the end of harvesting and the Feast of Tabernacles after the harvest of fruit and grapes. All these festivals go back to ancient times and are older than Yahweh religion – Yahweh merely took centre place in an already existing festival cult (Albertz 1994a:89).

The offering of First Fruits is one of the earliest and most widespread kinds of sacrifice. It expresses human awe at the mysterious power of fertility.

Initially the ritual festivities were to secure blessing for the land and express joy and gratitude for the produce that had been gathered in. Only later were significant historical experiences incorporated unto the existing celebrations.

"Throughout the pre-exilic period the Israelite family largely preserved its cultic independence. So it is not surprising that this was matched by an independence of its world of religious symbols, which were clearly different from those of the (official) Yahweh religion" (Albertz 1994a:103).

Family religion formed part of the official Yahweh religion and charges of syncretism can be levelled just as much against positions of official Yahweh religion as it can against family religion.

The establishment of a Kingdom by David and Solomon had far reaching political, economic social and cultural implications in Israelite society. Israelite kingship was relatively secular compared to the god-king of Egypt or Sumero-Babylon. Even in Egypt the king remained subordinate to the gods during his lifetime and had to be found acceptable to them after his death. Rule by divine right is implicit in Israel, particularly in the Davidic Theology of the Southern Kingdom. There is little doubt that it was a new and alien element in the religion of Israel that nevertheless became part of the religious discourse of Israelite society.

The type of Temple envisaged by David and built by Solomon clearly expresses separation between God and the People. The walls are thick and the three graduated rooms seek, by increasing degrees of holiness, to protect the Sacred Presence from the profane world. The bond to a human group, which was so characteristic of Yahweh found no expression at all in this style of temple architecture. The lay people could only observe the sacrificial cult from the outer court in front of the Temple. They had no access to the Temple itself and were excluded from the cultic practices within the Temple building.

"Yahweh, God of Liberation, disappeared behind thick walls in the semi-darkness of the royal temple. Only the splendid bronze pillars Jachim and Boaz which flanked the entrance hall still gave the people the visible impression of his exalted majesty" (Albertz 1994a:131).

Both the post-exilic and Herod's Temple followed this same tradition.

The belief that the presence of Yahweh granted an unconditional guarantee of protection and salvation resulted in a religion that was largely unreflecting and uncritical. Amos, Micah and Isaiah categorically rejected the cultic practice of their time because it covered up social injustice and misery in society.

After the collapse of the Northern Kingdom, Hezekiah made serious effort to implement an unprecedented exclusivity in Yahweh worship and to eliminate the customary divine images and cultic symbols.

The veneration of a Mother Goddess was prevalent throughout the ANE. Josiah's reforms attempted to eradicate the practice. These measures were particularly hard for the women who nevertheless adjusted to the situation. The Asherah, so closely embroiled with personal piety, was at these times merely hidden deeper within the hearth of the home. She remained alive and vibrant in the hearts and lives of everyday families. Some were carefully buried but new figurines were soon acquired; since little pottery figurines have been found down to the Hellenistic and Roman period. This custom was indeed deeply rooted within family religion.

The purified Yahweh cult had no success in protecting Israel from its enemies; nor did the exclusive worship of Yahweh, in the private sphere, have any effect on social conduct.

> *"Your burnt offerings are not acceptable,*
> *your sacrifices do not please me"*

(NJB Jeremiah 6:20.

> *"... (rather) let justice flow like water*
> *and uprightness like a never-failing stream!"*

(NJB Amos 5:24).

Yahweh is pleased with worship that is simple and sincere.

## 2.2    The Form of the Early Israelite Religion

In order to trace theological thinking and its relation to religious practice, it is necessary to differentiate between a cultic layer, which is manifest in the way that people act out their beliefs and the cognitive level of their religious feelings and the theological superstructure (Ornan 2005:179).

The God of Israel may be unique but the formulae with which the Israelites expressed their understanding of their deity was not so. Their theology is well grounded within the cultural and religious paradigms of the Canaanite context.

Altars and Asherah are both of Canaanite origin – Asherah retained the identity of Canaanite origin while the altar did not. Altar became associated with Yahweh and adapted to Yahwistic practices.Yahweh had taken the place of El and Baal – there was no female deity to take the place of Asherah who became a common and familiar part of Israelite religion and presented a threat to Deuteronomistic Yahwism.

In the ancient world it was not unusual for a deity to assume and encapsulate within themselves the attributes of other deities whose influence would then eventually wane. It is not unreasonable to consider that the attributes of the Great Mother might have been subsumed into the theology of Yahweh by the Hebrews in their attempt to refine their ideas of superior monotheism.

The Goddess ruled over the mysteries of birth, death and regeneration. These attributes of the Great Mother were too vital to discard. They would have had to be incorporated in some way into the attributes of the new understanding of deity and the numinous. It is possible that the asherah became a symbol of the power and influence of the goddess vicariously assigned to Yahweh.

*"Solomon loved Yahweh: he followed the precepts of his father David, yet he offered sacrifice and incense on the high places"*

(NJB 1 Kings 3:3).

That Solomon loved one and worshipped another suggests that either their cults were comparable (or at least not in conflict with each other) or that their cults were one and the same. Two deities may have been worshipped together or the possibility remains that Yahweh and Asherah were the same deity.

Robertson (2001:235) says that though it is convenient to separate the goddess from her male counterpart and treat them as distinct deities, this analytical exercise leads to misconception. The ancient agricultural religion of the Great Mother was inextricably bound with the male deity – such as Baal and Osiris.

"There can be no doubt that the goddess to whom the Hebrews clung with such tenacity down to the days of Josiah and to whom they returned with such remorse following the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, was whatever the prophets had to say about her, no foreign seductress, but a Hebrew goddess, the best divine mother the people had had to that time" (Patai 1990:32).

It is noteworthy that Manasseh ca 698 BCE, besides rebuilding the high places, which his father Hezekiah had destroyed ca 725 BCE, re-instituted the asherah into the Temple. King Josiah again removed the asherah ca 620 BCE. Following his death the asherah was re-established all over the countryside.

The legend concerning the Rod of Moses (cf 1.11 above) explains that Solomon himself installed the 'rod' into his Temple. If it was only during the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah that it was removed this would mean that the a/Asherah stood in the Temple for a very long time.

## 2.3     Polytheism – a Reality in Ancient Israel

"All the men who knew that their wives offered incense to other gods and all the women who were standing there, a great crowd (and all the people living in Egypt, in Pathros) answered Jeremiah as follows. *We have no intention of listening to the word you have spoken in Yahweh's name, but intend to go on doing all we have vowed to do: offering incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring libations in her honour, as we used to do, we and our ancestors, our kings and our chief men, in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem: we had food in plenty then, we lived well, we suffered no disasters. But since we gave up offering incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring libations in her honour, we have been destitute and have perished either by sword or by famine. Besides when we offer incense to the Queen of Heaven and pour libations in her honour, do you think we make cakes for her with her features on them, and pour libations to her without our husbands' knowledge?*"
(NJB Jeremiah 44: 15-19).

There is growing consensus that Israel's monotheism emerged only midway through Israel's history. It was heir and reaction to a long tradition of Israelite polytheism.

Tigay (1986) conducted an extensive study of Israelite and Judean personal names on inscriptions as well as investigation of other inscriptions that can be dated to Iron Age II. He has

also examined onomastic evidence to see if names of deities other than Yahweh were in use .His study concludes that the evidence does not indicate that Israel was supposedly polytheistic.

"Israelite inscriptions include 557 names with *Yahweh* as the divine element, 77 names with *'l,* a handful of names with the divine component *b'l* and no names referring to the goddess Anat or Asherah" (Tigay 1986 cf Smith 2001:141).

Despite Tigay's assertions, Psalms 82, 89 and Deut 32:8 do in fact assume that other gods existed in addition to Yahweh but the texts say nothing about whether these deities were venerated in any way in Israel and Judah.

*"God takes his stand in the divine assembly,*
*surrounded by the gods he gives judgement"*

(NJB Psalm 82:1).

*"Who in the skies can compare with Yahweh?*
*Who among the sons of god can rival him?*
*God, awesome in the assembly of holy ones,*
*great and dreaded among all who surround him"*

(NJB Psalm 89 6-7).

*"When the Most High gave the nations each their heritage …Yahweh's portion was his*
*people"*

(NJB Deut 32:8a-9a).

"If the Israelites saw a living deity Yahweh made present at the altar they very probably saw a living deity Asherah made present at the wooden pole" (Pettey 1986:122).

*"You shall not plant a **sacred pole** of any kind of wood beside the altar of the Lord, your*
*God, which you will build; nor shall you erect a **sacred pillar** such as the Lord, your God,*
*detests"*

(NAB Deut 16:21-22).

The People of Israel were not inhibited by the Deuteronomic prohibition. Cultic ties between Yahweh and Asherah were such that the people of Israel were naturally led to see them in relation to each other. Asherah was not seen as a foreign deity, like Baal, but as a familiar one, like Yahweh.

**Hezekiah** (Judah 727–698 BCE) made an heroic effort to eliminate Asherah worship and other foreign influences from the land. He attempted to limit the functions of local cult places by centralising the offering of sacrifices in Jerusalem.

**Manasseh** (Judah 697–642 BCE) replaced the Asherah idol, which he had made, into the Temple in Jerusalem. Asherah was a goddess and not a mere inanimate object. Placing the cult object in the Temple implies associating her with Yahweh (2 Kings 21:7). Manasseh was 12 years old when he assumed the throne. It is possible that he took advice from his mother – whoever assisted as regent must have been in favour not only of rescinding his father's reforms but actively restoring what had been taken down.

**Josiah** (Judah 639-609 BCE) had all the objects used in cultic rituals destroyed. The Chronicler uses strong verbs – break into pieces, overturn, grind to dust – they convey the zeal of Josiah and as well as the antipathy of the Chronicler towards the Asherah cult. This could imply that Asherah worship was part of the formal worship ceremonies that took place in the Temple of Jerusalem.

These texts re-affirm that Asherah worship was widespread and enduring among the Israelites. In spite of harsh attempts Asherah worship could not be eradicated and remained a widespread popular religious practice among the people of Israel and Judah. It is debatable whether Asherah was still worshiped in early post-exilic times.

Even when there are difficulties in the presentation of monotheism the commitment to the presentation of monotheism remained deeply rooted.

## 2.4    Prophetic Literature

The Prophetic literature affirms the influence of Asherah worship in the Hebrew Cult.

Olyan (1988) has sort to disprove the theory that Asherah is paired with Baal in the Old Testament. Taking into account the Khirbet el-Qôm and Kuntillet Ajrûd inscriptions that clearly links Asherah with Yahweh; he says that references to Asherah in the Hebrew Bible are a result of Deuteronomic polemic. The Elijah / Elisha narratives, the Jehu stories and the oracles of Amos and Hosea do not mention Asherah. This is significant, because except for Amos, they are all anti-Baal. Prophetic silence has led Olyan to the conclusion that if Asherah was paired with Baal she would have been condemned as well (Hadley 2000:24).

*"Now give orders for all Israel to gather round me on Mount Carmel, and also the four hundred prophets of Baal…"*

[NJB regards *"and the four hundred prophets of Asherah"* as a gloss since they are not mentioned again (NJB 1 Kings 18:19)].

Patai (1967:40-41) assumes that no harm came to the prophets of Asherah because the contest was only with Baal and that Asherah was seen as the 'tolerable counterpart to Yahweh'. Patai considers the fact that the asherah was not removed from the sanctuary in Samaria as evidence that the worship of Asherah was seen as legitimate during the time of Ahab, even by the opponents of Baal.

The sons of Ahab have Yahwistic names which would indicate that Ahab worshipped Yahweh. There is no mention of the destruction of the asherah in Samaria during the succeeding reigns of Ahaziah, Jehoram, Jehu and Jehoahaz.

Only Isaiah Micah and Jeremiah join the Deuteronomistic editor in levelling scathing criticism against the Asherah cult among the Israelites. These reforming priests and prophets would not have had occasion to so relentlessly condemn alternative religious practices if they had not been popular amongst the people.

There are very few texts in which the prophets mention Asherah – not all of these are regarded as authentic to the prophets themselves.

Recent archaeology suggests that the worship of Asherah was common during the monarchic period of Israel – Why should they have neglected to speak about her?

Perhaps her cult was not as widespread or noticeable as the Deuteronomistic redactor or the Chronicles would have us believe. It might be that the Prophets themselves regarded Asherah as part of Yahwistic religion. Otherwise, compared to social injustice and political corruption they thought the worship of Asherah was not a serious problem.

Dever in his book *Did God have a Wife?* (2005), sets out to explain religion in two dimensions. There is an official canonical version of the literary tradition as preserved in the Hebrew Bible and the religion of the people or Folk Religion which is being brought back to life by archaeological data. The first aspect focuses on great men and public events. Women, with other disenfranchised and marginalised groups, are invisible in this principal record.

The religion of the People had its base in the home – it would have involved men and children as well as women. Ordinary agrarian families concerned with rhythms and exigencies of life.

## 2.5     Creation Theology

The First creation story (Gen 1-2:4) points beyond conflict. Through the spoken word creation is effected and the cosmos presents as the divine holy place. All of Humanity, in its divine image is appointed to reign over the created world. This order, initiated by God has a moral character. Life on earth is to be holy, moral and good – a cosmos that reflects the nature of its Divine Lord.

It was the union of the two principles of feminine and masculine that signified the power of fertility and the creative power of nature which in the ancient mind was cosmic in its properties and the ultimate manifestation of the Divine.

Worship of Yahweh was the worship of the ultimate God of perfection which included all known aspects of creation. Would there not have been a significant gap in the minds and hearts of ancient agrarian people if masculinity and creation were honoured without the aspects of bearer and nurturer?

In the Psalms Yahweh is the source of all life. In his shadow there is protection from the burning sun and all kinds of other dangers.

Water like trees is a symbol of the Temple Court and closely linked to trees. Water-giving trees (or gods) appear quite frequently in Mesopotamian iconography and its Palestinian offshoots (Keel 1997:135).

*"There is a river whose streams bring joy to God's city,*
*it sanctifies the dwelling of the Most High"*

(NJB Psalm 46:5).

*"By your power you split the sea in two,*
*and smashed the heads of the monsters on the waters.*
*You crushed Leviathan's heads…,*
*You released the springs and brooks,*
*and turned primordial rivers into dry land.*
*The subdued primeval waters cause the earth to be fruitful*

*(*NJB Psalm 74:13-15).

The Temple water was harnessed and calm. It is described as a Sea from whose chaos Yahweh had established and continued to sustain a righteous order.

1 Kings 7:23 describes the bronze Sea as being cast with a circular rim, measuring ten cubits across, five in height and thirty in the circumference. It would have looked like a huge basin resting on the backs of the twelve sculptured bulls that supported it. It could contain 2 000 baths (ca 11 500 gallons) of water. This sizeable basin served as a reservoir for the Temple courtyard. Estimates of its capacity vary between 20 000 litres and 38 000 litres (Bloch-Smith 1994:21).

The immense molten Sea which rested on the bowls of 12 cast bronze oxen (1 Kings 23-26) has Assyrian, Cypriot and Syrian parallels – at 8th Century Tell Tainat, bases rendered as oxen have been uncovered (Busink 1970:332 cf Bloch-Smith 1994:20).

Bloch-Smith asserts that no practical application is offered for the Sea during the time of Solomon. She supports the supposition that the tank served a symbolic purpose. Signifying either the 'cosmic waters' or the waters of life which emanated from the Garden of Eden, or the '*Great Deep*' of chaos. It is also possible and "consonant with Jerusalem cultic theology, that the molten Sea symbolized the conflict between Sea and the other gods" (Bloch-Smith 1994:20).

Baal fought Sea and River – the victory of the storm god over the cosmic sea forms part of the divine bestowal of political authority and power onto an anointed king.

*"I have found David my servant*
*and anointed him with my holy oil.*
*I shall establish his power over the sea,*
*his dominion over the rivers"*

(NJB Psalm 89:20,25).

In many ANE temples not only basins, but also sacred pools and lakes have been found. In Egypt these were a source of water for olive and myrrh plantation whose yield served the cult. The pools were the nesting place for the sacred geese. Water necessary for various rites of purification was also drawn from them. There was no conflict between these practical uses of water and their holy, primeval significance.

"As the great streams which water the earth flow from paradise so too the blessing which emanates from the Temple" (Keel 1997:138).

## 2.6    Summary of Chapter 2

In Early Israelite Society three strata of religious practice, *Personal Piety, Local Religion* and the *Official Yahwistic Religion* can be determined. All levels show Canaanite influence and included the veneration of Asherah in one form or another. The building of the Temple did not change the cult at the *Personal Piety* and *Local Religion* levels. The Kings, Hezekiah, and Josiah as well as the Prophets, Isaiah, Micah and Jeremiah and also the Deuteronomistic editor, all attempted to eradicate the Asherah from Israelite worship. They were unsuccessful because the Goddess oversaw the precariousness of birth and death, the cycles of life and ultimately survival.

ANE Creation myths are linked to primordial water and include the principles of masculine and feminine in terms of fecundity, bearer and nurturer. The huge Sea stood in the Temple forecourt, symbolic of the cosmic waters.

Chapter 3 discusses the way in which Early Israelites represented their deity within an essentially iconoclastic paradigm. Archaeological evidence confirms the presence of Asherah in various forms as well as aniconical representation of Yahweh.

# Chapter 3   Visual Art in the Ancient World

## 3.1      Context of Figuring in Ancient Israel

The Biblical narrative is traditionally conceived of as drastically opposing other ancient Near Eastern customs of representing divine images and ostensibly rejecting the power of imagery. The Divine was conceived of as having a human form both in the Bible and in Syro-Phoenicia and Mesopotamia.

Ornan (2005:1) argues that the Biblical narrative was articulated late during the Babylonian exile. The context of the Israelite rejection of pictorial rendering of the divine must be seen in the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests of Israel and Judah and the mass deportation and resettling in Mesopotamia, of the elite segments of the population from these two small kingdoms.

"The Biblical ban is to be perceived as a world view basically inspired by contemporary tendencies in Babylonia and Assyria and not as commonly suggested, as one that opposes Mesopotamian perceptions" (Ornan 2005:182).

Visual art in the ancient world was **not generally meant to please or to decorate**. Ancient pictorial renderings were **first and foremost a form of magical-religious expression** serving the needs of a religion, bound to the political agenda of the ruling elite and the sovereign whose election to office was regarded as a divine appointment (Ornan 2005:9).

Freedom of creativity was denied the ancient artist who adhered to ancient, rigid rules, consecrated through centuries of use and did not follow much his own inclination or fancy. Bound by such inflexibility, the sculptor-craftsman fashioned the image of the god or emblem to be placed in the temple according to prescribed formulas.

Unlike visual expressions in ancient Egypt or Greece, artistic representation in the Near East was not generally accompanied by corresponding texts and in cases where an inscription is found there is usually no self-evident relationship between the two aspects.

"Meaning (is) made explicit with signs, symbols and iconography" (Ornan 2005:11).

Ornan (2005:12) gives the example of the measuring rod and the rope which according to the texts were among the five royal insignia granted to the Mesopotamian kings by the gods. However in the pictorial renderings it is the deity and not the king who holds the measuring rod

and the rope. The explanation of this divergence between picture and text lies in the transmission of the message from one mode of expression to another: from the time-sequential verbal expression to the simultaneous event recording of the picture. In order to maintain the notion of the text and to accentuate the fact that the attributes were indeed a divine gift, the picture has to show the royal attributes carried by the gods and not by the king.

## 3.2    Cult Images

The role of a statue of a god was to perpetuate the divine presence in an earthly abode; whilst the function of a statue of a worshipper was to represent him or her constantly before the god in a quest for protection.

During the 8th century BCE, renderings of human shaped divinities were more common in Syria than in Babylonia or Assyria. In the wall decorations of Assyrian palaces there are very few representations of major gods and goddesses. Slab 14 of the Lachish siege depicts a divine chariot **without the actual image** of the god (probably Ashur) (Ornan 2005:86).

The most prominent Babylonian deities, Anu and Enlil were not portrayed in human form in Mesopotamian art. From the 12th century BCE, Babylonian cylinder seals concentrated on themes other than human-shaped images of gods.

The nature of the archaeological evidence suggests that although divine statues were indeed kept in shrines following the custom of ancient Mesopotamian worship; there was reluctance, in first millennium Babylonia to render the divine in human form on artefacts outside the locality of the temple.

Anthropomorphic representation of deities are absent from Neo-Babylonian art. The three celestial symbols of two stars within discs and a crescent moon replace the earlier triad of Marduk, Nabu and Nergal (Ornan 2005:110).

Despite the fact that an anthropomorphic deity was omitted from Babylonian public structures, written sources report that the people of Babylon had a chance to view the statue of Marduk during an annual procession.

A popular ancient Mesopotamian motif portraying abundance was the *hegallu* – usually represented by a small jar from which water runs and generally carried by lesser deities.

There is evidence that Ugarit had an anthropomorphic iconography. Two flat stelae with pictorial representation of El and Baal were found to the southwest of the Baal temple and date to 13th century BCE. There are also round-figured examples of the major deities. The El statuette is 13,8 cm high, made of bronze and plated with gold. Another El statuette, 25 cm high, made of limestone, depicts an enthroned deity. The identification of this deity as El is deduced from the Job Stele which contains an inscription referring to El and iconography depicting a god wearing the same headgear as that found on the El statuette (Mettinger 1995:125-126).

Textual evidence suggests that cultic images may have played a role in the cult in Ugarit. There is a recurring formulation that is usually understood as referring to a cultic procession with a representation of Asherah being led into the royal palace. *k t'rb 'ttrt šd bt mlk* 'when Astarte of the field enters the royal palace' (KTU 1.91:10 cf Mettinger 1995:126).

The Israelite God, according to the Bible, was not worshipped through a cult image since representation was forbidden. This cultic practice, together with the idea of monotheism and the centralisation of the cult was the primary ideological message. Nowhere is the human shape of the divine denied only the rendering of its image is forbidden. There are many Biblical attestations that convey the idea that God has a human face, hands and feet.

The Biblical prohibition against worshipping God through His image relates only to the cultic activity and does not pertain to the **cognitive perception** of the divine which like other ANE religions perceived the divine in human form. This idea persisted into the Common Era. Only around the sixth century did the abstract Greek conception of the divine enter into Jewish thought; but not until Maimonides (late 12th century CE) did the doctrine of divine incorporeality as a fundamental tenet and knowledge of God, based on Aristotelian principles, radically modify traditional biblical and rabbinical perceptions of the Jewish faith.

For the Israelites the Temple was to serve as the Cult Image *par excellence*.

However throughout the Ancient Near East small images were common. The overwhelming majority of votive figures representing deities do not seem to have served as the central cultic image in the context where they were found (Mettinger 1995:27).

**These figurines were sacred symbols – not idols and reflect a dual approach towards the divine.** They were perceived as a threat, by the priestly authorities who did not understand the

sincere religious needs of ordinary men and women who had less opportunity to participate in the orthodox rites and experience of the sacred, as offered by the priests.

## 3.3 Teleology of the Image

"In the Israelite worldview, holiness is not inherent in any created thing. It receives the quality of holiness only through relation to Yahweh" (Keel 1997:174).This observation indubitably establishes a relationship between Yahweh and the asherah as well as with the little figurines. Images denote presence and as such would sanctify the place of home or cultic site.

T Jacobsen (1987 11-12) suggests that "the god *is* and at the same time *is not* the cult statue".

"We must think, in terms of a purely mystical unity, the statue mystically becoming what it represents, the god, without, however, in any way limiting the god, who remains transcendent. In so 'becoming', the statue ceases to be merely earthly wood, precious metals and stones, ceases to be the work of human hands. It becomes transubstantiated, a divine being, the god it represents" (Jacobsen 1987:22-23).

## 3.4 Cherubim

Within the authorised cult, it remains a strange contradiction, that despite the fierce attacks against idols of any kind, there continued to be two 'graven images', the winged creatures, that dwelt within the Holy of Holies, until the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.

The entire contemporary and subsequent Hebrew- Jewish literature contains no condemnation of these figures. Cherubim must have been regarded as sacred symbols and not as idols. They must have tangibly expressed certain attributes of God without in any manner representing or depicting Yahweh.

"The two Cherubs over the Ark of the Covenant were made so as to correspond to the two Holy Names…" (*Midrash Tadshe* cf Patai 1990:83). The two names are Yahweh 'Lord' and Elohim 'God'. They were infused with the divine presence for: "As long as Israel fulfilled the will of God the faces of the cherubim were turned toward each other: however, when Israel sinned, they turned their faces away from each other" (Patai 1990:84).

Perhaps these cherubs also represented gender discriminate attributes of the metaphysical whose reality was enshrined in the Ark of the Covenant.

Archaeology has been able to throw light on these composite mythical creatures which include human and animal features. Refer such examples of cherubim as in the Samarian ivories which are dated around the 9$^{th}$ – 8$^{th}$ century BCE.

The Samarian ivories are fine examples of the art of Phoenician craftsmen. They show two couching female figures facing each other. The women are shown in Egyptian profile, their upper bodies are upright. Both arms are stretched forward and underneath each arm is a wing whose upper edge seems to adhere to the lower contours of the arm. In each hand the figures hold an object which seems to be a large flower, probably a lotus.

A human face would portray wisdom and reason. The wings of an eagle represent swiftness and ability to soar into the heavens. The forequarters of a lion show strength, the hind quarters of an ox or bull depicts fecundity. The Symbolism portrays omnipotence and omniscience.

Whatever the actual purpose of these ivory plaques might have been, they are probably the closest illustration of the cherubim which shielded the ark in the Holy of Holies in the Solomonic Temple.

## 3.5    Clay Figurines

The most eloquent archaeological finds of everyday life in past times, are those of the potter's handiwork.

The persistence and ubiquity of terracotta figurines are remarkable. They have been found in every major excavation site in Palestine. Their presence in the form of Astarte plaques extends from the Middle Bronze period ca 2000 – 1500 BCE to the pillar type found in the Iron II period ca 900 – 600 BCE. Pillar figurines have not been found in archaeological contexts before Iron Age II or ca 1,000 BCE.

The clay figures unearthed in Jerusalem date from the First Temple Period. They differ from the Astarte plaques in as much as these Israelite ladies wear none of the insignia of the earlier Canaanite goddesses. They have a style and appearance of their own with a broader face

emphasised by the straight horizontal hairline across the forehead with curly hair framing the face (Ben-Dov 1990:95).

### 3.5.1 Description of the Figurines
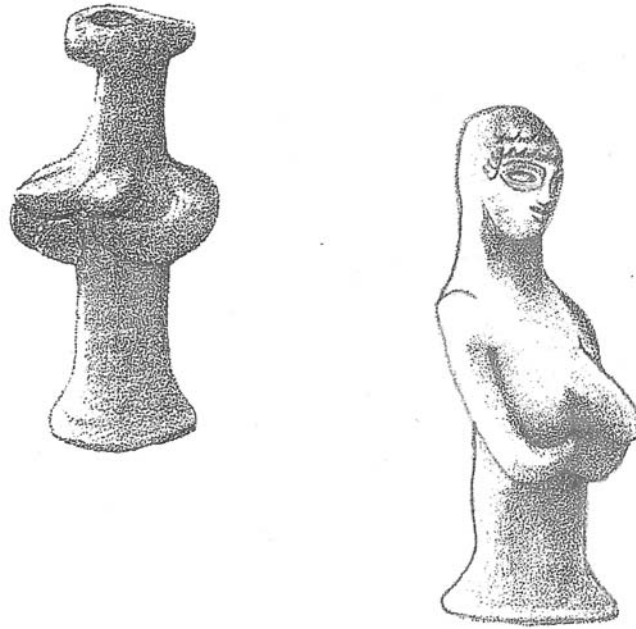


**Figure 2       Clay Figurines – The Little Ladies   (Dever 2005:181)**

The many Judean pillar-base figurines that have been unearthed in Palestine are rather small only about 20 – 25 cm tall. They have been dated to after the fall of Samaria – late 8th -7th century BCE.

These differ significantly from Phoenician Late Bronze figurines - 'lascivious courtesans of the gods' - where the lower body is portrayed in various ways. In these chaste figures the lower body is never modelled – **it resembles a tree trunk.**

There are two types – both depict a nude female without a lower body.

One type has a stylised face, simply formed by pinching the clay to form a crude nose and two impressions for eyes. The hands lift the breasts as if offering them to an infant. Sometimes they have side locks or wear turbans.

The Second type of figurine has a separate, finely moulded, artistic head with hair. The heads were made in an open mould but the bodies were handmade with exaggerated breasts supported

by arms and hands. The body below the waist is unembellished but may be flared at the base – which indicates that the figurines were intended to stand up unsupported. The heads were joined to the body by means of a peg at the neck. Because of this type of construction, it often happens that heads are found without bodies and bodies without their heads. Since the heads were mass produced many figurines have similar faces.

In both types there is an emphasis on the breasts that is not immodest – they are earthy and connected with fertility and fruitfulness.

Only three moulds have been found for heads of the solid-bodied pillar figurines. One was found on the surface of Lachish, another was excavated from Beth Shemesh, southwest of Jerusalem in the Shephelah, in the buffer zone between Judah and Philistia and the third was found at Tell Jemmeh (south of Gaza in Philistine territory). No moulds have been discovered in Jerusalem, which has yielded by far the most examples of the figurines.

### 3.5.2    Context and Interpretation of the Figurines

The pillar based figurines have most commonly been found in domestic contexts; relatively rarely in tombs and cultic places – this could indicate that they had more to do with life than with death.

The meaning of the little terracotta ladies has been widely discussed and much disputed. There is no written account of the significance of these widespread clay figurines. Scholars can only surmise that these figurines were intended to be representations of the *Mother Goddess* most probably Asherah.

Hadley (2000:196) says that the pillar figurines were typical household objects. They may have been a uniquely Israelite way of portraying the **goddess**, albeit with a Phoenician influence.

They may also have been representative of the **cult symbol asherah**; or after the functions of the Goddess had incorporated into Yahweh's own cult – an appeal to the **nurturing nature of Yahweh.**

Their presence throughout Judah including Jerusalem, and often together with the Egyptian god Bes, indicates that they had significance for mothers, their new born infants and their children (Bloch-Smith 1992:100).

Dever recalls that Albright called these figurines *Dea Nutrix the* nursing goddess "The Great Mother becomes a patroness of mothers everywhere" (Dever 2005:187).

These figurines portray the idea of plenty – the **patronage** of the goddess to bless the family through nourishing it. The purpose of producing children was to contribute to the prosperity and survival of the household. Fertility of land and animals was also of paramount importance.

Frymer-Kensky (1992:159) believes that they are not representations of a personalised deity. Rather "they are a visual metaphor which show in seeable and teachable form that which is most desired…they are a kind of **prayer** for fertility and nourishment." *Prayers in Clay* **-** this is the name Ziony Zevit gave to the terracotta figurines (cf Dever 2005:185 also Gittlen 2002).

Women are accustomed to 'private' forms of religious practice – not necessarily confined to the household. As gatherers (of water, fruits etc ) there would have been opportunity to visit groves and trees and other quiet places where they could present their over-riding preoccupations before the deity – for women these would have been serious matters that no doubt pertained to their own survival. As urbanisation increased these opportunities might have taken place informally at the Temple.

Van der Toon argues that there is no '*a priori* reason' that the figurines were *only* a part of Israel's Popular Religion and not the official cult – their poor quality would exclude them from being the cult object– but not from being connected to it (Van der Toon 2002).

The distribution of the figurines does not point to them being toys; nor artefacts of sorcery, nor forms of imitative magic to do with fertility nor ancestor idols.

In terms of household protection they may have been requests addressed to Yahweh through *this* Asherah. They are representative of a type rather than a specific cult image. This does not preclude their association with the Mother Goddess – from the Ugaritic texts she is identified as Asherah well attested in Israelite religion.

"There is no reason not to admit an identification to which so many indications point"
(Van der Toon 2002:60).

There is a lot of reluctance to accept that pure Yahwistic monotheism did not exist from Mosaic times as well as the existence of a polytheistic folk religion except as syncretistic practice.

Patrick D Miller (2000: 35, 36) concluded that if Asherah had been venerated in Ancient Israel it would have been in terms of the hypostatized feminine aspect of Yahweh.

Rainer Albertz (1994a) connects the female figurines with the Asherah cult which was adopted as aspects of family and personal piety even within official and royal circles.

Keel & Uehlinger (1998) regard the Ancient Israelite society as monolatrous i.e. they acknowledged more than one god but worshipped only one of them. They are unwilling to acknowledge that Asherah was a full-fledged deity and that her cult actually did flourish in Ancient Israel alongside the cult of Yahweh.

Dever (2005) will accept that the figurines might not have been worshipped as idols – but are symbols used as prayer aids (talismans) - as long as a widespread *Cult of Asherah* is not denied.

Mark Smith (2002) will not concede that Asherah was actually a goddess in Monarchic Israel. He finds only minimal evidence linking her as a consort to Yahweh. He will acknowledge that the asherah continued with various functions in the cult of Yahweh *without* connection to the goddess who gave her name to the symbol.

Susan Ackerman (2003:459) has suggested that the women's cults (2 Kings 23 etc), may have functioned under the auspices of the Queen Mother.

Dever (2005) has examined all the typical biblical language regarding images – none of them fit the picture of the female figurines. He discounts that the Biblical writers were either ignorant of or lacked interest in the distribution of these figurines.

The texts attempt to reduce 'Asherah' to a mere symbol of the goddess such as a pole or a tree. Later editors have manipulated the pronunciation of the name to read 'shame' – hence the 'Shame of Samaria'. Dever (2005:185) believes that the Biblical writers did not want to perpetuate the remembrance of Asherah. "…a hierarchical, male, orthodox Establishment (attempted) to drive Asherah underground – an attempt that ultimately succeeded".

Once it is accepted that the official cult of pre-exilic times was quite different from the orthodoxy of post-exilic times, the devotional life reflected in the figurines – within a domestic context – can be seen as a part of the practice of official religion and intrinsically dependent upon orthodox theology.

Popular religion was not nonconformist – it conformed in its own way to the established cult.

"Even if Israel is proved to have worshipped through images of wood and stone it was no less true to its instinct on the one and only God"
(Sasson 2002:70).

## 3.6    Aniconism

The word *aniconic* means pertaining to idols not shaped in the form of a human being or an animal. Aniconism is used in the following discussion as the term referring to cults where there is no iconic representation of the deity serving as the dominant or central cultic symbol. One can distinguish between Material aniconism which refers to the presence of an aniconic symbol and Empty Space aniconism which refers to sacred emptiness (Mettinger 1995 19, 20).

One of the ways in which Ancient Israel distinguishes itself from Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures in the lack of a divine image as the central cultic symbol.

The phenomenon of Israel's repudiation of idols is not exclusive to Israelite religion. The distinctiveness of the religion of Ancient Israel remains an enigma and shows both continuity and innovation in the religious arena of the Ancient Near East.

Even a superficial understanding of Egyptian iconographic representations are not to be understood as descriptions of the actual appearance of the deity but rather as hints at essential features of character and function.

Whilst Israel shows extreme hesitation in the realm of visual art towards anthropomorphic representations of the deity, the literary level of expression attested in the literature of the Hebrew Bible abounds with anthropomorphisms. Aniconic iconography should thus not be seen as a contiguous expression of an aniconic theology.

There was a great divide between the mental concept of Yahweh – that is what people thought about the deity– *Gottesvorstellung* and the express form in which this concept is communicated in texts rites and iconography– *Gottesbild*
(Olsson 1983 and 1985 as footnote in Mettinger 1995:38).

The express prohibition of images formulated in the legal codes appears to be a Deuteronomistic product. Dohmen's study (1985 cf Mettinger 1995:16) showed that not a single 'image ban' text can be dated prior to the fall of the Northern Kingdom. The veto on images is primarily directed against images of foreign gods.

Prior to the programmatic aniconism promulgated in Deuteronomistic theology there was a much more relaxed attitude towards images in which aniconism existed as a tolerant de facto tradition without specific theological reflection on the matter. In other words 'we do it this way – others may have their images' (Mettinger 1995:25).

Mettinger is keen to regard the *debîr* in Solomon's Temple as an example of empty-space aniconism. The Cherubim were placed in the *debîr* as the throne of the Invisible Deity – the Empty Throne is a material expression of the aniconic tradition. However, initially, the Ark of the Covenant occupied this space. Later on the Deuteronomists placed only 'The Name' in the Holy of Holies.

Aniconism in Israel eventually expressed itself in iconophobia and the programmatic prohibition of images is most probably a late development due to the influence of Deuteronomistic theology. The literary formulation of this interdict is late (around the time of the Exile) but there is a history of aniconic practice behind this programmatic formulation (Mettinger 1995:135,140).

In the history of aniconism in Palestine *massebôt* were material-type aniconic representations of the deity. Their presence is not incompatible with empty space aniconism. Much still needs to be understood about the *Theologoumenon* of this absolutely silent art form.

In Israel the *massebah*, or standing stone, served as the focal point of worship. During the latter half of the monarchy of Judah, they were condemned as illegitimate cultic symbols – somehow subsumed under the ban of images. A decidedly negative attitude is expressed toward the aniconic *massebôt* in later literature.

*Massebôt* were the most prominent objects on the high places – *bamôt*. Up until the time of Hezekiah's measures to centralize worship in Judah they were obviously legitimate Yahwistic shrines.

*"...the people are having a sacrifice today on the high place. You can catch him (Samuel) ...before he goes up to the high place for a meal. The people will not eat until he comes, since he must bless the sacrifice, after that the guests will start eating"*

(NJB 1 Samuel 9:12b-13a).

*"The king (Solomon) went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, since that was the principal high place"*

(NJB 1 Kings 3:4a).

It is only later that they came to be regarded as idolatrous places of worship and only in conjunction with of the condemnation of *massebôt* as subsumed under the band on images.

Hosea forewarns *"The Israelites will have to spend a long time without sacrifice or sacred pillar and without domestic images"* (paraphrase NJB Hosea 3:4). This passage indicates that both *massebôt* and the household figurines were among the standard cultic paraphernalia of the Northern Kingdom in the days of Hosea around 734 – 732 BCE, the time of the Assyrian advance.



**Figure 3     Little Coin showing a sanctuary with all its appurtenances   (Keel 1992:183)**

### 3.6.1     Empty Space Aniconism

### 3.6.1.1   Cultic Stand from Taanach

Taanach, in the Northern Kingdom, is mentioned among the Levitical cities "from the half-tribe of Manasseh, Taanach with its pasture lands…" (NJB Joshua 21:25). By the late 10$^{th}$ century, the

city appears to have been typically Israelite and functioned under the royal administrative sanction established by Solomon (1 Kings 4:12).

Two elaborate cultic stands have been found during excavations in this area. Lapp discovered the second, more elaborate cult stand in a cistern, a little way from the area described as a 'cultic' structure and interpreted as Yahwistic by J B Taylor (Mettinger 1995:164).
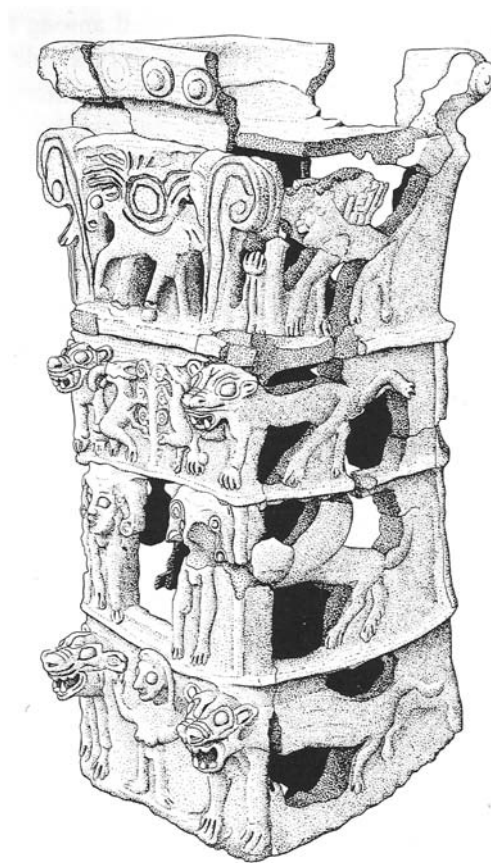


**Figure 4      Lapp's Cult stand from Taanach   (Mettinger 1995:165)**

J B Taylor has also presented an interpretation of Lapp's cultic stand. From top to bottom, the four tiers represent four temple scenes.

In the first scene the sun disc is clearly represented; it is carried by a stylised animal. Taylor's research indicates that it is a horse that supports the disc and identifies the deity as Yahweh:
*"He destroyed the horses which the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun…"*
(NJB 2 Kings 23:11). Kenyon discovered many clay figurines of horses when she excavated Cave 1 in Jerusalem (Hadley 2000: 172-173).

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In the second scene Asherah, represented as a sacred tree, stands between two lions.

Scene three depicts two sphinx flanking an empty hole. This tier presents a peculiar exception to the pattern deduced from the other tiers – the portrayal of the deity one expects to find here is absent. Taylor suggests that the gap belongs to Yahweh – the invisible deity who dwells enthroned on the cherubim.

In the fourth scene Asherah is again flanked by lions and portrayed as a naked woman.

The presence of identical lions on tiers two and four and similar sphinxes on tier one and three brings a degree of unity into this beautiful artefact.

Based on this double representation of the goddess Asherah, it is reasonable to assume that there is only one other deity present on the stand and whose depiction occupies the first and third tiers. Also the fact that the lions on levels two and four are identical would corroborate this interpretation.

If Taylor is right, then tiers one and three represent **Yahweh**, and tiers two and four represent **Asherah** (Mettinger 1995:163-166).

Yahweh and Asherah are portrayed aniconically in tiers one and two. Tier three represents both aniconism and iconography – Yahweh is Present in Absence. **In the Absence of Yahweh, Asherah becomes Present.** This cultic stand is a material representation of that which cannot be represented. It is the immanence of the dialectic of the revealed yet hidden God.

Notice that the curled fronds flanking the animal in tier one are the same pattern as the branches of the tree in tier two and almost identical to the pattern on the side of the heads of the sphinxes in tier three. This pattern became very popular and wide spread. It is found in Proto-Aeolic capitals and on many seals and is regarded as representing Asherah. So in the instance of this cultic stand, *where Yahweh is represented, the symbol of Asherah has been placed next to the aniconism.* There are no curled fronds on the fourth tier where Asherah is figured.

This highly ornamental stand not only indicates that Asherah was venerated at this Israelite site but also that she was closely associated with Yahweh and his cult (Hadley 2000:187).

## 3.7    *Bamôt*

The locus of religious life is any place deemed to be holy because the divine presence is sensed to be there.

*"The people were still sacrificing on the high places, because at that time (the time that Solomon took over throne of David ca 970-931 BCE) a dwelling place for the name of Yahweh had not yet been built. Solomon loved Yahweh…except that he offered sacrifices and incense on the high places. The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, since that was the principal high place…"* (NJB 1 Kings 3:2-4).

The cult of early Israel was practiced in open air High Places called *bamôt*. Texts and archaeological finds attest that *massebôt* formed part of the nature of these shrines.

Typically these open air cultic places would have been aniconic but included a *massebah* and an asherah. The essential element seemed to have been sacrifice, a ritual slaughter followed by a communal sacred meal. A sharp contrast to ANE temple sites which would have included iconic images and the feeding of the deity.

Sacrifices performed were essentially animal sacrifice in the form of ritual slaughter, followed by a communal meal shared by the worshippers. It is this communal meal and its ritual accoutrements rather than the feeding of the gods, known from the Mesopotamian cult, that are central to the meaning of West Semitic sacrifice. The blood of sheep was the preferred sacrificial matter.

The Hebrew word for altar is derived from the word *mizbēah, which* comes from a verb meaning to slaughter (Dever 2005:99). The biblical texts often locate them at high places and associate them with a cult assemblage of standing stones, asherah and sometimes with people seeking sanctuary.

Finds of iconic representations serving as cult images at *bamôt* are very rare as are finds of cult images in general since they were objects of value and significance to warring conquerors.

Even after the completion of the Temple in Jerusalem, the activities were conducted for a small priestly class. For most people in Ancient Israel, the Temple liturgy and official theology were

unknown and irrelevant – certainly not the real religion for the majority of people (Dever 2005:98).

There is archaeological evidence of over a dozen instances, dating from 12th to 7th century BCE of local holy places that served a single family or at most a small group of families. Dever (2005:117) has identified these areas as Family Shrines. The consistent pattern of artefacts at the shrines is significant. Benches around the walls, standing stones, altars, stone tables and bases, offering stands, jewellery, ceramic vessels (often exotic), animal bones, food remains, astragali (knuckle bones used in the practice of divination) and terracotta female figurines.

"*Nothing* was more fundamental to family rites of worship than a visible symbol of the divine presence" (Dever 2005:119).

Some examples are Room 65, from the 12th century BCE small hilltop village of 'Ai, north west of Jerusalem which was certainly Israelite. This large room had low benches around the walls and among other finds is a rather beautiful fenestrated offering stand (Dever 2005:113).

At 10th century BCE Megiddo two well preserved 'cult corners' have been found in buildings from Strata VA-IVB. One is designated Shrine 2048, the other Shrine 228. Amongst other cultic paraphernalia, Shrine 228 contained a horned altar and several standing stones. "This shrine appears to have been deliberately put out of use" (Dever 2005:115).

At the Judean fortress of Lachish, excavators found 'Cult Room 49' in Stratum V dated to 10th century BCE. This was a small room with low benches around the walls. In the room were small, stylized four-horned altars, several terracotta offering stands and various types of cultic vessels (Dever 2005:117).

**It was only under the Deuteronomistic reforms that attempts were made to suppress the use of high places and local shrines and centralise the Yahwistic cult in Jerusalem. These attempts were largely unsuccessful. In the countryside people worshipped as they always had done. They almost certainly did not regard their devotions as non-Yahwistic. Their time honoured practices were suitable ways of expressing their beliefs and hopes.**

There are no traces of aniconic theological reflection in the preserved textual material of Ugarit. Blood is also not significant in the Ugaritic texts.

## 3.8    *Massebôt*

"In the most primitive times, the connection between the numen and the rock may have been understood as an indwelling, so that the stone and the deity were perceived to be very nearly identical" (H Schmidt cf Keel 1997:181).

Rock, as a fortress and refuge, is a metaphor for the unshakeable faithfulness of Yahweh. It does not form part of the transitory world for there, the indestructibility and steadfastness of Yahweh is present.

The etymological origin of the word *massebah* is from *nsb* which means "to set up". It was a stone pillar, set up as a marker, a reminder to whoever looks upon it of its inherent intent.

In ancient Palestine standing stone pillars were a common feature of sanctuaries. Jacob erected a massebah at Bethel as a memorial of his encounter with God.

> *"Jacob took the stone …and set it up as a pillar, pouring oil over the top of it. He named the place Bethel"*

(NJB Gen 28:18, 19a).

Moses set up twelve *massebôt* before the altar in Sinai as a ratification of the covenant agreed to on Mt Sinai (Ex 24:4).

Cultic stones mark the place where the deity is in some way immanent so that worship offered there reaches him or her. This immanence may be marked either generally by being placed at the entry or boundary of the holy place or more specifically by being positioned near the altar, the very place of communion between God and the one who desires to venerate and be blessed.

*Massebôt* should not be seen as a likeness but rather as a medium of divine power.

A *Massebah* is not an idol. Dever (2005:99) does not even perceive them to be aniconic or non-anthropomorphic symbols of the god but rather a stone **'stand-in'** for a deity. He uses the word to denote a deliberately erected stone, large or small occurring singularly or in multiples which symbolises **the presence** of the deity thought to be particularly visible and efficacious in a particular place.

Uzi Avner (cf Mettinger 1995:33) has noted that *massebôt* in cult places are frequently associated with altars, offering tables and basins.

Their predominant orientation in cult places is towards the east, facing the rising sun, which was believed to radiate life, fertility, and strength. The stones are crude even when they stand next to monumental architectural structures. *Massebôt* recurrently occur in groups of the same number, particularly, pairs, triads and septets.

At a later period a different attitude towards these stones emerged within Israel .They were violently opposed by the later prophets and in Deuteronomy.

> *"... nor shall you erect a sacred pillar, such as the Lord, your God, detests'*

> (NAB Deut 16:23).

*Massebôt* found in the Holy of Holies of the Yahweh temple at Arad possibly indicate that for a time they were taken over by Yahwism.

There are examples of *massebôt* appearing both inside and outside temple shrines. At Schechem *Massebôt* No 2 and No 3 flanked the doorway of Temple 1b from the end of the MB period while *Massebah* No1 stood about 2,5m to the southeast of the altar in the courtyard of Temple 2 from the time of the Late Bronze period (Mettinger 1995:31-32). Remains found in many temple areas show characteristics of 'high places'.

### 3.8.1    Description and Form of *Massebôt*

A wide variety of differently shaped and worked stones have been found throughout Palestine; they date from the Bronze and Iron ages.

Their common feature is that they are all completely 'plain' – without even the least inscription, figuring or relief. The few stones that have been found with inscription are of foreign influence and termed 'stele'.

Since many of the Palestinian *massebôt* are finely shaped and worked, their lack of adornment was not due to lack of technical stone-cutting competence.

### 3.8.2 Archaeological Evidence – *Massebôt* in Jerusalem

During her excavation of the City of David, in 1962, Kenyon found a cave in the area delineated A XXI. The site is at the base of the slope of the Ophel in Jerusalem. This shallow recess into the rock scarp was enclosed by very substantial walls that looked as though they were intended to surround an entrance into a rock chamber (Kenyon 1971:114).

Between the walls and the rock, a great number of pottery vessels, many unbroken, were found and interpreted as a favissa; that is, a repository for vessels that had been offered to a deity and could not therefore be used for profane purposes. There was no evidence that this area had been used as a tomb in ancient times besides which, the cave hardly extended beyond the area of the pottery deposit.

Walls associated with those that enclosed the cave continued to the north and despite the difficulty of starting from the top and digging though all the accumulated layers of wash, the excavation was extended.

Beyond this area were found two levels of structures. At the foot of the scarp into which the cave had been dug, a small room was found. It measured less than 3,5 m from north to south. It contained two oblong monoliths which stand about 1,7m high. Since the room was so small and the roof did not need support Kenyon was of the opinion that these slender rectangular pillars were *massebah* columns, which had served as cult objects (Mare 1987:95).

A curious feature in this room is a doorway in the west wall that had been blocked up but certainly formed part of the original plan (Kenyon 1971:116).

On the ledge on top of the scarp, there was a small stone-built structure 1,75m x 1,5 m, much too small to have been a room, unconnected with any other walls. The only explanation that Kenyon found feasible was that it was the base of an altar (Kenyon 1971:116). The evidence suggests that this 'extra-mural area' was a cult centre, within 300m from the southern limits of the Temple compound.

In 1967, further south, in the same rock scarp, another 'extra-mural' sanctuary was found. A building had been constructed against the scarp; the central feature in this building was a well-cut entrance into a cave. This was very different from the 'shallow scoop' to the north. The main chamber 'obviously man-made' was around 3,4 m deep, 3,2 m wide and 2 m high. The floor and

ceiling were horizontal and well-cut. At the rear were two bays divided by a pillar of rock. Again there was no evidence that these areas had been used as tombs (Kenyon 1971:118).

Around 1 300 objects were accumulated in this larger cave. A cache of pottery vessels were found, consisting mostly of normal domestic utensils; many unbroken or repairable. The largest cooking pot ever found was amongst this assemblage; also figurines that were better preserved than other specimens that had been found as well as a 'magnificent incense stand' (Kenyon 1979:295).

"The human figurines are of a type common elsewhere in the Jerusalem excavations and on other sites, but interesting since they are so numerous" (Kenyon 1971:120).

The Horse and Rider figures were also quite complete, in many cases the riders could be attached to their mounts.

It is unusual for unbroken domestic vessels to be discarded and also the unbroken incense stand and the iconic figurines, these are all indicating a cult depository or a place where precious articles, much loved and revered by their owners, were stowed during a time of a Yahwistic pogrom.

This suggestion would concur with Old Testament reports that there were sanctuaries *"in the towns of Judah and the neighbourhood of Jerusalem",* which Josiah ordered to be destroyed (II Kings 23:5). It is probable that they were in this very area.

### 3.8.3     *Massebôt* in Iron Age Palestine

Although only a few *massebôt* have been dated to Iron Age Palestine, Mettinger (1995) has shown that cultic activities focused on *massebôt* were practised by the Israelites during both Iron Age I and Iron Age II. During the same period the Temple cult in Jerusalem existed alongside various local cults with *massebôt*. The findings from the Southern Kingdom of Judah, Arad and Lachish as well as Jerusalem and Megiddo from the Northern kingdom of Israel, show indisputably, that *massebôt* functioned on the official level of religion as well as that of local popular religion.

"*Bamôt* and *massebôt* were phenomena that belonged to the realm of normal cultic practice on various levels of religion, including official religion, prior to the ban" (Mettinger 1995:167).

### 3.8.4    Arad

"The cult at Iron Age Arad attests, beyond a reasonable doubt, to the important role of *massebôt at the official level of religion*" (Mettinger 1995:1490).

The *adyton* of the official sanctuary at Arad in Judah had a *massebah* as its central cultic symbol. Although the interpretation of the stratigraphy at Arad is highly controversial it is agreed that the stones there are *massebôt* and that they were placed in the holy of holies of a sanctuary.

The Aharoni-Herzog chronology locates the foundation of the sanctuary in Stratum XI (Solomonic Period i.e. 10th century) and the abolition of the sanctuary in Stratum VII (7th century).

Ussishkin argues that the sanctuary is later than Stratum X and probably dates from the 7th century. It was destroyed when stratum VI ended at the beginning of the 6th century (Mettinger 1995:143-149).

The final abolition of the temple in Stratum VII **was an act marked by respect for its sanctity**. The two incense altars that stood on the steps at the front of the *adyton* were laid on their sides and covered over with a thick layer of plaster to protect them. The upper courses of the temple walls were also dismantled and the whole structure was covered with a layer of earth that completely concealed all traces of the former shrine.

Aharoni's preliminary publications lack detail concerning the circumstances of the find of the *massebôt*, it seems that during the most recent stage of the sanctuary, there was just one single *massebah* functioning as a cultic symbol.

The presence of the other two stones has brought forth various interpretations. It could be that they had once served at the open *High Place* that preceded the sanctuary. They might have functioned as divine symbols of the *adyton* of the temple or had both functions subsequently.

Uzi Avner (1993:175) has argued that at some stage there were two *massebôt* representing a divine couple. We do not know whether the phase of Arad's cultic history when there was more than one *massebah* lasted only during Iron I or whether it continued into the later half of the period of the monarchy in Judah. Whatever the time frame – the final occupation had a single *massebah* (Mettinger 1995:148).

It should be noted that whether the history of the temple at Arad is long or short, the ground of the sanctuary covers part of what was probably an Iron Age I open air high place (Stratum XII). The cultic area would have occupied the whole summit of the hill with an open village on its lower slopes. When the citadel was built in Stratum XI (Solomonic), only part of the former high place, namely the North East corner, was preserved for cultic purposes.

### 3.8.5 Lachish

At Lachish archaeologists have established that the *adyton* of the late Hellenistic Temple was built over the *bamôt* of Stratum V.

A large stone was found just south of this *adyton*. It was fashioned from limestone, flat on one side and rounded on the others; 1,2m high, 95 cm broad and 60 cm high. The *massebah* was set into the debris of Stratum VI and so was erected in Stratum V.

Directly in front of this *massebah*, there was what Aharoni describes as, "a rounded heap of black ashes several centimetres deep with a diameter of about 50 cm. The shape of its charred remnants suggested a tree trunk, from an olive tree (*Olea europaea*)" (Mettinger 1995:151).

"It seems very probable that the wooden trunk set before the *massebah* was an asherah" (Aharoni 1975: 29-30).

If Aharoni is correct, the open air high place at Lachish represents a fine example of the combination of *massebah* and asherah. Both belonged to Stratum V, but while the asherah was burnt with this stratum, the *massebah* stood through Strata IV and III.

Stratum V is from the period of the United Monarchy and was probably destroyed by the Pharaoh Shishak (late 10th century BCE). The later Strata IV and III date prior to the destruction of 701 BCE – (Hezekiah's rebellion against the Assyrian Sennacherib).

Yohanan Aharoni was convinced that Arad VIII and Lachish III were contemporary and that destruction was at the hands of Sennacherib in 701 BCE. Later excavations have demonstrated that this was indeed so (Ussishkin 2004).

Two pits were discovered not far from the *massebah*. They are both considered to have been favissae which had been dug in the vicinity of the *High Place*. One pit, found in Stratum IV, in

the street west of the *massebah*, was filled with stones. It turned out that nine of the stones make up at lest four *massebôt*, each about 60 – 70 cm high, roughly dressed, in a square shape.

Aharoni (1975)) has concluded that **these stones, after having been deliberately defaced and broken, were carefully buried** in a way reminiscent to what happened to the stone altars and *massebôt* found at Arad.

Lachish Stratum V has thus provided evidence for the use of *massebôt* during the Iron Age and evidence for a continuity of Asherah worship at the site from the late Bronze period through to the early Israelite period.

### 3.8.6   Megiddo

Megiddo was probably the administrative centre of one of Solomon's districts and *massebôt* dating to this Iron Age period have been unearthed. Locus 340 is regarded as a public installation and the *massebôt* found here functioned here in an official cult, under royal administrative sanction.

Building 338 in Stratum VA - IVB is located within area BB at the eastern part of the tell, upon the very highest point, in an area with a longstanding cultic tradition. The building was erected on an artificially raised platform. It was first excavated by Schumacher (1908) who interpreted it as a Temple. A room was found within Building 332 - it was designated Locus 340. The walls of the chamber still stood to a height of about 2,5m. Its interior measurements were 9,15m x 4m.

In the centre of the room, along the longitudinal axis which is roughly orientated towards the north, a row of six cultic stelae extended down a low 'partition'.

Two large stelae, equal in size and symmetrically positioned, formed the cultic focus of the shrine. They are equidistant from the side walls and 3,42m apart from each other. Both are rectangular with a cross section measuring 0,40 x 0,47m. The northern stone measured 2,2 m in height and the smaller one 2,13m in height.

Between them stood two other smaller pillars, one about 1m and the 0,70m high. The two large stelae were flanked on their outsides by two other stelae. On the south side the monolith stood 1,20m high and on the northern side stood a slightly taller one that had been built of five

superimposed worked stones. Between the southern central column and southern monolithic stele stood what Ussishkin took to be an offering table (cf Mettinger 1995:160).
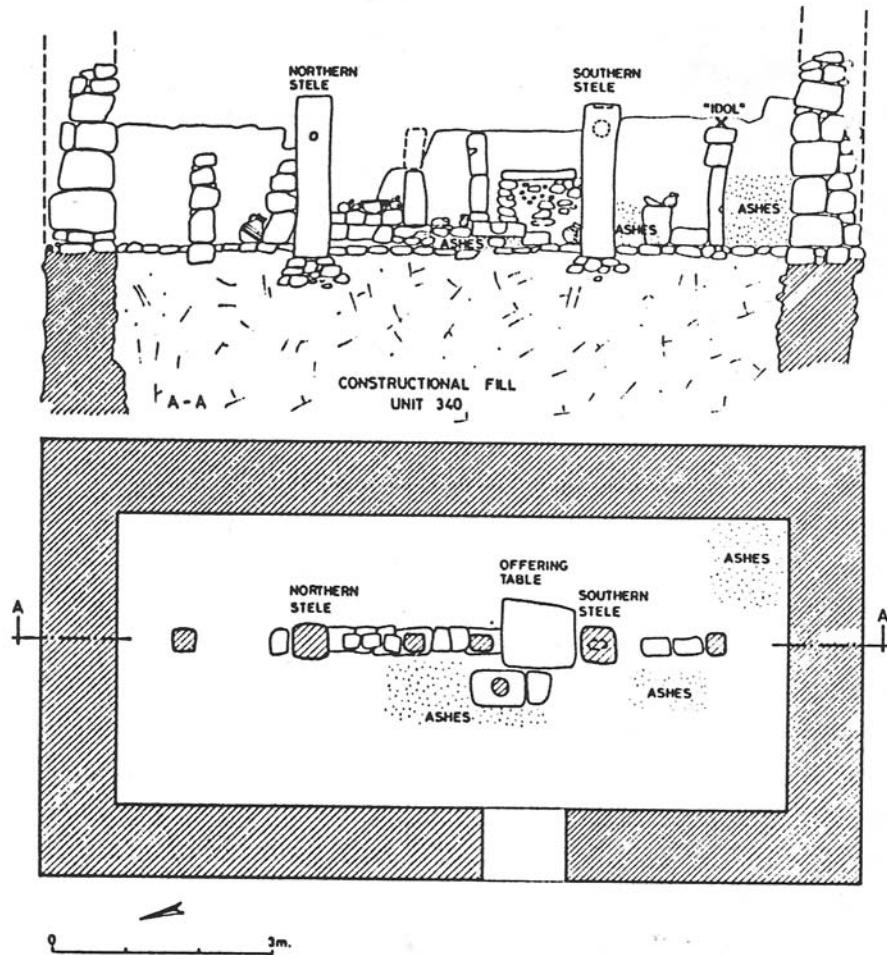


**Figure 5**     **Megiddo. Reconstruction of the Shrine Locus 340. Plan and Section (Mettinger 1995:161)**

Part of Building 338 was destroyed by fire; however the indications for the shrine, Locus 340 are different. All these standing stones were found in an undisturbed, upright position. This suggests that the shrine was deliberately buried as an act of reverence – just as was found at Arad and Lachish! (Mettinger 1995; 157-163).

### 3.8.7   Beer-Sheba

Excavations at Tel Beer-Sheba revealed ashlar stones from a dismantled horned altar. The reconstructed cube-shaped altar has each dimension at three royal cubits. The Arad altar was five cubits square and three cubits high which conformed to the Biblical dimensions for the wooden altar to be used with the tabernacle (Ex 27:1). The Beer-Sheba altar was made of unhewn stones in accordance with another Biblical injunction (Ex 20:24:25).

There is no reason to doubt that a dismantling of altars took place throughout the kingdom of Judah during the reign of Hezekiah dated between 715 – 701 BCE (Rainey 1994:333). This action was part of his plan to unify the kingdom of Judah, centralise the cult in Jerusalem and attract the Northern Kingdom to Jerusalem.

The Beer-Sheba altar contrasts both in size and in materials with the Arad tradition. It is significant that **the altar had been dismantled** and at least some of the stones carefully built into a repaired storehouse wall or buried under the rampart outside the gate. Rainey maintains that this took place during the time of Hezekiah when Stratum II was constructed.

Based on the Temple in Jerusalem, Arad and the Hellenistic temples at Lachish the altar would have stood in a courtyard on the east side of a building whose main axis was east-west.

Rainey (1994:148) has suggested that this altar originally belonged in a temple building that has been shown to have had this format (Israelite Stratum III).This temple stood in the area where Building 32 was later built.

## 3.9   Kuntillet ʿAjrûd – Archaeological Evidence Linking Yahweh with a/Asherah

The name means 'the solitary hill of the water well'. ʾAjrûd is located about 50 Km south of Kadesh-Barnea in the northern Sinai. It is situated on an isolated hilltop near small wells that are still frequented by Bedouin. The site is strategically placed on an intersection of several ancient routes traversing the desert. ʾAjrûd was excavated (1975 -76) by a team from the Institute of Archaeology from Tel Aviv University under the direction of Ze'ev Meshel.

Meshel believes that this site was an Iron Age II Religious Centre. Dever and Hadley do not agree with him. "The site is a typical Middle Eastern 'caravansary' or stopover station" (Dever 2005:160).

Hadley (2000:116) thinks it was most likely a place where travellers could stop and find water for their animals and themselves from the wells in the vicinity and could shelter from the bitterly cold and windy nights in relative security.

Kuntillet 'Ajrûd is essentially a one period site, occupied continually in the mid 9th to mid 8th century BCE. The pottery not only confirms the date but establishes that although remote, this is an 'Israelite site' with both northern and southern or Judean contact (Dever 2005:160).

Carbon-14 dating of samples of organic material from 'Ajrûd confirm that it was occupied during the period 800-770 BCE and on palaeographical grounds the texts were written c 800 BCE (Mastin 2004:326).

The main structure, atop the Western Building, is a typical Iron Age Judean desert fort. It is a rectangular construct with double casement walls, square towers at the corners and a partially open courtyard in the centre. Steps indicate an upper level, no doubt with sleeping quarters. It is probable that the complex would have been staffed and guarded by a small Permanent Force and would have provided shelter and provision for travellers and traders.

A gate shrine has been identified. The shrine consists of two rooms with typical low benches around its walls.

Several pieces of frescoes and inscribed wall fragments were discovered in the bench rooms and in a few of the adjoining rooms as well as in the eastern building. The inscriptions are in Phoenician or early Hebrew script and mention several deities including Yahweh, Baal, El and Asherah suggesting that this place served a diversity of people. Although they are fragmentary, they appear to be of a prayerful or dedicatory nature. Fragments of two large pithoi were also found. The pithoi are covered with all sorts of inscriptions and drawings which are evidently the work of different people.

That some of the inscriptions are religious does not necessarily imply that the site was a religious centre. Moreover typical cultic objects normally associated with shrines have not been found. (Hadley 2000:110).

### 3.9.1    Kuntillet ʿAjrûd Inscriptions

The Kuntillet ʿAjrûd inscriptions discussed below are written in Hebrew and have been dated to around 800 -700 BCE.

An 8th century storage jar has written in paint the Numbers 6: 24-26 blessing:
*'May Yahweh bless you and keep you and be with you'*

A wall inscription in one of the bench rooms reads
*'To Yahweh of Teiman and to his Asherah'*

Pithos A has a long inscription that ends:
*'I blessed you by (or to) Yahweh of Samaria and by his Asherah'*

Pithos B reads:
*'Yahweh of Teman and his Asherah'*

### 3.9.2    Interpretation of the Texts

Dever admits that in Biblical Hebrew, a proper name like 'Asherah' does not usually take a possessive suffix like 'his'. Nevertheless he finds it more reasonable to interpret the inscription as referring to Goddess Asherah rather than to a symbol of the goddess. He also believes that the goddess was venerated throughout the monarchic period and most probably as the consort of Yahweh (Dever 2005:167).

Olyan (1988:28) says that the word a/Asherah in these inscriptions is unlikely to denote the goddess Asherah as it has a pronominal suffix. Since the deity and the symbol are inseparable, the asherah appears here as the **symbol** of the goddess Asherah alongside Yahweh. Olyan also notes that Ahab erected an asherah in the temple in Samaria which Olyan believes remained standing long after Jehu's reform (843-816 BCE).
*"...and even the sacred pole stayed standing in Samaria"* (NJB 2 Kings 13:6).

He believes that most probably this is the asherah that is referred to in the Ajrûd inscriptions. That is a wooden cult object which was often found in places where Yahweh was worshiped. Olyan thinks that the asherah erected by Ahab (I Kings 16:33) is the same one which is acting as an agent of blessing in the inscription. Biblical and epigraphic data fit the same time frame – this

is evidence which shows Yahweh was worshiped with his a/Asherah in Samaria ca 800 BCE and that they were invoked for a blessing.

Keel & Uehlinger (1998) construe that the a/Asherah refers to a cultic object – not the goddess Asherah – but a '**mediating** entity that brings Yahweh's blessing'. It was conceived as a stylized tree subordinate to Yahweh. The asherah as a cultic image was 'present as a numinous symbol of power'. They are unwilling to acknowledge that Asherah was a full-fledged deity and that her cult did flourish in Ancient Israel alongside the cult of Yahweh.

It is interesting to note that apparently all the inscriptions which pair Yahweh and a/Asherah at ʿAjrûd, supply a geographical name with Yahweh, whereas other inscriptions at the site that mention Yahweh but not a/Asherah, do not have a geographical name. This has led Wiggins to observe that "it seems as though the *references to the a/Asherah* of Yahweh are geographically bound" (Wiggins 1993:178).

Wiggins (1993:178) says Teman would indicate a region of Edom. The inscriptions thus show that Yahweh was known in both Samaria in the north and Teman in the south and also attest to the presence of his asherah in these two locations.

> *"Eloah comes from Teman,*
> *and the Holy One from Mount Paran"*
> (NJB Habakkuk 3:3).

NJB Footnote: Eloah is an ancient name for God, Teman, a northern district of Edom and Paran a mountain in Edom (also Isaiah 63:1).

There is a difference between regarding *asherah* in the ʿAjrûd and Qôm inscriptions as referring to 'his (wife) Asherah' or 'his (wooden image) asherah. "If one views asherah in this case as the wooden image of the goddess associated with the shrine of Yahweh ["*you must not plant a sacred pole of any wood whatsoever beside the altar which you erect for Yahweh your God…"* (Deuteronomy 16:21)] – there is then no problem involved with attaching a possessive suffix to the noun" (Emerton 1982:14-15).

Yahweh remains the subject of blessing and salvation. This is carried out by (or through) His asherah. "The asherah may be the hypostasis of Yahweh's benevolence and succour and so represented the desired help" (Hadley 2000:99).

### 3.9.3 Yahweh and his a/Asherah and Shiva and his Shakti

The Zohar refers to the Shekinah as 'the Tree of Life' and also as a spiritual entity that is so close to the Godhead that it becomes an integral part of the Divine. It is through the intermediary of the Shekinah that the Divine thought is made manifest in the world
(Butler & Ritchie 1996:90).

Butler & Ritchie (1996:91) make a connection between the Hindu deity Shiva *"and his Shakti"*. Shakti means force, power or energy and is the personification of God's female aspect; she represents the active, dynamic principles of feminine power. In some traditions she embodies the active energy and power of male deities. She is sometimes referred to as the Divine Mother and is called Amma. "Shakti is female and is the counterpart in everyway of the more remote Shiva"

Shiva like the God of the Zohar is distant. Shakti is the active manifest power that created and continues to re-create the universe – without her creative potential the corporeal universe would not have resulted. As Parvati, she becomes the caring, attentive wife who coaxes and woos Shiva. Parvati is a caring friend to everyone who call upon her and to the whole of nature (Wikipedia/Shakti).

I am not identifying Shakti with Asherah – only attempting to show that concepts so elusive to our western mind were familiar to ancient people.

In Jewish tradition the Shekinah resided in the Holy of Holies. This was of great importance because it was her presence there that completed communion with God. After Zerubbabel had repaired the Temple on the return from exile, the Shekinah returned to Jerusalem and communion with God was restored (Patai 1990).

In terms of these ideas the 'His asherah' of the Ajrûd and Qôm inscriptions can be understood as the element necessary for the complete communion with Yahweh, a substitute for the smoke of sacrifice which also carried the prayers of the faithful to heaven. The Christian cross could be regarded as an asherah par excellence.

The pairing of Yahweh and Asherah should not be seen in an overtly sexual way but rather as a Supreme Being who encompasses both male and female attributes – that celebrates difference without competition or subservience.

## 3.10    Kuntillet Ajrûd Sketches

Two very large storage jars have scenes painted on them. These are the only intact examples of figured Hebrew art.

Sketches on Pithos A that are relevant to our discussion are examined. There is a drawing of two male figures and a seated lyre player – 'The Lady of ʿAjrûd'.



**Figure 6        Pithos A. The Lyre Player with Bes Figures   (Hadley 2000:116)**

*Dever is convinced this sketch depicts the goddess Asherah.*

Dever believes not only that the inscriptions refers to the Goddess Asherah but also that she is represented by the seated lyre player and is to be considered specifically as the consort of Yahweh. He bases his identification on parallels which he cites from around the ANE.

Dever (2005:164-165) describes a female figure as seated on a 'lion throne'. This seat has splayed claw-like feet, panelled sides, and the chair-back is slightly tilted. The feet of the figure dangle in the air which suggests a footstool is not there.

He does not regard her as an ordinary Judean housewife. He says that lion thrones are common in ANE art / iconography and are much older than Kuntillet ʿAjrûd – nearly all cases include a low footstool. They are never associated with ordinary people – always royalty or deities.

Since this drawing is found in a cult centre it is more probable that it is a deity and most probably Asherah.

There is inscriptional evidence that refers to goddess Asherah as the Lion Lady. One of the many bronze arrowheads from the period of the Judges (12th – 11th century BCE) bears the inscription "Ben ʿAnat (Son of the Goddess Anat), Servant of the Lion Lady"– an epithet of the Great Goddess, under her alternative name. (Dever 2005:128). 'Mistress of the Lions' first appears in the northern part of Israel in the 10th century in local terracotta production and on seals – a Syrian influence – but as Keel & Uehlinger (1998:174) emphasize – terracotta production in Israel did not simply replicate the traditions of the Late Bronze Age; their own innovations were introduced during Iron Age IIA (ca 10th – 8th century BCE).

Keel and Uehlinger (1998: 278-281) reject Dever's suggestions that the seated figure is Asherah because in their studies of 9th – 7th cent BCE seals, ivories and other iconographic motifs – no goddess is anthropomorphically portrayed – they only feature bulls and deities riding on bulls. There are also no seals that show the tree emblem.

Dever (2005:163) identified the two images to the left as depictions of Bes. Bes is the name usually given to a group of Egyptian dwarf gods.

Hadley (2000:143) is critical of Dever's opinion and argues that if the two figures are Bes why should the seated lyre player be specifically regarded as the goddess Asherah? If the drawing is meant to be a description of the inscription why should Bes be depicted and not Yahweh?

The lyre player is on a different level to the Bes figures and is facing the other way. If the lyre player is to be associated with the Bes figures then the lyre player would be the servant cast in the role of performer for Bes. It is unlikely that a major goddess as the consort of Yahweh would fulfil such a subservient role.

Keel and Uehlinger believe that the best parallels to the ʿAjrûd chair are found in Phoenicia – they also note that the seated figures in Phoenicia are divinities – however they are certain that the lyre player is a human rather than a divine figure (1992:253 cf Hadley 2000:151).

Dever considers the hairstyle of the lyre player to be similar to the 8th– 7th century pillar figurines whilst Hadley sees the hairstyle to be different in the particular and considers the style to be the same as that of a common Egyptian type wig worn by men (Hadley 2000:147).
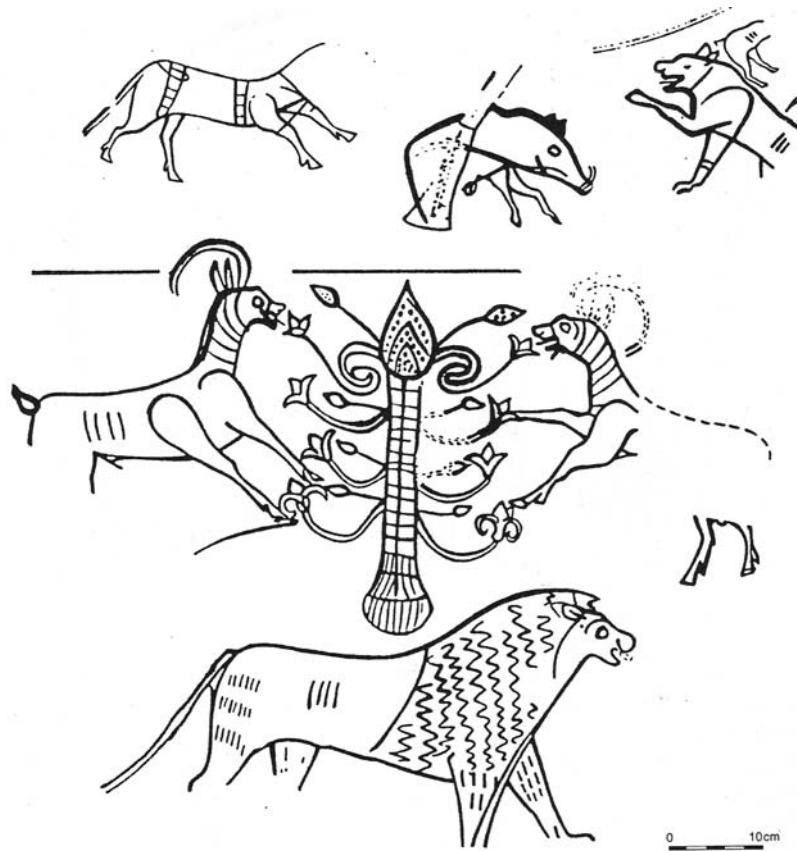
**Figure 7          Pithos A: Stylized Tree   (Hadley 2000:117)**

It is more probable that Asherah is represented by her symbol of a tree. Pithos A displays a picture of a stylised palm tree situated above a lion. If a major goddess were to be depicted in anthropomorphic form then it would probably be done in a way similar to this presentation (Hadley 2000:153.

"The drawing of the stylized tree and ibexes is placed above a portrayal of a striding lion is most probably to be interpreted as a representation of asherah, if not the goddess herself" (Hadley 2004:154).

As it stands the tree and the ibex motif have been drawn sideways – this seems to indicate that the pithos was lying on its side when this depiction was painted.

No matter which interpretation is found to be the more acceptable, Yahweh and Asherah are linked in a cultic capacity and the presence of these inscriptions and drawings affirm that the goddess Asherah was indeed held in high esteem by some of the Hebrews of that period.

## 3.11    Khirbet El-Qôm – Archaeological Evidence

The 8th century BCE Judean site of Khirbet El-Qôm, west of Hebron was excavated by Dever in 1968. Among the many bench tombs in the Iron Age cemetery, was found a four-line Hebrew inscription dedicated to ʼUriyahu, the governor:

> *'Blessed is ʼUriyahu by Yahweh*
> *From his enemies he has been saved*
> *by his a/Asherah'*

Dever (2005:132) interprets *Asherah* not as an object of blessing but as the proper name of the goddess Asherah.

The same linguistic arguments that apply to the ʼAjrûd text apply to this inscription.

Keel and Uehlinger (1992:27 cf Hadley 2000:136) believe that the absence of a geographical name in the el-Qôm inscription is explained by its dating to after the destruction of Samaria, since Yahweh was then the god of a single state there was no need to specify which Yahweh was intended. The fall of Samaria is dated 722 BCE (Miller & Hayes 1986:318).

## 3.12    Summary of Chapter 3

Signs, symbols and figuring are forms of magical-religious expression. In the Israelite worldview holiness was an attribute was received only through relation to Yahweh. Except for the horse riders and the little terracotta figurines they did not engage in figuring and iconic representation. The winged cherubim that guarded the Ark must have been seen as symbols rather than as images.

Many finds throughout Judea and spanning a very long period of time testify to the popularity of the little terracotta ladies within the homes of ordinary Israelite families. They were probably intended to represent Asherah the Mother Goddess or asherah the cult symbol.

The *debîr* in the Temple is an example of Empty Space Aniconism – eventually only The Name resided in the Holy of Holies

*Massebôt* are examples of Material Aniconism. They were common features throughout Palestine and indicated the presence of God. Cultic activities focused on *massebôt* during Iron Age I and Iron Age II. *Local Religion* co-existed with the official Temple cult in Jerusalem. The cult of Israel was practised in open places. *Massebôt* were the most prominent objects of *bamôt* until they fell under the ban on image during the time of Hezekiah.

The Lapp Cultic Stand from Taanach is an example of both iconic, aniconic and empty space aniconism.

Arad, Lachish, Megiddo and Beer-Sheba have all yielded evidence not only of *massebôt* but also of deliberate dismantling and burying of stone altars at Arad and Beer-Sheba and the *massebôt* at Lachish and Megiddo. These actions testify to their holiness and thus their relatedness to Yahweh. These insights intend to show not only the possibility but also the probability that sacred objects could have been buried beneath the Temple in Jerusalem at any time when the priests thought that their sanctity might be compromised.

The storage jars at Kuntillet Ajrûd are the only intact examples of figured Hebrew art. No matter which of the various interpretations are preferred Asherah is present, if not as the Lion Lady then as the stylized tree. The inscriptions pair the a/Asherah geographically with Yahweh.

Chapter 4 focuses on Jerusalem, The Temple, and the architecture of other ANE temples.

# Chapter 4   Jerusalem, The Temple of Solomon and Other Ancient Temples

## 4.1   Mount Zion in Jewish Tradition

Mount Zion is mentioned over one hundred and fifty times in the Bible. In First Temple times it was identified with the Temple Mount.

> *"For Yahweh has chosen Zion,*
> *he has desired it as his home*

(NJB Psalm 132:13).

In Jewish tradition, Mount Zion is always identified with the Temple Mount.

"They said to the King Messiah, *Where do you wish to dwell*? He said, *Is there need for such* a *question? On Mount Zion, my Holy Mount*" (Yalkut Shimoni, 476 cf Ben-Dov 1990:241).

Early Christian tradition identified Mount Zion with celestial Jerusalem.

> *"You have come to Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,*
> *where the millions of angels have gathered for the festival …"*

(NJB Hebrews 12:22).

This was the place that David chose to build the Temple for Yahweh.

> *"This is the charter of the Temple: all the surrounding space on the mountain top is an*
> *especially holy area. Such is the charter of the Temple"*

(NJB Ezekiel 43:12).

The Haram area in Jerusalem has for millennia been the focus of much religious and archaeological interest. It is unique in that there is no other spot in the whole world, of such limited area, which has retained significance for so many of diverse faiths. Judaism, Christianity, Islam have all revered the area at various times in history.

Christian and Islamic traditions suppose that the Temple stood on the site of the Dome of the Rock. There has been much scholarly debate about this position; however no consensus has been reached on any of the other proposed locations either. "When repair work was done on the Dome

of the Rock in 1958/59, no earlier traces of buildings became visible under its foundations"
(Albertz 1994a:297).

## 4.2    Religious and Political Orientation of Jerusalem in 10<sup>th</sup> Century BCE

Joshua 15:63 includes Jerusalem as a city allocated to the tribe of Judah. Since Judah did not
succeed in expelling the Jebusite inhabitants, it remained as a foreign enclave.

Around 995 BCE, David captured the fortified city of the Jebusites; he went to live in its citadel.
(2 Samuel 5:8). Jerusalem thus became the property of its conqueror and became known as *The
City of David*. In this way a bond was forged between the House of David and the city, which
would for millennia, be known as Jerusalem.

Bahat (1996:312) says that David's main consideration for choosing this city as his seat seems to
have been the fact that it did not belong to any of the tribal territories, unlike Hebron, David's
seat before his conquest of Jerusalem, which belonged to the tribe of Judah and was therefore
unacceptable as a centre for the other Israelite tribes.

When David had completed his elaborate royal centre in Jerusalem he decided, not without
trepidation, to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem.

> *"So David did not take the Ark with him into the City of David but had it put in the house
> of Obed-Edom of Gath. The Ark of God remained with Obed-Edom, in his house for three
> months and Yahweh blessed Obed-Edom's family and everything that belonged to him"*
>
> (NJB 1 Chronicles 13:13 – 14).

After David was reassured that the Presence of the Ark brought a blessing to the place where it
was housed, the Ark was transported with much pomp and ceremony to Jerusalem and there it
was placed inside a Tent which had been erected for it.

The Presence of the Ark in Jerusalem endowed the City with a previously unknown sanctity.
David transformed Jerusalem into the place where God dwelt, for one of the functions of the Ark
was to serve as the *'footstool for our God'* (Psalm 132:7).

Solomon ascended the throne around 965 BCE and died around 925 BCE. The Temple continued
in use down to the time of the Babylonian captivity when Nebuchadnezzar made his final

conquest of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. The symbolism of the Temple associated with King Solomon far outlived the fleeting empire in which it was built.

The sanctity of this building and surrounding courts was so great that to this day it emanates to the whole city of Jerusalem.

The tradition of Israel expressed itself in the language and art of its day. The structure, style and motifs incorporated into the Temple show compromise between the older Sinai traditions of the Tent assembly and that of the emerging Zion tradition. It was a bold attempted to bind together a federation of tribes under a conditional covenant.

The Davidic ideology envisioned Zion and the Davidic dynasty as the eternal and unconditional chosen children of Yahweh. It was the Prophets who perpetuated the perspective of conditionality of Temple and Kingship.

David had tried to unite the tribes politically. It would appear that ideologically they were united in their worship of their God Yahweh. Their religious allegiance was reinforced by moving the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem.

After the death of Solomon not even the Temple in Jerusalem could hold the tribes together. The economic basis of the kingdom was unsound. Material splendour was concentrated in Jerusalem; in lesser towns much of the old simplicity and comparative poverty remained
(Kenyon 1979: 256).

Solomon's successor – his son, Rehoboam (924 – 903 BCE) (Miller & Hayes 1986:220) did not have the support of the northern tribes of Israel. Rehoboam travelled to Shechem where he appeared before the 'Assembly of Israel'. The harsh policies that Solomon had imposed were rejected (1 Kings 12:4). Rehoboam was advised not to negotiate the complaints and the northern tribes seceded. The kingdom split into two. Jerusalem was only the capital of the Kingdom of Judah. The Kingdom of Israel turned to other cultic sites such as Bethel and Dan. Because of the Temple the sanctity of Jerusalem was never compromised.

Not until the reign of Hezekiah (727 – 698 BCE), and despite the Assyrian threat, did Jerusalem re-assume a pre-eminent position.

After the collapse of the Kingdom of Israel (Tiglath-Pileser III 732 BCE) and the conquest of Samaria (Sargon II 721 BCE) Jerusalem became increasingly important to the entire nation, both in Judah and Israel. Once again the city became the political and religious capital of the entire country.

Bahat (1996:320) says there are indications that many refugees from the Kingdom of Israel arrived in Jerusalem and settled there. This is deduced from names which end in –a, which is a characteristic of the Northern Kingdom and that the population of the city is known to have increased considerably at this time.

In 586 BCE the Babylonians destroyed much of Jerusalem houses and shops, administrative buildings and the Beloved Temple.

"A new period began, in which the terrestrial and the heavenly aspects of the city united in order to make Jerusalem a city with a unique spiritual nature, a character which it has retained to this day"(Bahat 1996:326).

## 4.3    Religious Architecture

The meaning of the word Temple is underpinned by both sacred space and sacred time within the context of the Creation and Revelation Theology of Eden.

The word Temple is derived from the Latin word *templum* which originally meant a consecrated, vast space, open on all sides, from which one could survey the whole surrounding landscape as far as the horizon. It is also probably related to Latin *tempus* – time. The Greek word *temenos;* sacred enclosure: 'literally a place cut off' (Collins English Dictionary). The word finally came to mean sanctuary, the sacred building known as Temple, the **place** of a Divine Presence and of the **contemplation** of this Presence.

Religious Architecture can be understood within certain contexts – aesthetic, utilitarian, mechanical, and symbolic (Parry 1992:3).

The aesthetic content refers to the sensibility and response of an audience to the beauty and artistry of an architectural structure, or to its ornamentation, decorations and fine workmanship. The aesthetic view of architecture underscores all other aspects.

The utilitarian function pertains to its pragmatic usefulness e.g. the manner in which the walls and roof provide protection from the elements. The mechanical context concerns structural elements, the strength of the building, the thickness of its walls, the depth of foundations, type of mortar used in the construction and the methods of masonry.

According to Herschel's definition (cf Parry 1992:4): Symbol is a reference to something visible that represents something invisible, something that is present that is representing something that is absent **Something Immanent** reminding those that look upon it of **Something Transcendent**.

The meaning of such an abstract is complex, subjective, open to multi-dimensional interpretations and nuances and is ultimately unknown. It is subject to the whole discipline of historical criticism.

Mechanical aspects can have symbolic value. According to the rabbis the symbolic functions of the windows of the Temple was far greater than was their utilitarian function: "The windows of the Temple existed to let the light found within the Temple out into the world" (Exodus Rabbah XXXV1.1 cf Parry 1992:5).

### 4.3.1    Architectural Styles

There are four architectural styles that were commonly used in Ancient Near Eastern temple buildings: *Longroom*, *Broadroom*, *Bent Axis Approach*, and *Centralized Square Plan* types.

The *Longroom* consists of an oblong room with the entrance in one of the short sides. The axis is 'along the line of approach'. The majority of Syro-Palestinian temples belong to the *Longroom* type. The *Longroom* temple model was the basis for the design of the Temple of Solomon.

The *Broadroom* type consists of an oblong room with an entrance in the middle of the long side. The axis is 'across the line of approach'. The Temple at Arad is a *Broadroom* style.

*The Bent Axis Approach* room originated in Assyria. It is also celled *Herdhaus* because in primitive times a hearth was positioned at the end of the room, later a throne, altar or raised platform occupied this area of the hearth. This type consists of an oblong room with the entrance at one end on the long side of the building. The approach is from the side towards the axis and then along the line of axis. This architectural style required those who came to worship to turn in

order 'to see the god'. "In this manner the god was sheltered and distanced from humanity" (Oppenheim 1944:56).

It is often difficult to determine the category to which a temple belongs – the important criterion is the axis, or orientation of the building.

## 4.4    Location of Solomon's Temple

The Hebrew Bible is our prime source of information regarding Solomon's Temple. Although it does provide many details it can not be regarded either as a topographical or as an architectural manual; nor does it offer any explanation of the significance of design and decoration.

1 Kings does not clearly tell us where Solomon built the Temple however 2 Chronicles 3:1 tells us that it was Mount Moriah where David was told to build an altar to the Lord. The high point in the Jerusalem area that would qualify as 'one of these mountains', is Moriah with its large rock, which is now housed in the *Dome of the Rock*.

This site is located just west of the Kidron Valley opposite the Garden of Gethsemane and north of the City of David. Solid tradition has persisted that this is the site where Solomon constructed his magnificent temple on the platform built around the threshing floor that David purchased from Araunah.

This was also the traditional site at which the plague threatening Jerusalem from the north and which had already spread to Beersheba in the south, was halted by the Angel of Yahweh who was standing by the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite (2 Samuel 24:16).

The layout of Solomon's Temple must have involved terracing in that area (Kenyon 1979:240).

Josephus (Book 15 Chapter 11) testifies that the platform for Solomon's Temple was only half the size of that built by Herod the Great. Herod expanded the platform to support his magnificent temple and splendid colonnade.

Unfortunately the religious sanctity of the present Haram esh-Sherif forbids investigation of any subterranean areas that might have been constructed beneath the Temple such as the beautifully vaulted underground 'Solomon's Stables' which have been found near the El Aksa Mosque.

### 4.4.1 The Architecture of Solomon's' Temple

The Bible is our primary source for the architectural plan of the Temple but gives not even a hint from where these plans, that Solomon used, were sourced.

"David then gave his Son Solomon …the plans for the buildings …as well as the plans for everything that had come into his mind through the Spirit" (NJB 1 Chronicles 28:11-12) [alternative translation].

Moses had received the pattern of the Tabernacle from God (Exodus 25:9). The Chronicles regards David as the founder of these new institutions, so it is David, acting under Divine inspiration who announces, in the greatest detail, the model of the new Temple.

*All this was in the document conveying Yahweh's instructions, by which he revealed the pattern of what was to be done"*

(NJB 1 Chronicles 28:19).

Scholars have not reached consensus on the theory that the architectural plan of the Temple of Solomon originated outside the Israelite context. Ahlström (1963:88) argues that both the Israelite cult and the Israelite culture were 'Canaanized'. The Canaanite religious institutions and belief systems possessed a "powerful hold on the religious consciousness of the Israelites that they proved virtually impossible to abolish". This influence extended to the architectural form of the Temple of Solomon - which for the most part was carried out in accordance with Phoenician traditions.

The building methods were also Phoenician, since the walls were built in Phoenician style masonry which shows three courses of hewn stone and then a course of cedar beams. Walls built in this way have been found at Ras Shamra in Syria (Kenyon 1979: 241).

The Israelites never possessed an independent monumental architectural tradition of their own. Their public structures imitated current styles in the wider contemporary world. Solomon's Temple was patterned after a typical Phoenician Temple plan.

"The plan of the Temple is rooted in the religious architecture of the second millennium B C E in Canaan and northern Syria" (Mazar 1992:377).

Busink (Les Origines du Temple de Solomon 1963:191 cf Parry 1992:81) has an opposing view. He admits that there are commonalities between the Canaanite Longroom Temple style and the Solomonic Longroom temple. He also acknowledges that certain aspects of the Temple of Solomon were influenced by the Phoenician style of architecture, in particular the pillars.

However he is not convinced that the major components of the temple were copied from the Canaanites but rather believes that the most important elements concerning the sacred building as an architectural work are of Israelite origin. He believes that Solomon had already obtained a blue-print for the design of the Temple. *"I propose, then, to build a Temple for the name of Yahweh my God, in accordance with what Yahweh told my father David"* (1 Kings 5:19).

Busink's point is valid when he argues that Hiram, the brass worker from Tyre did not create the architectural plan of the temple nor was he the builder of the Temple (1 Kings 7:13 – 51). The Biblical source says that he was the son of a widow of the tribe of Naphtali and that his father was a Tyrian bronze worker. Hiram the brass worker from Tyre fashioned the pillars Joachim and Boaz that stood in front of the Temple as well as all the other bronze ornamentation.

A second Hiram, the King of Tyre, was actively involved in sourcing the construction materials for the building of the Temple (1 Kings 5: 15-31).

*"I have received your message. For my part, I shall supply you with all you require in the way of cedar wood and juniper"*

(NJB 1 Kings 5:22).

The servants of Hiram worked alongside the servants of Solomon in hewing and shipping wood and stone trees for the Temple.

Parry (1992:37-83) after lengthy examination of many ANE Temple styles shows that the Temple of Solomon did borrow several architectural forms from neighbouring temples but was not an exact duplication of any other single temple. Even if the form of the Temple shared similarities with other near eastern contemporary temples the cultic function was very different.

Kenyon (1967:58-59) says that the archaeological evidence from Palestine indicates that the Israelites themselves lacked any skill as masons and craftsmen. Evidence of the skill of the Phoenicians in working stone from the second millennium onwards comes from sites such as Ras Shamra, Byblos as well as the subterranean remains at Tyre.

"One of the most prominent characteristics of Jewish architecture was their love of even numbers … and their employment of one definite integer in every part of their buildings" (Fergusson 1878:17). In the Tabernacle 5 cubits was the dimension chosen; in the Temple it was 10 cubits – every measurement was a multiple of this number.

The Temple of Solomon, built of stone and wood was a detached single structure of the *Longroom* type. The dimensions of The First Temple were relatively small. There is one engineering factor that had a bearing on the size of the Temple: its design *avoided the use of internal columns.* The chambers were the maximum width possible, at that time, without additional supports for the wooden roof span. It is possible for 30 foot cedar beams to have been laid across the expanse.

If there were pillars within the Temple they are not mentioned in the Bible. However there is mention of supports. (1 Kings 10: 11 – 12) Hiram's fleet brought back, among other things, great cargoes of *almug* timber. "Of the *almug* timber the king made supports for the Temple of Yahweh…" According to 2 Ch 2:7 the wood came from the Lebanon. It is rare, unidentified and possibly scented wood. It is also mentioned in Akkadian texts.

The climatic conditions of Judea should be considered. We know that the Mount catches the wind because it was originally used as an ideal threshing ground. Rainfall in Jerusalem is around 300 mm per annum. It is common for snow to fall in winter and dew during the dry season. Any structure that was not thoroughly weather-proofed would have been unsuitable for the location. It is thus unlikely that it was a flat roofed structure.

The interior of Solomon's Temple including the portico was 60 cubits long, (about 90 feet) 20 cubits wide (about 30 feet) and 30 cubits high (about 45 feet high) (if the measurement of 1 foot 6 inches to the cubit is used.) (NJB1 Kings 6:17). The entrance or portico (*ulam*) was a *Broadroom* type structure at the east end of the Temple. Using the same measure it would be 30 feet wide, 15 feet deep and 180 feet high. West of the entrance was the central nave – Holy Place (*hekal*) – it would be 60 feet long and 30 feet wide. West of the *hekal* was the last chamber an inner sanctuary, – the Most Holy Place (*debîr*). All sides of this wooden cubic structure measured 30 feet. At the entrance to the *debîr* was a double door made of olive wood. It was carved with winged creatures, palm trees and flowers (1 Kings 6: 31-32) (Mare 1987:73-74).

Mazar, taking into account the three-storeyed annex rooms around the outside of the Temple (1 Kings 6:5), describes the Temple as a rectangular structure 50 x 100 cubits about 25 x 50 meters or about 80 x 160 feet, with the exceptional height of 30 cubits (about 15m or nearly 50 feet) – larger than any Canaanite or Phoenician temple known to us. The walls are said to have been 12 cubits thick – a similar dimension to the Middle Bronze Age Temple at Schechem (Mazar 1992:376).

Jews employed two kinds of cubits – one equal to about 15 inches the other 18 inches as well as the Babylonian cubit of 21 inches. One can never be sure which cubit unit is being used – generally speaking a cubit was close to half a yard.

Busink (cf Keel 1997:162) maintains that the Jerusalem *debîr* is not primarily an imitation of the Egyptian and Phoenician *naos* nor is the structure analogous to the Syrian *adyton* – rather it should be seen as a direct successor to the shelter which David pitched for the Ark. (2 Samuel 6:2) *"...the Ark of God dwells in a sukkāh!"*

Narrow clerestory windows would have provided ventilation but allow only a little light to enter. (1 Kings 6:4) They must have been situated high up because of the side rooms. They were probably only on the side walls of the Holy Place (*hekal*). It is thought that these clerestory windows consisted of recessed frames narrowing to the outside in the thick (ca 7½ feet) walls. They might have included bars to keep out the birds (Mare 1987:74).

This envisaged design would be like those seen on the ivory plaque from Babylonia which shows a woman looking though a window recessed and fitted with bars. A similar ivory carving has also been found at Megiddo at archaeological levels considered to be around the time of Ahab.

After Solomon had moved the Ark into his new Temple the Tabernacle was no longer needed **the old Tabernacle was received into the Temple and placed in the inner sanctuary** thereby accommodating the scruples aroused by the relocation from Tabernacle to Temple.

The rabbis had great respect for Tradition which says that the individual parts of the Tabernacle were stored beneath the Temple of Solomon. (B T Sotah 9a; Genesis Rabbah XLII.3; Leviticus Rabbah XI.7; Ruth Rabbah VII) – all recount that the Tabernacle was hidden away when the Temple was built (cf Parry 1993:103).

The architectural and ritualistic symbols involved in the description of the Temple of Solomon correspond with those of the Tabernacle. According to Jewish writings the Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon are equal with one another: both are Temples of Yahweh (Parry 1993:103).

The development was thus similar to that found in Egypt where the old chapels were taken over into the great Temple complexes.

### 4.4.2   Interior of Solomon's Temple

The Temple of Solomon was the *Place of Holiness,* the space where the five holinesses recognised by the Israelites were honoured. These were: God, sacred places, temple vessels and accessories, people and holy days.

Creation had always been a theme in the theology of Israel. The relation between Temple and Creation is well established within the Hebrew Bible.

> *"He built his sanctuary like the high heavens,*
> *like the earth which he has founded forever"*

(NAB Psalm 78:69).

Solomon's Temple was elaborately constructed and adorned. The Temple was built of perfectly dressed stone. Despite this fine masons work the inner face of the walls were completely lined with cedar wood and the floor was also made of wood. This wainscoting was beautifully carved with *"figures of cherubim, palm trees and open flowers"* (NJB 1 Kings 6:29).

A wealth of gold was spread over them. Above all, it was the vessels and ornaments of bronze, fashioned by Hiram of Tyre, which for the Jews was a display of unrivalled richness and beauty. "The Temple in Jerusalem, decorated with the motifs of the cosmos and the Garden of Eden, mirrored the cosmos" (Smith 2001:169).It would seem that from the moment one entered Solomon's Temple one encountered endlessly repeated decorative motives of cherubim, palm trees and open flowers. 1 Kings 7:49 indicates that gilded floral work formed an integral part of the interior of the Holy Place.
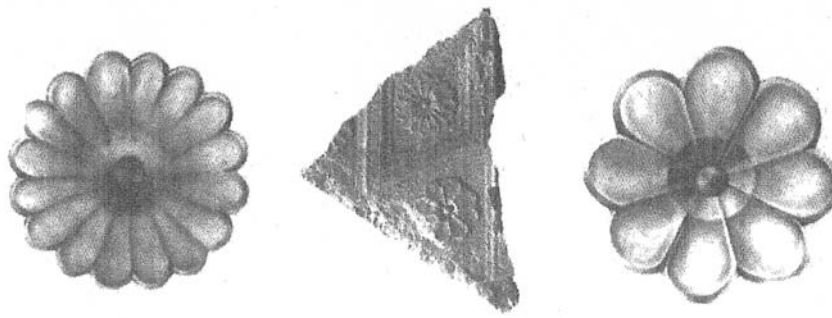
**Figure 8**     **Artistic details from the Royal Stoa and Temple Walls   (Levine 2002: 261)**

The decorations above could be similar to those that would have been in the Temple and bear a resemblance to the carvings found on the ceiling in Rosslyn Chapel.

### 4.4.3    The Parochial of Solomon' Temple

*"I rejoiced when they said to me 'Let us go to the house of Yahweh' "*

(NJB Psalm 122:1).

In Israel's worldview, the Temple stood on the foundation of the earth. This Sacred centre is the place where Yahweh, through the spoken word, first established the ordered realms of nature and cosmos that had supplanted the darkness of primordial chaos. The Temple embodied this distinctive air of the arcane; remained a place of mystery.

The interior of the Temple was not a place of assembly for the congregation but primarily God's House – a place for the Shekinah to dwell – the Divine Presence, just as the old desert Tabernacle had been. People gathered for liturgical functions outside the enclosure in surrounding porticos or courts.

The *hekal* was entered by the priests and the *debîr* by the high priest, alone. The blood sacrifices were only performed in the outer sanctuary where the altar of bronze had been built. It had not been designed as a place of prayer; prayers were said outside on the forecourt.

*"I am like an olive tree growing in the House of God. I Trust in God's constant love forever and ever"* (GNB Psalm 52:8) suggests that magnificent olive trees, palms and cedars of Lebanon stood in the Temple Courts.

The trees that grow around the Temple are often considered as the source of life and fertility because God is present there. Their healthy green foliage is a proclamation of Yahweh's blessing.

Alongside the river banks that flowed through Ezekiel's Visionary Temple area, grew every kind of fruit tree. The leaves would not fade nor their fruit fail because they were irrigated by the water, also a symbol of Yahweh's blessing, that comes from the sanctuary. The trees would both nourish and heal God's people (Ezekiel 47 1-12).

The worshippers gathered in the great courtyards outside. Here the numinous power of Yahweh's blessing would be embraced and felt more keenly than was his grandeur. It was not merely the sight of trees and water and other elements, it also included the experience of joyful, human fellowship. *"I enjoyed the company of my dear friend, at whose side I walked, in procession in the house of God"* (Paraphrase Psalm 55:15).

### 4.4.4   The Pillars of Hiram

Hiram the brass worker from Tyre designed the pillars Jachin and Boaz that stood in front of the Temple *"He was endowed with skill, understanding and knowledge of how to produce any work in bronze"* (NAB 1 Kings 7:14b).

Texts are juxtaposed from The New Jerusalem Bible and the New American Bible translations of the accounts found in both Kings and Chronicles. Try to imagine these pillars in your mind's eye.

*"He cast the two bronze pillars; the height of one pillar was eighteen cubits, and a cord twelve cubits long gave the measurement of its girth; so also was the second pillar. He made two capitals of cast bronze for the tops of the pillars the height of one capital was five cubits and the height of the other five cubits.*
*He made two sets of filigree to cover the moulding of the two capitals surmounting the pillars, one filigree for one capital and one filigree for the other. He also made pomegranates; two rows*

*of them around each filigree, four hundred in all applied on the raised moulding behind the filigree; there were two hundred pomegranates round one capital and the same round the other capital. The capitals surrounding the pillars were lily shaped.*

*He erected the pillars in front of the portico of the Temple, he erected the right hand pillar and named it Jachin, he erected the left hand pillar and named it Boaz*

(NJB 1 Kings 7:15-22).

[NJB footnote 1 Kings 7:*h* vv 17-20 is disordered and in places corrupt. Restoration conjectural].

[NJB footnote 1 Kings 7:*i*: the two names are obscure, possibly meaning it is firm and it is strong].

The same verses from the **New American Bible** version read:

"Two hollow bronze columns were cast, each eighteen cubits high and twelve cubits in circumference; their metal was of four fingers thickness. There were also two capitals cast in bronze, to place on top of the columns each of them five cubits high. Two pieces of network with a chainlike mesh were made to cover the (nodes of the) capitals on top of the columns, one for each capital. Four hundred pomegranates were also cast; two hundred of them in a double row encircled the piece of network on each of the two capitals. The capitals on top of the columns were finished wholly in lotus pattern above the level of the nodes and their enveloping network. The columns were then erected adjacent to the porch of the temple, one to the right, called Jachin and the other to the left, called Boaz. Thus the work on the columns was completed (NAB 1 Kings 7:15-22).

[Footnote NAB 1 Kings 7:21 Jachin…Boaz. The significance of these names is not known but they may be the opening words of temple inscriptions (Heb yakin, *'May he establish'*; boaz, *'with him strength'*].

[GNB Footnote 1 Kings 7: v: Jachin: The name sounds like the Hebrew for 'he (God) establishes'].
[GNB Footnote 1 Kings 7: w: Boaz sounds like the Hebrew for 'by his (God's) strength'].

The account given in 2 Chronicles in the **New Jerusalem Bible** reads:

*"In front of the hall he made two pillars thirty-five cubits high and on the top of each a capital measuring five cubits. He made festoons\*, in the debîr, to go at the tops of the pillars and made*

*a hundred pomegranates to go on the festoons. He erected the pillars in front of the Temple, one on the right, the other on the left; the one on the right he called Jachim and the one on the left, Boaz"*
(NJB 2 Chronicles 3:15-17).

* "festoon: a decorative chain of flowers, ribbons etc suspended in loops, garland; a carved or painted representation of this, as in architecture…" (Collins English Dictionary).

* "festoon: a chain of flowers, leaves, ribbons, etc hung in a curve as a decoration … decorate elaborately" (Concise Oxford Dictionary).

*"Thus Hiram completed all the work done for King Solomon for the Temple of God: the two pillars; the mouldings of the capitals surmounting the two pillars; the two sets of filigree to cover the two mouldings of the capitals surmounting the pillars, the four hundred pomegranates for the two sets of filigree – two rows of pomegranates for each set of filigree"*
(NJB 2 Chronicles 4:11b-13).

The **New American Bible** translation enhances our visualisation of the pillars:

"In front of the building he set two columns thirty-five cubits high; the capital topping each was of five cubits. He worked out chains in the form of a collar with which he encircled the capitals of the columns and he made a hundred pomegranates which he set on the chains. He set up the columns to correspond with the nave, one for the right side and the other for the left, and he called the one to the right Jachin and the one to the left Boaz."
(NAB 2 Chronicles 3:15 – 17).

"Hiram thus completed the work that he had to do for King Solomon in the House of God: two columns, two nodes for the capitals topping these two columns, and two networks covering the nodes of the capitals topping the columns; also four hundred pomegranates for the two networks, with two rows of pomegranates to each network, to cover the two nodes of the capitals topping the columns"
(NAB 2 Chronicles 4:11b- 13).

[NAB Footnote 2 Chronicles 3:16 (text below). *On the chains*: According to 4:13 there were precisely four garlands with one hundred pomegranates on each one of them.

**There are four double garlands on both the Mason's and the Apprentice Pillars in Rosslyn Chapel.**

Pomegranates are a well attested decorative motif. There is frequent reference to them in the Song of Solomon which demonstrates their affinity to both love and fertility motifs.

I have found no other reference where pillars are given names. Is it possible that since they were given different names they were in some way different; so that the people who congregated in the courtyard, who looked upon them, could distinguish between them?
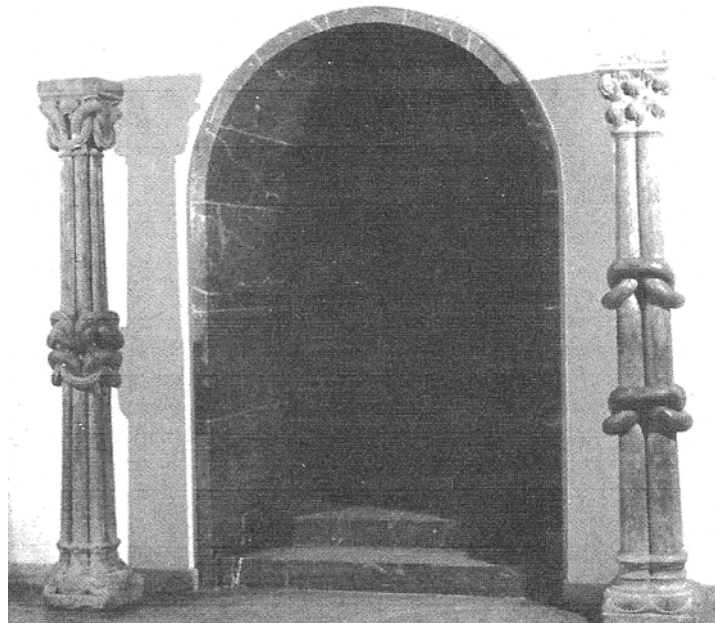


**Figure 9        Jachin and Boaz outside Würzburg Cathedral   (Gutmann 1976:177)**

### 4.4.5    Jachin and Boaz

*My Constancy and Faithful Love*

*The columns were then erected in front of the portico of the temple,*
*One to the right called Jachin and the other to the left called Boaz*

(NJB /NAB 1 Kings 7:22).

> *"Saving Justice and Fair Judgement the foundations of your throne,*
> *Faithful Love and Constancy march before you"*

(NJB Psalm 89:14).

Right Order and Right Judgement *or* Righteousness and Justice are integral to the rule of Yahweh. These attributes are grounded in the Sinai tradition.

> *"Cloud, black cloud enfolds Him,*
> *saving justice and judgement the foundations of his throne.*
> *Fire goes before him,*
> *sets ablaze his enemies all around"*

(NJB Psalm 97: 2-3).

It has been conjectured that the pillars represent prayers which were proclaimed in a ritual performed publicly by the king at the pillars (Albertz 1994a:298).

> *"My faithful love will never be withdrawn from him…Your dynasty and your sovereignty*
> *will ever stand before me and your throne be forever secure"*

(NJB 2 Samuel 7:15a, 16).

> *"Yahweh, the king rejoices in your power;*
> *how your saving help fills him with joy"*

(NJB Psalm 21:1).

There is no reference to a throne in the description of the Solomonic Temple (1 Kings 6).

The pillars before Solomon's temple are called '*ammûd* not *massēbāh*. They most probably took on the cultic function of marking the sacred area and their relatively great height indicating a place of communion between heaven and earth.

From Kings 7: 21 we learn that these bronze pillars rose up 23 cubits. There was a 5 cubit high bronze capital on top of an 18 cubit high stem. Since the cubit measurement is estimated to be about eighteen inches these are surely exaggerated dimensions.

We are not told anything about the bases for these bronze columns. From the palace at Tell Tainat (see 4.4.6) there is archaeological evidence of an elaborately carved column base. It could be that the bases for Solomon's columns were also made of stone and of similar design (Mare 1987:82).

The columns Jachin and Boaz have been compared to flanking freestanding columns, column bases or *massebôt* from the Schechem Migdal temple (Middle Bronze), the Hazor temple of Stratum I (Late Bronze) and Tell Tainat temple (Iron Age) as well as the Melqart temple in Tyre. (Bloch-Smith 1994:19).

The exaggerated size of the structures in the Solomonic Temple courtyard suggests that they were intended not for human use but for the realm of the divine and attest to Yahweh's Presence and Power.

Both the architecture as well as the location of the Temple on Mount Zion, as the highest point of the city, distinguish it as the portal between heaven and earth. "…a part of earth which reaches into the heavens …a part of heaven that touches the earth" (Keel 1997:171). Undoubtedly they personified the immanence and transcendence of the God of Israel.

If Jachin and Boaz on the Jerusalem Temple façade are to be regarded as symbols of the Tree-of-Life, we would expect that they would have been topped by Proto-Aeolic capitals. This matter remains problematic especially because of the vagueness of the biblical descriptions which describe the capitals as 'lily-work' that is leaf or lotus capitals like those on the façade of the temple model from Idalion.
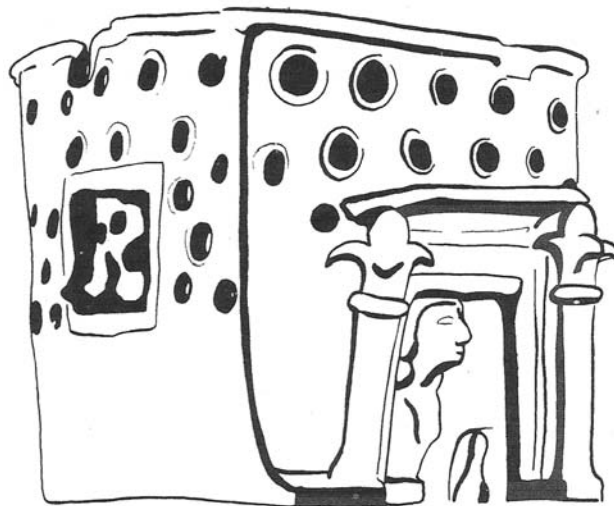


**Figure 10.     Idalion Pottery Model   (Gutmann 1976:165)**

These free standing pillars support a small porch roof and flank the entrance of the sanctuary. Two other model shrines one from Tell Far'ah (north) and the other from Transjordan date from the early Iron Age and although they resemble the Idalion shrine their pillars apparently had no

architectural function. Bloch-Smith (1994:19) suggests that the Phoenician pillars are an adaptation of an earlier Mesopotamian practice of erecting flowering trees or branches to represent an attribute or symbolized the power of the deity resident in the temple. Seen from a distance the ornate capitals atop the Jerusalem pillars may have given the columns a floral appearance.

*"The capitals on top of the columns were finished wholly in a lotus pattern"* (NAB 1 Kings 7:19). Lotus blossoms were symbolic of renewal and fertility. They constituted the chief component of the capitals of Solomon's Temple and of the ivory capitals from Arslan Tash.

Keel (1997:165) suggests that these pillars may be regarded as *asherahs* in a modified form re-enforcing the characteristic of the Temple "as a sphere of life".

Knight & Lomas (1996:12) regard these pillars as a visual representation of the politics of the Israelites of the tenth century. The left hand pillar stood to the south – Boaz – great grandfather of David – it represents the land of Judah and signifies strength. The right side pillar stood to the north – Jachin – who was the high priest who assisted at the dedication of the Temple. It represented the land of Israel. Together they signified political and religious stability united by the Temple of Yahweh.

**4.4.6    The Temple at Tell Tainat**

Tell Tainat is not far from the northern most point of the Orontes River in the far north of Phoenicia. Here a small tri-partite temple adjoining the palace has been excavated. Some archaeologists consider it to be analogous with the Temple of Solomon. However "except for its orientation and altar, the structure has nothing in common with the Temple of Solomon" (Monson 1999:11).

It is one of the thirty seven Syrian temples which Monson has identified. All these temples despite considerable differences have the following in common. The ratio of the narrow sides to the long sides is approximately 1:2. The orientation is towards the east and the location of the habitation of the deity is against the western rear wall.

Keel (1997:161) gives Alt credit for the observation that the proportions and orientation of these temples are not unique. The peculiar characteristic of the Syrian temple is the *adyton*. The *adyton*

is connected to the main room by a wide opening that would have been difficult to close. It is reached by ascending a small flight of stairs.

The *debîr* of the Jerusalem Temple differs from the *adyton* of the Tell Tainat temple The Holy of Holies was a closed wooden cube located at the far end of the principal chamber. Keel (1997:162) says that Kuschke is of the opinion that the divine habitation at the rear of the *cella* is sufficient reason to assign the Jerusalem Temple to the Syrian Temple type.

The Solomonic *debîr* is also comparable to the small chapels, *naos*, of the Egyptian gods which in earlier periods were built of wood and only in later times of stone. The *naos* was not positioned against the back wall.

### 4.4.7    The Temple at Ain Dara

The Ain Dara temple is located 67 Km NW of Aleppo which is about 100 Km east of tell Tainat. It is a Neo-Hittite temple dating to the early first millennium BCE. Monson (1999:12) argues that its design and ornamentation are closer to Solomon's Temple than the highly publicised temple from Tell Tainat.

The temple stands on the acropolis of the Tel. It is built on an elevated terrace. It is 38m long which is closer in size to Solomon's Temple than the Tell Tainat temple which is 25m long.

The approach is through a basalt flagstone courtyard. Large ornate reliefs of lions, cherubs, palmettos and guilloche (ornamentation imitating braided ribbons) line the staircase and porch which lead to the entrance of the temple. A covered walkway surrounded the temple on three sides.

The massive pillars on the porch are slightly inset and appear to have supported the roof. The central room of this temple is large and square and is lined with beautiful reliefs. It is approached by a further three stairs and a doorway.

Two levels of carved panels and orthostats (well cut slabs of stone) strengthened and decorated the lower parts of the walls. These features, common in Syrian architecture were utilized on a limited scale in Palestine.

The rear third of the room consists of an elaborate podium originally reached by a ramp. The partly preserved ramp ascends from the main room to the platform area – just as in the temple at Tell Tainat, the floor was elevated above the floor of the main hall. The rear wall of the room had a niche and pedestal with depictions of a deity and divine creatures. These are now on display in the Aleppo Museum.

Several holes, carved sockets and grooves, in the south west wall appear to have been used for brackets for supporting the construction of an inner wooden partition which may have blocked off the back part of the area to form a secondary room (Holy of Holies).

Monson (1999:18) says that judging from the Biblical description it seems likely that the *debîr* of Solomon's Temple was a secondary room within the main hall such as found here at Ain Dara rather than an added room as at Tell Tainat.

The side chambers at Ain Dara have independent foundations and appear to have been constructed later than the central shrine.

Multi-storeyed hallways lined three sides of the Ain Dara temple. They have paved floors and beautiful reliefs. Entrance was through doors on the main façade (south side) of the temple. The beautiful workmanship on the wall would indicate that they had a ceremonial function.

At Ain Dara two well preserved window frames have been carefully cut into the stones. Monson (1999:20) says it may be inferred that the 'blocked latticed windows' of Solomon's Temple would have been beautiful stone reliefs similar to those at Ain Dara.

The Ain Dara temple assists with a more informed reading of the biblical descriptions. Though style and construction might have been similar they were built within different contexts; each with their own concerns and distinct religious ideas. Each temple, just as each cathedral and parish church, would have had its own unique character and individual features.

### 4.4.8    The Temple at Arad

Ancient Arad was located on the eastern edge of the Hebron Hills, approximately twenty miles north east of Beersheba, facing the Beersheba valley to the south, and the wilderness of Judah to the east. The city served as a military centre located on the border of the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

A temple was discovered during the excavations of 1963 – the second season of the site – under the direction of Yohanan Aharoni. The temple was located in Stratum XI and dated to the 10th century BCE. Aharoni did not publish a full account of his excavation before his death in 1976.

Ze'ev Herzog (2001) has meticulously re-examined the stratigraphical information, duration of use and date of abandonment and arrived at different conclusions to Aharoni.

The temenos is situated in the north west section of the Arad Fortress. It consisted of a large courtyard with a sacrificial altar, an inner court and the sanctuary building which was located at the western end of the temenos. The sacrificial altar was built with unhewn stones (cf. Exodus 20:25).

This temple is a bi-partite structure unlike that of the tripartic Temple of Solomon. Herzog gives the average dimension of the building as 17,5m x 12m. Benches made of stone and mud were observed along the walls. In front of the main hall was a spacious courtyard (10m x 10m) in which stood a large sacrificial altar.

Aharoni looked for similarities between the building at Arad and the Jerusalem Temple. However the basic architectural concept of the two structures is different. "It appears that the Arad temple resembles the shape of the common domestic unit of that period, that is, the four-room-house" (Herzog 2001:165).

This *Broadroom* temple, like the *Longroom* Temple of Solomon was built along an east-west axis. The Holy of Holies was a small 1,3m square *adyton* (Mettinger 1995:148).

The entrance to the Holy of Holies was from the east side. There is evidence that a wooden door could close off this little compartment. It was approached by three steps. Impressions on the steps indicate that altars were at one time were positioned on either side of the top step. Aharoni describes a raised podium, 70 cm square, which was located in the north west corner (right rear end) of the *adyton* (Aharoni 1968: 22).

The *massebôt* at Arad were discovered in the *adyton*. One was found lying on the floor to the left of the podium. It was about 90 cm long made of hard, well-dressed limestone with rounded back and sides. This stone has been identified as a *massebah*. Two flint stones in the same area may also have been *massebôt*.

"This is the first absolutely certain example of an Israelite *massebah* mentioned so frequently by the prophets and so much debated among scholars" (Aharoni 1968:31).

"Two pillars stood right outside of the Broadroom hall, recalling the two pillars of Solomon's Temple" (Aharoni 1968:34).

The finds of Stratum XI have been correlated to the time of the Solomonic United Monarchy. Herzog's new observations suggests that the builders of the first temple removed most, if not all, of the floors of Stratum X1 and concludes that the erection of the first temple must be attributed to Stratum X (Herzog 2001:162).

The second phase of the temple's use corresponds to Stratum IX. The *adyton* was rebuilt with a new stone wall on the northern side and a raised platform made of roughly square stone slabs was erected at the North West corner.

An oblong stone stele with rounded corners and remnants of red paint on its short end was found lying to the south of the platform. Two beautifully carved limestone incense altars, (or offering tables – an alternative interpretation) were uncovered at the entrance to the *adyton*. They had been **carefully laid on their sides** and covered with a thick layer of plaster on the second step of the staircase from the Broadroom to the *adyton*. **They had been intentionally buried** under a wall assigned to Stratum VIII (Mettinger 1995:147).

Two flint stone slabs were found incorporated in the walls of the *adyton*. Their crude shape does not support Aharoni's speculation that they were older stelae (Herzog 2001:166).

Herzog rejects Aharoni's belief that disbandment of the temple happened in two stages; that is, to the two periods of religious centralization carried out by Hezekiah and Josiah. According to renewed analysis of the floor levels within the temple, Herzog concludes that only a single stage of demolition is evident at the temple of Arad. In Stratum VIII a walled structure was built over the *debîr*.

These current observations of the stratigraphy of the temple at Arad point to the actual duration of the use of the temple being significantly shorter than previously assumed. No temple could have been utilized in Stratum VIII which is dated to late 8th century. The temple only operated during Strata X and IX.

The date of the erection of the temple is inconclusive. If the fortress was constructed shortly after the destruction of Stratum XI (Shishak's invasion), then the erection of the temple may be dated to around 900 BCE. If the second opinion, of an occupational gap, is favoured, then the temple would have to have been built only around 800 BCE – a much shorter affiliation than previously conceived.

Dating of the Strata is problematic. The dilemma stems from the fact that the pottery assemblages of Strata X, IX and VIII are quite similar and resemble the typology groups of Stratum III at Lachish. This stratum is commonly identified as the city destroyed by Sennacherib in 701 BCE and this is associated with the late 8th century BCE (Herzog's source: M Aharoni and Y Aharoni).

The construction of the temple within the strong fortress of Stratum X, may reflect the need for popular ceremonial centres throughout the Kingdom of Judah in the 8th century BCE. The presence of several cultic places in the Northern Kingdom is suggested by the Biblical records and so far supported by archaeological evidence at Tel Dan.

Herzog (2001:160) says that it is absolutely clear that the temple was not destroyed by conflagration. No signs of fire were noticed in the *adyton* or in any other part of the temple.

"The **dismantling of the temple and the complete burial of its holiest parts,** (the stelae, incense altars and the sacrificial altar) must be considered as an act of religious reform" (Herzog 2001:170). The abandonment of the temple seems to corroborate the biblical account of Hezekiah's cultic reform and thus should be dated to 715 BCE.

The dating of the pottery assemblage from Stratum VIII to late 8th century BCE leaves little doubt that this reform should therefore be attributed to King Hezekiah – a neat correlation between the biblical account and the archaeological record.

## 4.5 Proto-Aeolic Capitals and the Palm Tree Motif

Yigal Shiloh (1976:26) regards the Palm tree motif as the basic pattern underlying the ornamentation of Proto-Aeolic capitals. This motif is the most central and significant religious symbol in the Mesopotamian – Syrian – Palestinian cultural sphere from the third millennium down to the end of the first millennium BCE.

The Palm Tree can be depicted in various ways with certain features remaining quite constant when the motif is rendered in its naturalistic form. Elements stressed by the artists are clear and consistent: the trunk is tapered and sometimes scaly – it ends in a slight swelling either rounded or pointed in a sort of triangle, a treetop of fronds, the leaves of each shown separately, sometimes two bunches of dates are shown down on either side of the upper trunk. The lowermost fronds are often shown with older ones drooping, ready to be cut. Sometimes fronds are shown at the base of the trunk either as old ones or as re-growth.

The Assyrian reliefs are rich in landscapes with palm trees – a fine example is found in a scene from the Palace of Sennacherib.

Elements found in the naturalistic depictions became stylized. Ornamental patterns are preserved either wholly or in part on various groups of objects. The identifying traits of the motif remain clearly recognisable. This motif does not generally appear in a functional architectural context. The constant elements in the motif of the Proto-Aeolic capitals are the central triangle, the flanking volutes and the upper and lower leaves.

All of this symbolism was associated with the goddess of the Ancient Near East. **"It is held to represent the 'Asherah' of well known significance in Canaanite-Phoenician ritual**" (Shiloh 1979:28).

Evidence of the application of the palm tree motif in the ornamentation of an architectural form in stone such as the Proto-Aeolic capital, is not found earlier than the $10^{th}$ cent BCE. The Proto-Aeolic capitals from Megiddo, dated to $10^{th}$ and $9^{th}$ century BCE, are the oldest known architectural elements bearing this motif. These ornamental capitals, most of which were apparently made of wood, were used in temples, because of their beauty and because of the cultic significance of their palm tree motif. Proto-Aeolic capitals made in wood were ornamented more elaborately than the stone capitals.

This sacred tradition would serve to explain why this motif remained in use for so many hundreds of years in mythological scenes in many areas of the Ancient Near East. Examples include various ivories, temple models, cultic stands, also as a constant ornamental motif on large stelae in the sacred precincts in Cyprus and on smaller stelae in the Punic colonies.

"Its religious and mythological overtones are emphasised by its very broad distribution for so long a time span and in so many cultures" (Shiloh 1979:27).

### 4.5.1 Archaeological Evidence
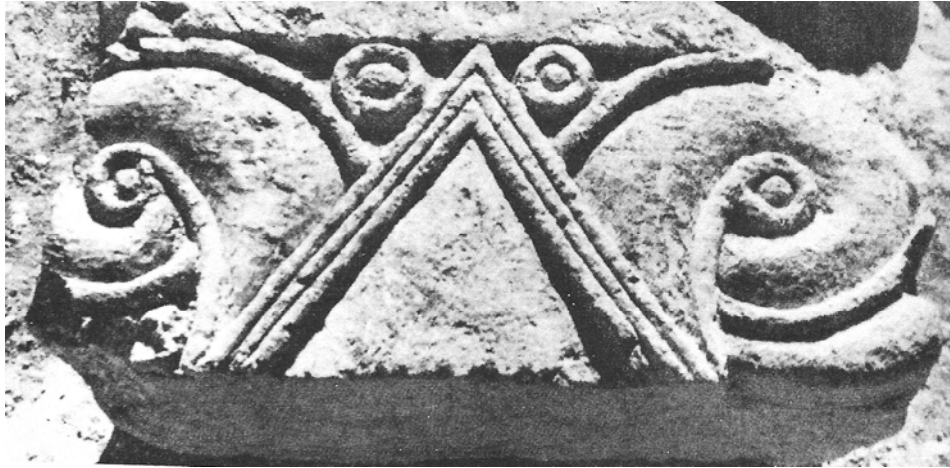


**Figure 11      Ramat Rahel Capital – Excellent example of the Stylized Palm Tree Motif (Shiloh 1979. Plate 14)**

### 4.5.2 The Jerusalem Capital

Kenyon, during her City of David excavations, in square XVIII, found a group of fallen ashlar blocks like those Shiloh found at the northern edge of his Area G. In this same area Kenyon found two fragments of a Proto-Aeolic capital among the ashlar debris at the top of the eastern slope above the Gihon spring. The capital from Jerusalem was carved from fine limestone known as *mizzi ahmer* – the finish is superior and the lines of relief are better defined than on other capitals (Kenyon 1974:115).

Based on a typological comparison with the capitals found at Samaria and Megiddo, Kenyon ascribed the Jerusalem Capital to the 10th century BCE period of Solomon. Yigal Shiloh argues that true comparison should be made with the capitals from Ramat Rahel and Medeibiyeh. He ascribes the Jerusalem Capital to 9th cent BCE (Shiloh 1979:21).

The stone dressers who worked on the monumental palaces and temples knew beforehand the intended position of a given capital and would dress the stone accordingly. The surfaces which would be hidden from view were finished more roughly than the exposed face sides or outer base.

The finely executed Jerusalem Capital also has noteworthy features for attaching it. Along the length of the top and near the face there is a strip 14 cm wide especially dressed and smoothed; toward its centre 34 cm from either side are 2 rectangular holes (2 x 5 cm). The precision and symmetry evident here as well as the spiral strip, shown that great care was taken in placing the capital – most probably in association with wooden beams.

### 4.5.3     Archaeological Evidence for Solomon's Building Program

All of the Solomonic structures built north of the south eastern ridge have disappeared or are unavailable for excavation. Structures in the area between the Temple Mount and the City of David have suffered the ravages of conquest and quarrying.

## 4.6     Zerubbabel's Temple

After the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem 586 BCE there was no absolute depopulation of Jerusalem. Gedaliah was appointed governor of the Judean people that Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon had left behind (2 Kings 25:22).

Jeremiah 41: 5 indicates that a shell of the burned temple still existed. The poor Remnant did its best to maintain the services in the Temple. Men from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria brought cereal offerings and incense to present to the Temple of Yahweh, to assist them in this duty. The Temple may have been ruined but it had not disappeared.

After the Persians had conquered Babylon (ca 530 BCE), Cyrus allowed a group of exiles to return. Their immediate concern was to rebuild the Temple. The Persians also returned the Temple vessels to Jerusalem; "this makes more sense if one assumes that they were being returned for use in some ongoing cult" (Miller & Hayes 1986:426).

The period of the rebuilding of the Temple was between about 538 – 515 BCE and 458 – 432 BCE. We have no evidence, either archaeological or literary, regarding the size and plan of this temple. Ezra 6:3 indicates that it was 60 cubits high and 60 cubits wide. These would appear to be improbable measurements. Haggai 2:3 seems to suggest that this Temple was not as beautiful as the one that had been destroyed. The historical value of the material found in Ezra and Nehemiah is often called into question. A careful reading shows contradictions, idealizations and polemics often with incomplete and chronologically mixed-up reports.

Upon arrival in Jerusalem, the first wave of Babylonian returnees may have commenced work on **restoring** the Temple. What such a restoration might have entailed is not stated. It is probable that Zerubbabel used what was left of Solomon's Temple walls and platform.

F I Anderson (1958) utilizing the sources of the post exilic period which speak of the Second Temple, (Zechariah, Haggai, 1 Esdras 1-7 and Ezra 1-6) believes that the Second Temple structure was not rebuilt, but simply in need of repair (Parry 1992:95).

"The second Temple was not a completely new building, but was erected on the ruins of the Temple of Solomon" (Albertz 1994b:458).

The south east corner of the platform supporting Solomon's Temple can be identified with considerable probability. Masonry, just to the right of the so-called *Straight Joint* of the east wall of the Temple platform, probably dates from the time of Zerubbabel (Kenyon 1967:136). This masonry is distinguished by large stones with heavy irregular bosses. There is a similarity between these stones and masonry found in Phoenicia which date from the sixth to fourth centuries BCE (Mare 1987:120).

South of the straight joint, the stones are cut in the typical Herodian manner with neat incised cutting around the edge of each stone; a low profile rectangular boss is left in the centre.

We are told that by the seventh month of the first year (September 538) the altar was completed – despite opposition from the local population. Divine worship was resumed at the beginning of Tishri and the altar was used for the Sukkoth festival celebrations several weeks later. Six months later work commenced on the Temple foundations. The dedication ceremony was greeted with mixed reactions. The elders wept over the modest dimensions of the new Temple compared to the one that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar – the young people rejoiced (Ezra 6:15).

The Temple was completed in 515 BCE, seventy one years after the destruction of the First Temple and more than twenty years after the first wave of exiles had begun restoration by building the altar.

After the loss of the Ark and the cherubic throne, the Holy of Holies evidently remained empty – symbolic of the transcendence of Yahweh.

In the middle of the *hēkal* was a wooden incense altar covered with gold leaf and on the left side a seven branched lamp-stand (*menōrā)* which replaced the ten lamp-stands of Solomon's Temple; on the right side was the table for the showbread. The altar of burnt offering was much larger. Since it was the only altar, the subsidiary altars in the outer forecourt were abolished.

All the sacrificial gifts, including those for the private cult, were concentrated on this one altar. The laity had to be allowed to enter this court to perform their private sacrifices; the official cult was brought even closer to the family cult (Albertz 1994b:458-459).

There are numerous indications that even after the Temple had been restored, that those outside of religious circles had their own worship apart from the Temple cult, whether in their homes or in synagogues. Many Psalms are indicative of pleas from the hearts of the poor (Albertz 1994b: 520).

## 4.7    Summary of Chapter 4

The site in Jerusalem that David chose for the Temple that his son Solomon would build for Yahweh is the place where Yahweh, through the spoken word, first established the ordered realms of nature and cosmos that supplanted the darkness of primordial chaos. The Temple enshrined sacred space and sacred time within the context of Creation and Revelation.

It was the presence of the Ark that endowed Jerusalem with its sanctity and united the political tribes in the worship of Yahweh. The old Tabernacle was dismantled and placed in the inner sanctuary of the Temple.

The architecture is not an exact duplication of any other single Phoenician – Syrian temple. It most closely resembles the temple found at Ain Dara. Hiram's two bronze pillars Jachin and Boaz were encircled with double rows of garlands of pomegranates. Chains formed part of the decorations. They were placed on the Porch and attested to the Presence and Power of Yahweh.

The basic pattern of the Proto-Aeolic capital is the Palm tree motif which was of religious significance for over two thousand years. All of its symbolism is associated with the goddess Asherah.

After 586 BCE, the Remnant left behind in Jerusalem continued service in the ruined Temple. It is probable that Zerubbabel restored rather than rebuilt the Temple.

Chapter 5 covers the period from the exile to the first century CE. It considers religious practices that survived the exile and continued through the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman periods as well as those that did not. It looks at Jewish thought after the exile in terms of understanding the Divine feminine and the Temple remodelled by Herod.

# Chapter 5   Israelite Religion during and after the Time of the Exile

## 5.1      The Exilic Period  586 – 539 BCE

The destruction of the Jerusalem sanctuary and the downfall of the monarchy meant that old-style Temple and Kingship Theology with their unconditional guarantees of salvation had totally failed. The period of the exile led to a far-reaching realignment within official Yahweh religion and a revaluation of personal piety; "If personal piety did not remain unaffected, it did remain largely intact" (Albertz 1994b:370).

Different levels and classes of people were affected quite differently by the national catastrophe. Official Yahweh religion was deeply drawn into the national suffering. Jerusalem had fallen because the people had not heeded the warnings of the prophets and had been unfaithful to Yahweh.

*You yourself have rejected me, Yahweh declares,*
*you have turned your back on me;*
*so I have stretched my hand over you and destroyed you*


NJB Jeremiah 15:6

The Deuteronomic reform theology had been attacked by the women who had fled to Egypt. In great anger they told Jeremiah that all had gone well with their families as long as they had included the Queen of Heaven in their worship and that disaster only came upon them once they had given up her worship.

The collapse of the state could very well be interpreted as divine judgment on Josiah's reform. The revival of syncretism, particularly within the level of family piety, which can be recognised in the exilic period, belongs within this context.

The main cult of the exilic period was no longer under royal supervision and was predominantly lamentation. It became customary to remember the most important dates of the collapse. This commemorative form of worship, which was not necessarily tied to a holy place, became the element which supported the cult in the exilic period. It was probably held by those who remained behind on the devastated Temple site. Vegetable and incense offerings could have been

made there. Even in foreign lands services of lamentation were held among the exiles (Albertz 1994b:377).

Despite the disruption in political organization, the family remained intact as the vehicle of personal piety in the exilic community – both in Judah and in Babylonia. Their personal relationship with God was deeply rooted within a reality that was not extinguished by historical, political or personal catastrophe.

The activation of the experiential world of family religion can be recognised in the fact that in the exilic Prophecy of Salvation, focus is centred on Yahweh's relationship with Israel (the beautiful prayer in Isaiah 63: 7-19) This superlative analogy is grounded in family relationships. Yahweh is not only addressed as the father who has created and cared for Israel: *"You, Yahweh are our Father"* (NJB Isaiah 63:16b). Yahweh is compared to the mother who has carried her child Israel protectively in her arms since birth *"...whom I have carried since the womb, whom I have supported since you were conceived"* (NJB Isaiah 46:3b).

For centuries official Israelite religion had hesitated to call Yahweh father. Yahweh was the god of Israel, its Liberator, Lord and King – the notion of father was limited to God's relationship with the King. The notion of family did not fit Israel's ideal monotheism and was probably too reminiscent of the Canaanite pantheon.

"The reservations against any form of feminine notions of God had been even stronger and these finally made themselves felt in the religious policy in the denunciation of all the … 'high-places' **with their traditional male-female symbolism**" (Albertz 1994b:404).

Within the sphere of family piety, things were different. The notion of father was closely bound up with the notion of personal creator and the worship of a female deity alongside Yahweh, as his consort was very popular (Albertz 1994b:404).

Personal piety aligned itself within the parent-child relationship, and many elements contained more maternal features even when they related to Yahweh. Since the prophets of salvation of the exilic period could not find room for a goddess alongside Yahweh, they nevertheless introduced explicitly female traits of Yahweh into official religion, and justified the image of God as portrayed in family religion.

"A one-sided male image of Yahweh was not capable of clarifying Yahweh's deep creaturely ties to Israel in a way which could make possible a new beginning beyond the collapse of salvation history" (Albertz 1994b:404).

Yahweh, like a mother who takes her crying child into her arms and comforts it, would also hear the laments of his people and take them to Himself. It is evident that during the Exilic period Family Religion played not only a supportive role but indeed a corrective function.

Monotheism did not arise out of common practice (Folk Religion) but rather out of theological reflection on the experience of a disaster. **All** the deities had failed – if Yahweh's reputation was to be salvaged then his image must be enlarged to include all nations.

Late 6th – 4th century BCE i.e. the period of the return from exile there does appear to be an absence of archaeological evidence such as found in earlier periods of *bamôt*, shrines, sanctuaries and cultic inscriptions but this premise does not hold true for the female figurines! All evidence of polytheistic practice **does not end** in the mid 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. There is also evidence that the elements of magic and mysticism survived in later Judaism. One example would be Incantation Bowls that served as night lights. They invoked the epithets of the Hebrew God – to protect against the ghostly demon.

## 5.2    The Persian Period 538 – 332 BCE

C Watzinger, W F Albright and Kathleen Kenyon all maintained that after the wide spread destruction at the end of the First Temple Period, there was a total cessation of town life in Judah continuing into the Persian period and that the resettlement of Judah was a slow process (Stern 1982:46).

The destruction and only gradual resettlement may adequately describe the situation in southern Judah, but it completely fails to fit the facts in other parts of Palestine. All the settlements in northern Judah and Benjamin (Tell en-Nasbeh, Gibeon, Bethel, Tell el-Ful) not only continued to exist after the destruction of the Temple but thrived. Their apparent prosperity in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century was in stark contrast to the sites excavated to the south of Jerusalem (Stern 1982:48).

In the Babylonian period some 70 – 80 percent from every pottery group from this time consists of vessels which are usually attributed to the last phase of the Israelite period. The other vessels

represent new types which are considered to belong to the Persian period. By the end of the century the new types constitute the majority (Stern 1982:229).

### 5.2.1    Temple Architecture in the Persian Period

Two *Longroom* type temples have been found in Palestine that date to the Persian period They are at Lachish and the Yehaumilk temple in Byblos as well as a number of temples in Vouni, Cyprus.

They typically comprise three successive areas arranged on a single axis with the entrances oriented opposite each other in a straight symmetrical line. A common feature of most of these buildings is that the inner areas are elevated above the outer area and are approached by steps. At Byblos and in the Central Temple in Vouni these areas are separated by two columns
(Stern 1982:64).

At Lachish, a new administrative building was built over the ruins of the palace-fort of the Jewish period. The plan is quite unlike previous official buildings. A great courtyard is surrounded on two sides by rows of rooms and on the other two sides by deep porticoes eventually leading to a great hall.

The interesting and relevant architectural feature is that these rooms were vaulted, "in contrast to the pre-Exilic buildings in which, as far as our evidence goes, the ceilings were flat" (Kenyon 1979:309). In some rooms, portions of the roof were recovered as they had fallen. They showed that the vaults had been formed by diagonally laid voussoirs (a wedge-shaped stone or brick that is used with others to construct an arch or vault) (Collins English Dictionary).

### 5.2.2    Terracotta Figurines of the Persian Period

Numerous sites in Palestine have yielded assemblages of stone statuettes and figurines of clay and bronze of the Persian period. These areas of find are generally interpreted as favissae of sanctuaries – that is refuse pits containing figurines which were discarded after use, some of them being intentionally broken before hand.

No identifiable sanctuaries were found with these repositories; however the situation is different in the area along the Phoenician coast. At several sites such as Amrit and Sidon, favissae containing identical figurines were discovered, all of them adjoining sanctuaries whose remains

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have been preserved. "We can therefore infer that sanctuaries also existed at those Palestinian sites at which assemblages of figurines were found" (Stern 1982:158).

At over twenty sites, figurines dating to the Persian period have been uncovered and dated. These figures include seated men with, beards and moustaches, Persian horse riders, male effigies wearing different hats and a large group of female figurines which are a direct continuation of the Fertility Goddess Asherah, already well known in Palestine in the Canaanite and Israelite period.

Very common is the terracotta of a woman known as a 'Pillar Figurine' because of its unique shape. The body is handmade, solid and round and has the shape of a pillar; only the face and the short curly hair, reminiscent of an Egyptian wig, are mould-made.

Like other pottery of the Persian period, the terracotta figurines also appear in two shades, greenish-white and pinkish-red. Some of the female figurines are fully clothed and characterised by different styles of dress. A large group of the fertility goddesses have features typical of the Persian period.

These differ from their predecessors in their great variety of types and in the new, completely mould made and hollow technique of producing terracotta. The variety of the types is not expressed in new attitudes of the body – in these they follow their predecessors – it is predominantly in their facial expressions – which have become more vividly naturalistic - most probably through the influence of western (Greek) sculpture. This is in sharp contrast to the earlier figurines whose faces present 'a frozen demeanour'. They would appear to represent the continuation of indigenous art which persisted despite the change of style of each period.

"The Pillar-Astarte figurines…appear at Lachish, Tel 'Erani and Megiddo, in assemblages whose date is later than the Israelite period" (Stern 1982:179).

At Lachish figurines of the Persian period were found in four areas. All the figurines were assigned to the Post-Exilic period by Olga Tufnell. On the basis of an examination of the pottery contained in the assemblages, she attributed them to the fifth – second centuries BCE.

At Megiddo a number of terracotta figurines were found scattered on the mound, all of them of the Pillar-Astarte type. The excavators attributed them to Stratum 1 (525 – 332 BCE). Although this stratum contained a very mixed group of finds, including objects from the Iron Age, a

typological study indicates that on the basis of parallels from Tel Şippor, Lachish and other sites, the figurines date to the Persian period.

At Tell Şippor, south west of Jerusalem, more than two hundred terracotta figurines and about twenty stone statuettes were discovered in a shallow pit. The pit was interpreted as a favissa of a nearby temple which had been thoroughly razed. All the figurines were broken and the excavator assumed that they had been deliberately smashed before being buried.

J T Milik drew a distinction between the date of the manufacture of the finds and the time they were discarded. She attributed some of the figurines to the Iron Age and suggested that they had been handed down from an earlier sanctuary to the Persian-period temple which stood on the same spot. The remainder of the objects were assigned to a span of some two hundred years, the earlier dating from the end of the sixth century and the latest from the first half of the fourth century (530 – 350 BCE). At the end of the period (350 BCE, at the latest) they were deposited in the favissa (Stern 1982:159).

A mineralogical analysis made of the figurines from Tel Şippor shows that the assemblage was produced from three different clay compositions. Seventy percent of them were made from clay found in the Phoenician-Palestinian coastal region; these would have been imported from central workshops located in the densely settled Phoenician coastal areas. Twenty five percent of them were made from clay from the hilly region around Tel Şippor and five percent from Rhodes (Stern 1982:182).

"A number of unusual figurines which have an extremely archaic appearance come from Tel es-Safi and Tel Şippor. They represent nude women rendered in a most primitive style, and were it not for their stratigraphic context, we would have imagined them to date hundreds or even thousands of years before their time" (Stern 1982:168).

There is also an entirely different repertoire of western figurines rendered in a pure Greek style; their subjects are taken from the world of Greek religion. Only a small number of these were actual imports; most of them were apparently produced in the same Phoenician workshops as the eastern assemblage, using imported moulds.

A distinctive feature of the figurines of the Persian period in Palestine and on the Phoenician coast is the heterogeneous nature of the assemblages. N Avigad (cf Stern 1982:180) has

distinguished in these figurines traces of Phoenician, Persian, Egyptian, Canaanite, Cypriot and Greek influences. A Ciasca ( cf Stern 1982:180) emphasises that the new figurines are a conceptual continuation of the figurines of the Israelite period. To attribute this cosmopolitism entirely to the Phoenician seafarers, and to a lesser extend Greek solders and colonists, might be, oversimplifying a complex phenomenon that is not well understood and easily taken out of context.

These changes were a vibrant contextualisation of a very meaningful belief in a feminine deity, in whatever way her role might have been perceived. **The goddess survived because she remained vital and contemporary**.

It is well established that these figurines belonged to the household and probably more so to the women. However it is not well known to what extent women were involved in the manufacture of these icons. Nor is it known what influence the end user had on the fashion of production.

There can be no doubt that these statuettes were of tremendous importance. They were much loved and greatly cherished by their owners.

## 5.3 Post-Biblical Israel and Early Judaism

Post-biblical Judaism created for itself a new concept of feminine divinity in the figure of the Shekinah who first appears in the Aramaic translation – paraphrase *Targum Onkelos* the date is in dispute between 1st and 4th century CE. It is generally agreed that its author used an older version as the basis of his translation.

### 5.3.1 Shekinah

"The Shekinah is the speculum through which the divine appears, a speculum that is related as well to the Torah, which is the wisdom bestowed as a gift upon Israel by God". The speculum that refracts the non-representation of the divine, masculine glory (Wolfson 1999:153).

In the Priestly tradition the 'Glory of Yahweh' is the manifestation of God's presence. It is a fire clearly **distinguished** from the cloud that accompanies and surrounds it. (Exodus 13:2). It is the bright light that needs no storm for its appearance, and which later leaves a glow on the face of Moses. The fire and the cloud stand for God's unapproachable majesty.

In Sinai, It filled the newly erected Tent: *"The cloud covered the tent of Meeting, and the glory of Yahweh filled the Dwelling…there was fire inside the cloud at night…"*
(NJB Exodus 40:34,38b).

Later *It* takes possession of Solomon's Temple: "When the Priests came out of the Holy Place, the cloud filled the Temple of Yahweh…for the glory of Yahweh filled the Temple of Yahweh" (NJB 1 Kings 8:10).

It is actually the *Name of Yahweh* that dwells in the Temple since Yahweh cannot be confined.

On the eve of the destruction of Jerusalem Ezekiel sees the glory leaving the city: "The glory of the God of Israel rose from above the winged creatures where it had been… the Temple was filled by the cloud and the court was full of the brightness of the glory of Yahweh"
(NJB Ezekiel 10:4). Later he sees it returning to the new Temple: "The glory of Yahweh arrived at the Temple by the East Gate" (NJB Ezekiel 43:4).

Shekinah is a Hebrew abstract noun derived from the verb *shakhan* which literally means 'the act of dwelling' (Patai 1990:99). He goes on to explain that abstract nouns constructed from the root letter of the verb with the suffix *ah* have the feminine gender.

"The (Talmudic) passages which establish the Shekinah as a separate divine personality, indicate her femininity in no way except by the grammatical gender of her name" (Patai 1990:107).

In both Hebrew and Aramaic, the gender of the subject plays a significant part in sentence structure because the verb as well as the adjective have separate male and female forms. Every statement made about the Shekinah would signify her gender. The term for the Visible Appearance of Yahweh in the sanctuary or in any other place chosen by Him is the verb *shakhan,* which as mentioned above, has the meaning to dwell or abide.

"The asherah was a representation of a female deity that stood in the house of Yahweh and the Shekinah was the feminine *presence* of God that *dwelt* among the people and in the Temple" (Robertson 2001:208).

The Shekinah dwelt continuously in the First Temple. The Targum of Jeremiah (2:7 et al cf Parry 1991:25) calls the Temple the 'house of the Shekinah. In the Temple of Herod the Shekinah was only present intermittently.

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The Shekinah joins the sick to comfort and helps those who are in need. The Shekinah descends upon all those who practice good deeds; she also rests between husband and wife. The Shekinah is so small as to dwell in the Holy of Holies yet she overshadows the world (Patai 1990:104).

## 5.4    The Roman Period - 1<sup>st</sup> Century BCE

### 5.4.1    Herod's Temple

"He who has not seen the Temple of Herod has never seen a beautiful building"
(B T Baba Bathra 4a cf Parry 1992:2).

Early scholars failed to discriminate what belonged to the period of the Temple of Solomon and what to the monumental building era of Herod.

Herodian style of construction is characterized by its use of enormous stones with dressed margins. This construction is evident in the stones that remain from Herod's time such as the walls of the Temple Mount and the Citadel in Jerusalem.

The foundations of Herod's buildings were laid on bedrock, constructed without mortar or any other bonding agent. The builder's attained constructional stability by meticulously dressing the stones so that they fitted together extremely well.

#### 5.4.1.1   Hellenistic Architectural Form

A common characteristic found among many Greek temples was the colonnade which surrounded the central rectangular edifice. Each temple was dedicated to a particular god or goddess and the building functioned as a house for the statue of the deity. This design was more suited to processionalism than to congregationalism. An individual worshipper who wished to petition the god had to stand in the doorway in order to pray to the statue.

Greek Architecture is aesthetically pleasing, their appreciation and love of beauty, symmetry and proportion has given their ancient monuments an outstanding legacy of design harmony.

Early Roman temples were established on high platforms and approached by steps. They were often made of timber and mud bricks and decorated with terracotta. Generally their architectural form was rectangular although circular forms were also used.

Even if the tripartite *Longroom* is not synonymous with the various Prostylos and Amphiprostylos Hellenistic temple types, modern scholars concur that the architectural style of the Greco-Roman period influenced the decorative adornments of the Temple of Herod but that **the inner areas of the Temple enclosure retained its original style**.

The Temple possessed architectural elements that were not unlike other sanctuaries of that period. .There is no doubt that Herod did all he could to bring his Temple closer to the grandiose ideal of great Hellenistic sacred architecture. Fashionable ornamental architectural trappings and decorative features formed part of the new and extended courtyards. The Jews did not allow idolatrous designs or fixtures to be found upon the Temple Mount. The Temple design was always compliant with the strict interpretation of the Second Commandment.

### 5.4.1.2   Description of Herod's Temple

Herod's Temple was built on the east west axis with the entrance on the east side. The Temple was of tri-partite *Longroom* type. "The Temple was said to have had the form of a lion being narrow in the rear and broad at the front" (M Middot 4:7 cf Parry 1992:86).

Parry (1992:126) has compared the dimensions of the Temple of Solomon with that of the Temple of Herod and found them to be very much the same.

Josephus (1987:425. Book 15 Chapter 11:6[421]) says that the Temple itself was rebuilt by the priests in a year and six months. Consider that it took Solomon's very large, skilled and experienced craftsmen seven years to build the Temple (1 Kings 6:38). Even if this is regarded as a symbolic number of creation and completion, it would still be indicative of a considerable length of time.

Josephus (1987:425. Book 15 Chapter 11:6[420]) also says that it took Herod's workmen eight years to build the cloisters and outer enclosures.

Since the Hellenistic style was insistent upon giving every building the most aesthetic façade possible it could be that this is how one cubit came to be added to  the length of the porch of Herod's Temple. It would seem that the existing Temple of Zerubbabel, which was the repaired Temple of Solomon, was not pulled down, but only refurbished and perhaps some of the magnificence of the pre-exilic Temple restored.

The Temple building was surrounded by four splendid courtyards with their series of beautiful colonnades and verandas; monumental steps and gates, which were used by the ordinary people within strict graduated boundaries of purity. It was this enlarged platform that was new and magnificent – 'a structure more noteworthy than any under the sun' – and available for the delight of all the Jewish people.

Specific decorative trappings included giant columns of the Corinthian order, rosettes, acanthus leaves, vines and clusters of grapes, "the roofs were adorned with deep sculptures in wood, representing many sorts of figures" (Josephus 1987:425. Book 15 Chapter 11:6[416]).

It is known that the building was carried out within the strict bounds of the Pharisaic laws and within the precepts of the injunction of the Second Commandment. 'Figures' would have been taken from the plant world with great care to avoid what might be construed to be an image or any possible symbol of pagan influence.

There is no description of any pillars that would correspond to the Jachin and Boaz of Solomon's Temple. This is strange because of the religious and possibly political importance ascribed to these beautiful structures. There is no mention that these pillars were restored in the Temple of Zerubbabel.

However, Josephus (1987:424. Book 15 Chapter 11:3[394 -395]) says that the doors of the Temple were the same height as the Temple "and **pillars** interwoven: and over these but under the crown work, was **spread a golden vine**, with its branches hanging down from a great height, the largeness and fine workmanship of which was a surprising sight to the spectators, to see what vast materials there were and with what great skill the workmanship was done".

The rabbis had great respect for Tradition The unknown author of M. Middot 5:2 (cf Parry 1993) is of the opinion that it would have been unacceptable to the rabbis to take down the ancient sacred stones that formed the Temple building .The stones, particularly those inside the Temple formed part of the graded and consecrated space. Even after the destruction in 70 CE the Temple area remained sacred because Solomon had sanctified it for all time. Sacred Time was superimposed upon Sacred Space (Parry 1991:215).

Neither its magnificence nor its sanctity could save the Temple from destruction by the Legions of Titus.

## 5.5    Summary of Chapter 5

The destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile challenged Israelite religious perceptions. Temple and Kingship theology had failed either because the warnings of the Prophets had not been heeded or because Josiah's reforms prohibited worship of the Queen of Heaven.

*Official Religion* embraced the theme of lamentation and commemorated important dates associated with the calamity. *Family Religion* relied on its experiential relationship with Yahweh to overcome national and personal disaster. Personal piety took on not only a supportive role but also a corrective function.

Ideal monotheism railed against any feminine ideas of deity. The High Places with their explicitly male and female symbolism are not found after the Exile.

During the Persian period *Longroom* type temples were built which supported vaulted roofs

Over twenty assemblages of stone statuettes and clay figurines from the Persian period have been found in favissae. The large group of female figurines are a continuation of the fertility goddess Asherah from the Canaanite and Israelite periods. They show a cosmopolitan influence, indicating the universality of the Great Mother.

Post Biblical Judaism creates the concept of Shekinah derived from the verb to dwell. Grammatical construction around the word always indicates that the concept is feminine. The a/Asherah was a physical representation of a female deity that stood in the house of Yahweh. The Shekinah was the abiding Presence of God which dwelt amongst the people and in the Temple.

Herod enlarged the platform on the Temple Mount. Roman buildings incorporated the aesthetically pleasing qualities of Hellenistic symmetry and proportional harmony. It is unlikely that the sacred stones of the Temple of Solomon / Zerubbabel were taken down. Grand colonnaded verandas, monumental steps and gates graced the courtyards and public areas of this monumental work. Josephus describes pillars that were entwined with vines.

Chapter 6 focuses on the history of Jerusalem and the fate of the Jews from the first century; the Destruction of the Temple, the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aksa Mosque.

# Chapter 6  Jerusalem

## The Historic, Architectural and Religious Milieu of Jerusalem from the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE

## 6.1     The Destruction of Jerusalem

"Some men have hearts of stone and some stones a human heart"
Rabbi Kook (Ben-Dov 1990:60).

Jerusalem is known as the City of Stone - not only because stone was always the medium chosen for building, and decoration but also because a greater number of stone vessels are spread throughout the city than anywhere else in the world (Ben-Dov 1990:95).

Following the Conquest of the Temple Mount, the Roman Emperor, Titus, (79-81 CE) requested the commanders of his legions not to destroy the Temple.

"It is not known whether the Jews succeeded in conquering Jerusalem from the Romans and at least in renewing sacrifice at the Temple" (Ben-Dov 1990:281).

It was only razed to the ground after the Great Rebellion of the Jews 70 CE against their Roman overlords. The Temple treasures were pillaged and Jewish inhabitants expelled from the city. They were not permitted to either reside or even visit Jerusalem.

### 6.1.1     Emperor Hadrian – Aelia Capitolina

The disastrous Second Revolt of the Jews 132 – 135 CE led by Simon Bar Kochba resulted in the banishment of Jews from Jerusalem.

Mazar (1975:236) comments on the reference in the *Chronicon Paschale* that Hadrian pulled down the Temple of the Jews in Jerusalem. He says it may refer to the partial rebuilding of the Temple by Bar Kochba.

Hadrian built *Aelia Capitolina* upon the city he had razed and had a temple (refer Ben Dov 6.1 above) built to *Jupiter Capitolinus* upon the Temple platform. Some coins struck during this period bear an imprint of the Temple (Mare 1987:205).

### 6.1.2    Jerusalem – City of Many Masters

There are only two periods throughout the millennia of Jerusalem's history that it has been a Christian city.

The first time was in the 4th century after Constantine recognised Christianity as the religion of his Empire. Christianity had spread through all classes of the population of the Roman World including the imperial army. Constantine appreciated the enormous potential for power that lay in fostering ties between the Empire and the new religion which had won the hearts of millions of people. By enhancing the status of Palestine and Jerusalem as an important Christian location, his political position could be strengthened against the Parthians and later the Persians in the east.

The Tenth Legion, which had been permanently stationed in Jerusalem, withdrew to Eilat. The small Christian community with the support of Constantine and the money that flowed into the city, raised up a civilian city upon the ruins and the military camps that had been the nature of Jerusalem for a very long time. Jerusalem became the centre of the awakening Christian world.

Despite support from Emperor Julianus (363 CE) who encouraged the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple; during the period of Christian Byzantine rule, 4th to 7th century CE, the decrees issued by the former Roman overlords, namely that Jews may not enter the city, were firmly enforced. The only exception was the 9th day of Ab in the Jewish lunar calendar – the anniversary of the Destruction of the Temple. This permission was distasteful, and an underhand attempt to entice Jews to recognise Jesus, who had foreseen the destruction of the Temple.

At the beginning of the 7th century a violent struggle broke out between the Byzantine Empire in the west and the Persian to the east, a confrontation whose outcome led to the introduction of a new element into world history: Islam.

In 614 CE Jerusalem was conquered by the Persians who savagely massacred the Christians. The Christians regained the city in 628 CE.

In 638 CE, Jerusalem fell to the Moslem Arabs. The keys of the city were handed to Caliph Omar. It is recorded that when he visited the Temple Mount he was accompanied by his close

adviser, Ka'ab al-Akhbar, an apostate Jew. During this period, Jews were permitted to reside in the city but they were denied access to the Temple Mount.

Islam attached great importance to the city of Jerusalem. It took steps to sanctify the city and transform it into a cornerstone of Moslem theological philosophy. "In general the Arabs preferred to make use of the buildings of their predecessors; provided of course that they were in good condition" (Ben-Dov 1990:232).

Jewish law developed a legal system based on the principle that Jews were forbidden by their own free will to enter the Temple Mount until the coming of the Messiah – ritual purification will take place only at the end of days (Ben Dov 1990:56).

The western wall of the Temple enclosure is the original section of the Temple Mount structure that had survived to a considerable height. "It has been decreed in Heaven that it will never be destroyed. Why? **Because of the Divine Presence, the Shekinah will never depart from the Western Wall"** (Ben-Dov 1990:57).

The second time was in 1099 when the Crusaders occupied the city; and the Knights Templar took control of the Temple Mount. A giant cross was put up on the Dome of the Rock that was known as the *Sanctuary of the Lord*.

During Crusader times the Jews were again forbidden to reside in Jerusalem. In July 1187, Saladin, the Egyptian sultan stormed and toppled the Crusader Kingdom. After the demise of the Christian occupation Jews once again returned to the city.

At the beginning of the 1200s German Emperor Frederick II reached Palestine at the head of a new crusade. A peace treaty was entered into with Egypt's Moslem Ayyubid ruler, who in terms of the agreement ceded the city to the Christians – although the Temple Mount would remain with the Moslems.

During the second half of the 13th century, the Mamelukes, Egypt's new rulers, took Jerusalem from the Christians and destroyed many beautiful Christian buildings.

### 6.1.3 Messianic Jews

In the summer of the year 70 CE Jerusalem was conquered by the Roman Legions of Titus. The Temple was destroyed and the Jews expelled from the city and forbidden to return.

Prior to the destruction, there existed in Jerusalem, a small community of Jews, who believed in Jesus and had accepted His doctrine - a group known as 'Messianic Jews'. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah but the Jews regarded them as apostates since they denied the essential tenets of Judaism. They too were expelled from the city along with all its other Jewish inhabitants.

A few years later they appealed to the Roman Emperor Vespasian and requested permission to return, claiming that they had nothing whatsoever to do with Jews and Judaism. The Romans acceded to their request and they were allowed back into Jerusalem. At this stage Jerusalem was a garrison town.

These were the first civilians to return to Jerusalem after the destruction of Herod's Temple, the sacking of the city and the expulsion of its inhabitants. The granting of this permission may have been connected with the soldiers need for various civilian services. From that time on followers of Jesus dwelt in the ruined city.

Throughout the entire period of Roman-Pagan rule the small community of Messianic Jews continued to reside in Jerusalem (Ben-Dov 1990:188-189).

## 6.2 The Dome of the Rock

No edifice can surpass the Dome of the Rock as the symbol of Jerusalem. "It owes this pre-eminence to its location on the Mount where the Temple once stood, to its very great age and to its sheer magnificence." "Impressive as it is from the outside - its interior stuns, so rich and supremely artistic are its decorations" (Ben-Dov 1990:38).

There is no doubt that the Dome of the Rock is one of the most splendid buildings in the world – perhaps the most beautiful edifice ever constructed , 'so rich in its wonderful colours and so scrupulously does it observe the laws of symmetry.'

Join-Lambert (1958:171) describes the interior of the Dome of the Rock. The building is octagonal in shape but erected on a square base. There is a double aisle. The middle octagon is supported by eight pillars and twelve circular columns; the dome sixty-five feet wide, rests on four pillars and twelve circular columns .The first dome was covered in gold.

The structure is composed of three vertical and three horizontal elements. The plan of the lower circle is built out from a circle which surrounds the sacred rock. Two aisles, each of which has eight sides, surround this circle, each encompassing the other (Ben Dov 1990).

The three vertical elements of the construction are first, the lower storey with its colonnades and pillars. The second is the rotunda or drum constructed upon the circumference of the inner circle. The rotunda is pierced by fifty eight windows (the door takes up the place of two windows) which filter the strong sunlight creating a dim interior in which splendour and sanctity pervade.

The third element is the dome itself which is discussed below (6.2.1).

"The proportions were exact, the pillars being exactly one-third of the height of the dome and the effect is one of perfect harmony. The conception of this masterpiece…is completely Hellenistic" (Join-Lambert 1958:171).

The wooden tie beams supporting the arches are like those used in the construction of Saint Sophia in Constantinople. The scroll patterns of the mosaics are of 'purely classical inspiration' similar examples can be seen in Constantinople, Ravenna and Rome. In following the antique tradition, the architects created in this building an incomparable work of art, the most beautiful monument in Jerusalem and one of the most beautiful in the whole world.

Despite the variety of materials used and the layers of successive periods which have been expressed in its interior decoration, the result is a wonderfully harmonious combination of form and colour. The most recent layer to be added are the large soft carpets in special tones of red and green which are spread over the two inner aisles. At some unknown period a tradition was established that the Kings and Emirs of Morocco accepted the responsibility for embellishing the floors of the Dome of the Rock.

Tradition records that three hundred workmen were employed on the upkeep of the edifice; some of these were Jews, employed as sweepers, others Christians, in charge of the carpets. All of

them were exempt from the payment of taxes. Special funds were reserved for the upkeep of the lighting and the incense which was burnt here (Join-Lambert 1958:172).

### 6.2.1 The Dome

The dome actually consists of twin domes about a meter apart. The only connection between the two of them is a passage which allows maintenance crew access to the outside of the inner dome in order to repair and preserve it. The outer metal, slightly elliptic dome, acts as a protection for the, circular wooden dome which supports the exquisite ornamentation of the inner dome. Weather conditions which cause the expansion and contraction of the outer dome do not affect the inner one and so the decorations are not damaged.

The Dome was constructed by the Fatimid, Caliph Al-Zahir 1022 CE after the original ceiling collapsed. The entire decoration was the work of the 14th century Egyptian artists during the period of the Mameluke Rule in Jerusalem – by that time Moslem artistic tradition has crystallised and its forms had been established.

The Fatimids pillaged the original bronze panelling of the dome and replaced them with lead panels. Lead is a natural dark grey colour but its oxidation produces a pale surface. For centuries this was the characteristic appearance of the dome. In 1952 the young King Hussein from Jordan commissioned gilded aluminium panels from Italy, to replace the lead, in an attempt to restore the Dome to its former appearance. However the aluminium joints leaked and severe damage was caused to the inner dome. The aluminium has been replaced with bronze panels.

From 1992 – 1994 King Hussein had the Irish construction company Mivan commissioned to undertake the unprecedented job of gilding the dome with 5000 glittering new gold plates. The basic structure of the building was also repaired and the compound fire-proofed. The late King Hussein is said to have spent more than US$ 8 million of his personal wealth to finance the project (http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/islam_restoration.html).

### 6.2.2 The Dome of the Rock, Christianity and Jerusalem

The Dome of the Rock is alleged to be of an immense age; there is even a legend that credits Abraham with the building of this edifice.

**The Dome of the Rock is the only edifice in Jerusalem that has not undergone change**. The few modifications that have been made to it are only of a decorative nature. No conqueror has ever maliciously mutilated the building in any way nor has it suffered earthquake damaged as did the Al Aqsa mosque in the 9th century. Even during the Crusader period its magnificent interior decorations were not touched.

Until the 4th century, the attitude of Christianity towards the city of Jerusalem was ambivalent. Biblical verses in praise of Jerusalem were given an allegorical interpretation – they would surely refer either to the heavenly Jerusalem or the renewed church.

This ambivalence rose out of the belief that it was the Jews that crucified Jesus. This notion was only formally denounced during Vatican 2 (1962-1965) and did not include the acquiescence of the Eastern Orthodox Church. So for Christians, the significance of their visit to Jerusalem and other areas of the Holy Land was to be found in visiting the holy sites and reliving the activities of Jesus associated with that particular place.

However, Ze'ev Safrai (1998:207) talks of Irenaeus (died 203 CE) who compiled a *List of Churches* the purpose of which was to argue that all shared an equal status and therein "he also includes the church in *the centre of the world.*" Irenaeus referrals could be textual support for Fergusson's assertions (see 6.2.3) that the Dome of the Rock is a Christian structure built by Constantine in the 4th century – although it could also be referring to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

"The debate implicit in the seventh canon of the Council of Nicaea shows that by 325 BCE the church of Jerusalem already had pretensions to control the entire Church of the Empire" (Ze'ev Safrai 1998:209).

It is improbable that in three centuries of Byzantine Christian occupation the Christians did not consider building an edifice upon the Temple Mount.

Because of its octagonal plan, which is not found in Moslem architecture, some scholars have sort its origin in a Christian church which stood on the site and was converted into a Moslem holy place. However there is not a single Christian or Jewish source that even hints at the existence of a church here.

Ben-Dov concedes that it is possible that the foundations of a church were laid during the Constantine period. Building materials such as marble pillars could have been brought to the site, already prepared for the project but that it was not completed. When they came upon this unfinished construction, the Moslems completed it as it had originally been planned.

"It is in this building that one can best imagine the lost splendours of Christian Jerusalem" (Join-Lambert 1958:172).

### 6.2.2.1 Ferguson's Theory

Fergusson's ideas are briefly outlined because there is some continuity in the form of interior decoration found here and that within Rosslyn chapel. This would show that some of the interior decoration of Rosslyn chapel came from within the Temple tradition.

J Fergusson (1878), towards the end of the 19th century proposed that the Dome of the Rock and the Golden Gateway were erected by Constantine as Christian buildings. The 'Mosque of Omar' as the Dome of the Rock is sometimes called, is not a mosque. He defines a mosque as a wall built at right angles to the direction of Mecca; its objective being to enable the faithful to obey the precept of the Koran which enjoins them to turn to the Kaaba at Mecca when they pray (Fergusson 1878:194). Fergusson says there was originally no provision for this in the Dome of the Rock. The main entrance is from the south and consequently as one enters the building one's back is turned on Mecca, an irreverence that is not typical of a Muslim place of prayer.

The architecture, both its style and quality, is substantially different from that of the Al-Aksa Mosque which is known to have been built by Abd-el-Malek (685 – 692 CE). The Dome of the Rock retains the gracious, well-proportioned elegance of classical art. Magnificent circular arches are aesthetically pleasing. **All** the capitals in the Dome of the Rock are of the Corinthian order and classical in their detail with concave curves to their bell-shaped capitals.

The Al-Aksa Mosque is revered and loved by tens of thousands of devout worshippers who honour and respect its precincts. Like the early Israelites, who also lacked architectural skills, these early Muslims had few architecturally outstanding monumental buildings. Aesthetically, the building is inferior, disproportionate, and unattractive. The pointed windows of the Al-Aksa exhibit a later more modern style than the circular arches in the Dome of the Rock.

In the Al-Aksa there are some 'borrowed' pillars. It would appear very unlikely that they were built either by the same person or in the same period.

There are no other buildings built by the Saracens in the same architectural style as that of the Dome of the Rock. **"Its architectural character remains at most a strange and perplexing difficulty"** (Edinburgh Review Oct 1860 in Fergusson 1878:195) referring to the Dome of the Rock.

The mosque at Cordova in Spain is the closest that we know of, to the Al-Aksa in both date and design. Khalif Abd-el-Rahman began construction in 786 CE. It is an eleven aisled basilica not unlike the seven-aisled Al-Aksa. The seven aisles occupy almost the same width as does those of the Al-Aksa and it is believed that the outer four were added to satisfy the ambition of its founder who wished his mosque to be grander than that of Abd-el-Malek, which it is, in both size and design. "Great progress in the art of architecture (was) achieved by the Saracens in the century that elapsed between the erections of these two buildings" (Fergusson 1878:202).

Interestingly here, the *mihrab* (the niche towards which the faithful turn to pray) is a rare incidence where it points incorrectly towards the south instead of towards the south east (Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Mihrab&oldid=117247480).

Fergusson goes on to say that although there are resemblances between the two mosques, there is nothing in either of them that would indicate any point of contact with the Dome of the Rock. Whilst the features of the exterior of the Dome of the Rock are the same as those found in all Christian structures of the fourth century.

The art of veneering the surface of walls with marble slabs was widely practised by the Romans in their thermæ and other secular building. The patterns used are typical of classical or Byzantine work. The Byzantines continued to use this style of decoration in their buildings down to the time of building of *Hagia Sophia,* (532 – 537 CE) whose interior is also decorated in this way. This basilica was built in an amazingly short time of five years. The dome had to be replaced in 563 CE after an earthquake.

"The architectural form of Santa Sophia is concealed by the richness of decoration. The walls, from the ground up, are covered in identical manner. Plaques of red, yellow and green marble

blend with the mosaics, and these are further embellished by the capitals, imposts, architraves and friezes" (Mitchell Beazley (1982) cf Norwich 1988:180).

The use of a marble veneers is not known in Moslem buildings before the time of the Crusades. The Muslim style of architectural decoration made extensive use of coloured tiles.

In 1873 repairs were made to the western wall of the Dome of the Rock. Tiles, with which the whole of the upper part of the external walls are covered, had become loosened and in some parts detached revealing the plain wall beneath. The Turkish General ordered the entire face to be stripped and the original masonry was exposed and found to consist of a series of round arches – five pierced for windows and two blind panels.

It was known that the existing pointed arches and their frames were inserted when the tiles were first applied in the age of Suleiman 16th century BCE. What was not known was that the parapet wall above the principle range of windows which had always been believed to be solid was actually composed of a range of thirteen small arches on each face and each arch being adorned with a small pillar on each side.

The style and building of the middle storey are typical of the building type of the fourth century. "Thousands of such galleries adorn the apses of churches between Pavia and Cologne … the Po and the North Sea" Most of the important churches embraced this design feature. As to the question of how early this style is to be found in Europe - "There are two churches in Milan, both built by St Ambrosius in the fourth century, in which we find the system fully developed" (Fergusson 1878:203).

Inside the apse of the church of *St Ambrogio* there is a mosaic which probably dates to 530 CE and represents the building as it was then. In this mosaic this same type of gallery is clearly and easily recognisable.

The Church of *San Nazaro* built in 382 CE "has apsidal galleries externally and internally, columns with capitals identical with those of the little dwarf columns of the (Dome of the Rock) gallery" (Fergusson 1878:204).

The Cistern of Philoxenus, now the Bin Bir Derek at Constantinople also has the same small pillar type. This work is generally acknowledged to have been carried out, if not by Constantine himself, certainly during his era.

### 6.2.3 Art Work found inside the Dome of the Rock
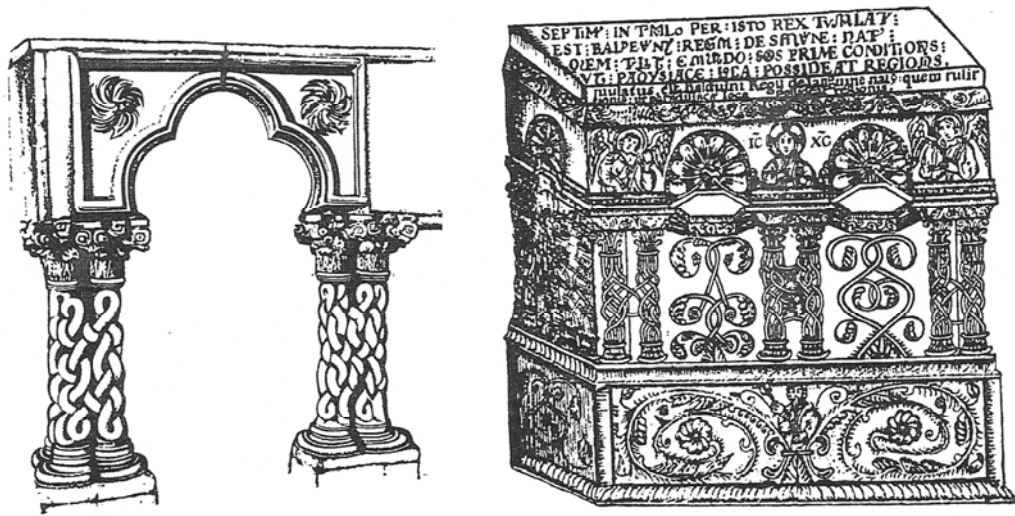


**Figure 12**      **Art Work – Perhaps in the style reminiscent of The Temple**
                   **(Gutmann 1976:183)**

**Left – Niche, Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem**

**Right – Tomb of Baldwin V   (Drawing of Elzear)**

"This has so antique an appearance that…it might have been borrowed from Herod's Temple or from some building anterior to AD 70" (Fergusson 1878: 212-213).

In the Dome of the Rock, the sofit, which is the under-surface of the architrave – which is the main beam resting across the pillars - is still in bronze. It has a beautiful antique appearance in the style of decoration before 70 CE. – is their a possibility it was borrowed from Herod's Temple? When it is compared to the decoration on the Tomb of Baldwin V one can see that the style and patterns of ornamentation are very similar.
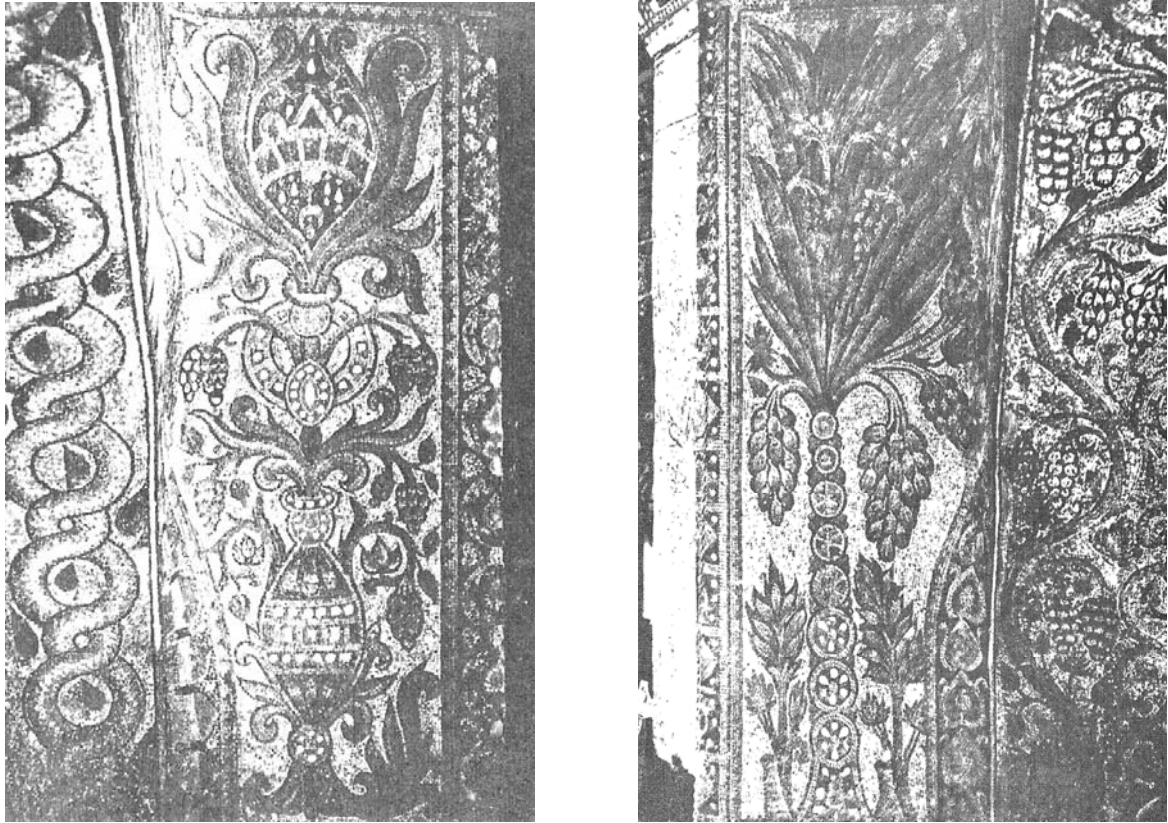
**Figure 13      Art Work – Bronze sofit – Perhaps salvaged from The Temple
                (Gutmann 1976:189)**

**Left – Composite plant with jewelled ornaments from a pier of the octangular arcade.
                Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem.**

**Right – Tree with jewelled trunk from a pier of the octangular arcade, Dome of the Rock,
Jerusalem.**

This drawing clearly shows the palmetto and as well as the symbolic tree of the goddess, one of
the architectural symbols of the goddess found throughout the ANE in earlier times.

Note the double helix in the left picture and the orbs (sephirot) on the trunk of the palm tree in
the picture on the right.

Although the style is somewhat different this theme and similar patterns are re-echoed in
Rosslyn Chapel.

### 6.2.4    Islam and the Dome

"Glory be to Him, who carried His servant by night from the Holy Mosque to the Furthest Mosque the precincts of which we have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. He is the All-hearing, the All-seeing" (Koran Surah XVII, 1).

Oral tradition has it that Mohammed was called from Mecca and rode on his imaginary horse, Al-Burak, to the distant or furthest mosque - which is presumed to be that of Medina – the exact site of the 'Furthest mosque' is not specified. However every Moslem will tell you that it was from the Rock of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem that Muhammad was raised to heaven. There he met with Moses, Elijah and Jesus, the central figures of Judaism and Christianity; Islam thus authenticates and establishes itself in the Place ever sacred to the Jews and intimately connected with the last days of the life of Jesus before His crucifixion.

Join-Lambert (1958:166) asserts that the Mosque of Omar has no connection with the Caliph. Caliph Omar disapproved of luxury. If Omar did build a mosque there it would have been a very unpretentious building. At that time even the mosque at Medina was only constructed from palm trunks.

*The Noble Sanctuary*, probably the enclosure of the Temple, is a place rendered holy by Abraham, David, Solomon, and Mohammed. It is also a veritable well-spring of many legends which give legitimate reason for the veneration of the rock. Nevertheless it is the Mosque of Al-Aksa, *The Faraway Sanctuary*, (from Mecca) which is the third most holy place for Muslims.

### 6.2.5    Archaeology – The Devil's Advocate: The Madaba Map

In the Byzantine period, both Judaism and Christianity had well developed ideologies of Sacred Space either in term of the Holy City or the Holy Land. In Judaism this Space was perceived as a distinct area, whilst in Christianity it was seen in terms of all of the many holy sites where Biblical events had occurred. Holiness was to be found in visiting places.

"The Land was the great stage of miraculous acts of revelation and redemption ... it was the place to visit and relive the great moments of religious history" (Demsky 1998:289).

The Madaba Map can be found in St George's Church in the modern village of Madaba in Jordan. This map was originally part of the floor of a Byzantine church, built during the reign of

Emperor Justinian, 527 – 565 C E. It is the oldest map of Jerusalem and a prime source for knowing the city in the Byzantine period. The Madaba Map is generally dated to the late 6$^{th}$ century CE (Demsky 1998: 285-289).

Considering that this mosaic is located in a house of worship and taking into account its subject matter, it must be considered as having a religious message. Its pictorial presentation was well suited for those who might not have known Greek or who had limited reading skills in that language.

The orientation of the map is Biblical, that is the upper part is toward the east, the lower part is towards the west, the south is towards the right and the north is towards the left. The Biblical source is the description of the Promised Land of Canaan in Num 34:1-2. The city is portrayed realistically, so much so, that even today it can be used as a guide in locating the various churches. However, "there is no reference either in iconography or in biblical quotation to Jerusalem's former glory, especially in noting the Temple" (Demsky 1998:288).

This fact is extremely problematic for Fergusson's propositions. Why is there no reference in a Christian map, to a most beautiful building, whose architecture predates the mosaic depiction by well over a century?

Perhaps construction of the Dome of the Rock began during the late Byzantine period; so that at the time of the map, the dome has not yet been completed; so it had not yet become part of the skyline of Jerusalem.

It is not improbable that Messianic Jews were involved in this enterprise. Its exclusion from the map could have been an expression of anti-Semitism.
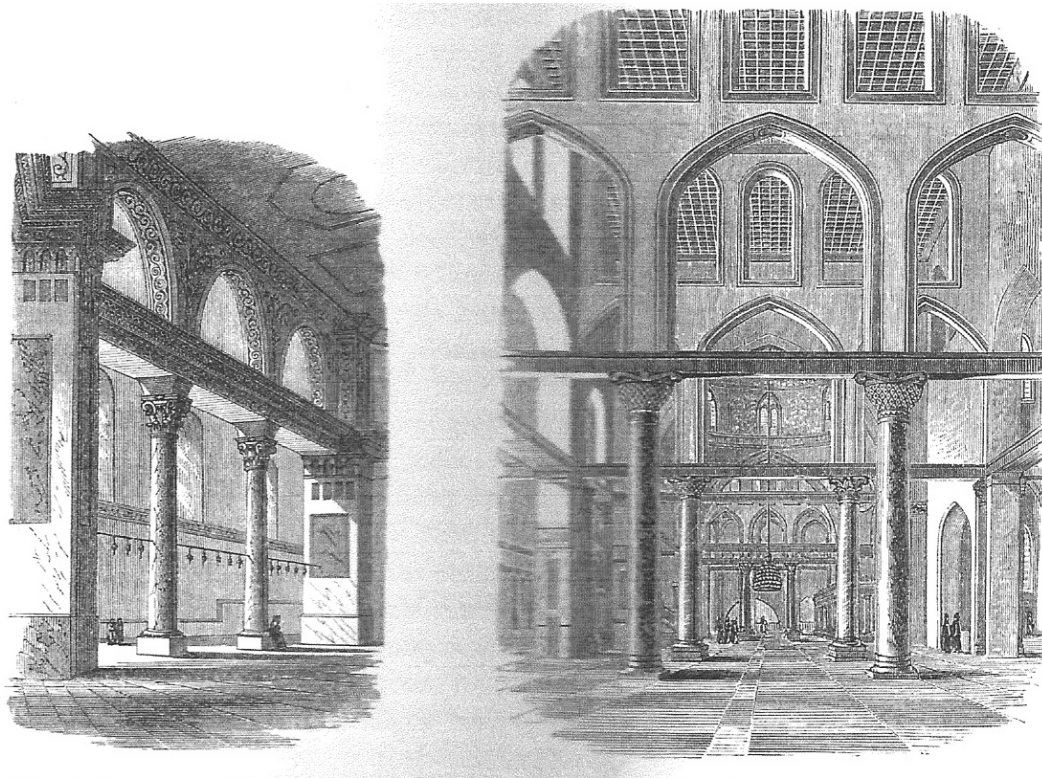
**Figure 14**      **LEFT – Well Proportioned interior of the Dome of the Rock showing identically executed columns bases and capitals**
**RIGHT – Disproportionate interior of the Al-Aksa Mosque. Note the many non-matching, columns and capitals**
**(Fergusson 1878:208   [both drawings by Arundale])**

## 6.3    The Al-Aksa Mosque

It is said that Caliph 'Abd el-Malik completed the construction of the Dome of the Rock in 691 CE. At this time the Al-Aksa was still a wooden construction (Ben-Dov 1990:282).

In 680 CE the first mosque erected here was a large wooden structure that could hold over 3000 worshippers. In the early 8th century the wooden construction was replaced by a stone building three times as large as the present mosque. In 747 CE, Jerusalem was rocked by a strong earthquake which severely damaged the newly built mosque. The Abbasid rulers attended to the damaged mosques within the city but did not restore the Al-Aksa to its former state – it was now only a third of its former size.

King Hussein (ca 1952) had silver plated aluminum panels made for the dome of the mosque; it too leaked and was replaced with lead material.

Fergusson (1878:257) describes this building as "a heterogeneous mass of incongruous parts without either elegance of proportion or beauty of detail, making up a structure of a totally dissimilar class, and belonging certainly to quite a different age from the beautiful octagon in its immediate proximity."

## 6.4    The Great Mosque in Damascus



**Figure 15       The Great Mosque in Damascus   (Prawer 1972: Plate 17)**

The spot where the mosque now stands was the site of a Christian church dedicated to John the Baptist in the Byzantine era.

Initially, the Muslim conquest of Damascus in 636 CE did not affect the church, as the building was shared by Muslim and Christian worshippers. It remained a church although the Muslims built a mud brick structure against the southern wall so that they could pray. Under the Umayyad caliph Al-Walid I, the church was demolished. Between 706 and 715 the current mosque was built in its place. In the 8th century, Damascus was one of the most important cities in the Middle East and would later become the capital of the Umayyad caliphate.
(wikipedia.org/wiki/Umayyad_Mosque)

The exterior of the mosque resembles that of Al Aksa and not that of the Dome of the Rock.

## 6.5 Archaeology and Mishnah relating to the Temple Mount

It is known that there is a vast space beneath the Al-Aksa mosque. In the south east corner of the mount there is another opening that leads to a small chapel called the Cradle of Jesus, built and consecrated during Crusader times. Continuing on past the chapel, are 'Solomon's Stables' and beyond that another chamber.

A 14th century Moslem historian from Algiers, Ibn Khaldun, was the first to associate these structures with Jewish Purity Laws. Confirmation for his ideas was found in the Middot Tractate of the Mishnah which deals with the Temple and the Temple Mount – it is said that – "Beneath both the Temple Mount and the Courts of the Temple was a hollowed space for fear of any grave down in the depths…" (Para 3:3 cf Ben- Dov 1990:77).

It is very likely that a method of construction was employed even by Solomon that would prevent defilement by the dead and that through an oral tradition was later laid down by Jewish law.

## 6.6 Summary of Chapter 6

The Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, its treasures pillaged and the Jews expelled from Jerusalem. In 135 CE Jews were again banished from the city. Even when Jerusalem was ruled by the Christians from the 4th – 7th century the Roman decrees against them were enforced. In the 7th century CE Jerusalem was lost to the Persians and then to the Moslem Arabs. During this time Jews were permitted into the city but denied access to the Temple Mount. Christian Crusaders occupied the city for about two hundred years from 1099 CE. Jews were again forbidden to reside in the city. In the late 13th century Jerusalem was lost to the Mamelukes.

A group of people known as Messianic Jews were also expelled in 70 CE. They appealed against the ruling and were allowed to return. Throughout the entire period this small enclave of Christian-Jews resided in Jerusalem.

It is not known when or by whom the beautiful Dome of the Rock was erected on the Temple Mount. No conqueror has ever deliberately damaged this building nor has it suffered earthquake damage as has the Al-Aksa mosque. In the late 19th century J Fergusson proposed that the Dome of the Rock was erected by Constantine as a Christian building.

The quality of architecture and its well proportioned style differ significantly from the disproportionate lines of the Al-Aksa mosque which lacks the elegance of classical art. The early Moslems had few architecturally outstanding monumental buildings. The pointed windows are a more modern style than the circular arches of the Dome of the Rock.

Figure12 shows the similarity between the artwork in a niche in the Dome of the Rock and that found on the Tomb of King Baldwin V. On both artefacts the twin chain type pillars and their capitals are virtually identically. The Tomb shows two types of stylized trees and emphasises that the twin pillars though separate, since they share strands of weaving – the two are essentially one.

Figure 13. The beautiful bronze sofits found in the Dome of the Rock shows a double helix and fabulous stylized trees with palm fronds and dates. Orbs are incorporated on the tapered trunk. These are ancient symbols of the goddess Asherah.

There are no features found in any mosque of that period that are similar to the Dome of the Rock. Meanwhile the exterior aspects of the Dome of the Rock are the same as those found in all 4th century Christian structures. The art of marble veneer was widely used by the Romans and the patterns presented are typical Byzantine style workmanship.

Caliph Omar who is reputed to have built the Dome of the Rock around 690 CE would not have erected such a structure since he disapproved of luxury. At that time the mosque in Medina was only constructed of palm trunks. In 680 CE the Al-Aksa mosque was a wooden construction that could house 3000 worshippers. In the 8th century it was replaced by a stone building which was damaged shortly afterwards by an earthquake, this mosque was never restored to its former state. The Great Mosque in Damascus was built between 706 – 715 CE. Damascus was an important city in the Middle East later to become the capital of the Umayyad caliphate. The external architecture of this mosque is similar to that of Al-Aksa.

There are vast underground chambers beneath the Al-Aksa mosque. It is very likely that the same would be found beneath the Dome of the Rock this would ensure that the purity laws dating back to Sinai were not compromised.

Chapter 7 discusses the Sacred Tree as it appeared in early Christian tradition, the role of Mary within the Christian Church, the Collyridians and heresy.

# Chapter 7  Mary and Christianity

## 7.1    Christianity and the Tree

North of the Temple Mount is the Church of St Anne, erected on the site, which according to tradition, was the home of the Grandmother of Jesus; that is, the home of the Mother of Mary. In1102 CE, the Scandinavian pilgrim Saewulf wrote describing the Church of St Anne in Bethesda: *"...the church of St Anne, the mother of the blessed Mary ...where she lived with her husband. This is where she gave birth to her most beloved daughter, Mary, the Redeemer of all Believers"* (Parmentier 1998:88).

Before 451 CE, a three aisled church, dedicated to St. Mary was built at Bethesda near to the Sheep's Pool. This church was probably destroyed around 1009 CE. The Crusaders built the church of St Anne about a century later; a short distance away from the ruins where the Byzantine church of St Mary had been. During this Crusader period a monastery dedicated to St Mary was built over the ruins of the Byzantine church.

After Saladin conquered Jerusalem (1187 CE) this building was used by the Moslems as an important theological seminary. In the 19th century the French White Fathers acquired the site and from the ruins that were there, restored the church to its original Crusader form. Archaeological excavations were conducted in the courtyard which revealed a floor and they found one of the Open Pools of Herodian Jerusalem, the Bethesda or Sheep Pool where Jesus performed many of his miracles.

One of the objects associated with St Anne's church is a tree in the forecourt which is said to have healed barren women. The Poet, Predicts of Ephesus (14th century CE) writes about the Crusader Church of St. Mary: *"You will find lofty buildings, a royal hearth, and the divine and delightful house of Joachim and Anna where the tomb of both ancestors of God is and **a tree** standing in the forecourt well provided with leaves affording shade which, having **sprung up at the birth** of the wholly undefiled maiden, grants fruit to the barren, who partake of the fruit of the tree"* (Parmentier 1998: 89).

Parmentier admits that it is difficult to believe that this connection to the Virgin Mary is authentic. Marian tradition seems to have blossomed only after the building of the basilica of St Mary.

The Pilgrim of Piacenza writes: "Having returned to the city we went to the swimming pool that has five porticos, one of which has the basilica of St Mary, in which many miracles take place" (Parmentier 1998:87).

James of Verona (1335 CE) gives an elaborate description of Bethesda. Here we find the idea that the wood of the Cross of Christ was cut from a tree which stood by the pool. "This pool is next to the Temple plateau and in it the animals which were offered in the Temple were washed in the past. Over this pool that tree was placed from which the holy wood of the Holy Cross was made. The builders of the Temple did not know how to use this tree and therefore it stayed until the times of Christ" (Parmentier 1998:89-90).

From the 12th century onwards a tradition developed which connects the wood of the Cross with Bethesda. Latin texts studied by W Meyer and referred to by Parmentier (1998:91-92) reflect the growing legend. In the text *Historia de ligno crucis*, the following story is told.

'In the time of David a certain Jew found in the forest a kind of tree which has three different types of leaves. He cut the tree down because he admired it, and he brought it to **King David.** When the king saw it he immediately understood what this tree would be in the future and he **adored it as long as he lived. His son Solomon also adored it**, and not just because his father did.

He also gilded the whole tree. Then the Queen of the South, when she came to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, prophesied about it, saying: 'If Solomon knew what the tree signifies, he would certainly not adore it any longer'. A philosopher (or: adviser) of the king who heard this, reported to his lord what he had heard. The king then sent him after the queen, who had already left, with many precious gifts, to give them to the philosopher (or: secretary) of the queen who did not know about these things, until he had asked his lady to tell what the tree signified. When he had received the gifts he told him not to show himself to the queen. Then he secretly asked his lady concerning the matter. She answered and said that a man would hang on it by whom the whole kingdom of the Jews would be destroyed. When King Solomon heard this he scraped the gold off the tree and threw the tree in the depth of the pool. This is why later an angel of the Lord descended daily into the pool, in which, not because of the water, but because of the tree, the sick were saved, through the descent of the angel. The pool had dried up at the time of the passion of our Lord and the Cross which was extracted out of it, Christ carried on his shoulders until the gate' (Parmentier 1998:91-92).

## 7.2    Mary

The veneration of a Mother figure is a deep rooted instinct satisfying a deep seated need for material protection and womanly understanding which a male God does not fill. *The Mother of God* may sometimes seem closer and more accessible to the hearts of the people than the incomprehensible Godhead.

"Mary does not desire to be an idol; she does nothing, God does all. We ought to call upon her that for her sake God may grant and do what we request"
(*Luther's Works*, Vol 21:326-29 cf Braaten 2004: viii).

When Christianity appeared as a new Jewish sect there was no opposition from Jewish converts adopting Mary the Mother of Jesus as a legitimate part of the new religion.

The Ancient church was very aware that to remove Christ from the presence of his Mother Mary would soon present another Christ. The first Jewish Christians were certainly not unaware of a/Asherah and the Gentiles were familiar with many goddesses; adopting Mary was an easy and comfortable shift for them. Mary stands at the intersection of the old covenant and the new covenant (Yeago 2004:72).

Scholars are very keen to place the Asherah veneration in Early Israel firmly within the household – the domain of women and their concerns. However many elaborate and exaggerated Mariologies were developed by men – Emperors, priests and monks, those at the helm of orthodox Christianity. The earliest recorded accounts of her blessing relate to the need of helplessness experienced by men.

The Council of Ephesus 431 CE ruled that Mary is the Mother of God yet she was never called this anywhere in the New Testament. The title was hotly contested in the Christological controversies of the 5th century. *Theotokos* became inevitable after the confession that Jesus is truly God, of one substance with the Father. It was an attempt to reconcile 'the co-incidence of opposites' that asserts the two natures of Christ; that Jesus was fully human and divine. Her body became the container of Immanuel - the space that embraced the space-less God.

She is the Powerful Queen who holds her Son and God in her gentle arms.

The theological ideas that grew out of these determinations have played an enormous role in further alienating the Jewish faith from the Christian faith. Biblical references are considered out of context. They were allegorical mind maps that compromised the foundations of Judaism and further antagonised and alienated Jew from Christians. There are ancient hymns that refer to her as 'Ark of the Covenant'. She has also been called the embodiment of Israel, arch-prophet and guardian of Torah (Jenson 2004:56).

Mary is a far more efficient helper than the Ark of the Israelites which often was itself in danger and could even be captured; whereas Mary's assistance never fails and all good things come our way if she so wills (Graef 1990: 195).

The legend of Theophilus and the source of the Faust saga dates from around the 5th century CE. This man, disappointed that he had not received a post that he desperately wanted, gives his soul to the devil. He repents, prays to the Blessed Virgin to ask God's forgiveness. Mary hears his prayer and compels the devil to give him back the contract. From this time there is documented evidence of the never failing efficacy of Mary as the loving helper.

Popular devotion grew and Mary was generally venerated as the all powerful intercessor. From the 10th century stories of Marian visions and miracles were very popular. The first written account comes from the pen of John of Salerno ca 945 CE. He wrote the *Vita of Odo*, Abbot of Cluny in which he tells of a robber who became a monk. Before his death a 'glorious woman' appeared and said to him: "*I am the Mother of Mercy'*. The monk reported his experience to his abbot and subsequently this title has spread from Cluny all over western Christendom (Graef 1995:203).

Orthodox Bishop Kallistos Ware describes Mary as "the living heart of our piety…our attitude is traditional, doxological and intuitive" (Fitzgerald 2004:83). Mary is venerated and prayed to as a mother. She is honoured because of her intimate relationship with Christ; because she is close to God.

In Eastern iconography Mary is never depicted alone; always with Christ, the apostles or the saints (George 2004:119).

The vehement attack of the Reformation against the exaggerated cult of Mary in late Medieval Christianity diminished her role in the story of salvation, personal piety and public worship in the resultant Protestant Churches.

Calvin considered prayers addressed to her to be against Scripture. Even though he rejected the cult, he wanted his followers to venerate and praise her and regard her as a teacher who instructs them in the commandments of Christ (Graef 1990: 13b).

Zwingli objected to a 'false trust' in the repetitive recitation of the *Hail Mary / Ave Maria* prayer without a corresponding Christian life. He rejected the veneration of Mary and the Saints because he believed that they should not form part of the Church (Graef 1990:14b).

Peter Canisius (d 1597 CE) accused the Reformers of interpreting the language about Mary in an 'absurdly literal sense'. Expressions are not used for her in the same sense as they are of God; we ask Him to do things for us, we ask her to intercede "…she is truly called queen and mother of mercy because she is the Mother of God and obtains spiritual life for us by her prayers; and we call her our hope and even our salvation (salvatrix), because she intercedes for us" (Graef 1990: 21b).

The words are used in a different sense and in no way detract from the uniqueness of Christ, the only mediator, in the exact sense of the term.

Karl Barth was a vehement opponent of Marian veneration going so far as to say "Where Mary is 'venerated' …the Church of Christ does not exist" (Quoted from *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* cf Graef 1990:135b).

The Second Vatican Council (1962 - 1965) affirmed that Mary is firmly connected to Christ and the Church but she does not play an independent role in the mediation of salvation. (Pope John Paul II Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*). "Mary is present within the redemptive relationship of the church and of the believer to Christ by virtue of her presence in the scriptural testimony to Christ" (Yeago 2004: 62).

There is undeniably a very wide gap between official Roman Catholic teaching about Mary and popular beliefs and practices of Marian devotion.

George A F Knight is a Protestant Biblical scholar who did important exegetical work in placing Mary within the whole scope of the Biblical revelation this enabling Protestants to appreciate the role of Mary in the history of salvation on their own terms.

What is it of Mary that could be considered by those of Protestant tradition? Mary's consent to God's intervention in her life; her presence at the death and resurrection of her Son; her pondering the meaning of Jesus as well as her persevering presence with the early disciples and other believers. She epitomises the way in which God reaches out to human beings within the parameters of history and affirms that however great is God's intent for His World, our Free Will is never compromised.

The Reformers of the 16th century rediscovered a theology of grace that had been obscured in the medieval Church. They wished to use the sufficiency of the Bible as the normative rule for belief and practice. Their ideas ultimately led to Protestant estrangement from Mary. For centuries the adherents to simple Biblicism have ignored the great dogmatic traditions. The very fanaticism that the Reformers abhorred has returned in the shape of Fundamentalism. Once again correction is necessary; it is surely time to reclaim a balanced perspective; to revisit old traditions and reclaim for our post-modern world a loving and unselfish equilibrium between ourselves and the Other in the fullness of Spirit; in the fullness of Creation and therefore in the fullness of Gender.

"Both the biblical and ecumenical movements will play their part in keeping Marian doctrine and devotion within the limits of sound theology and practice" (Graef 1990:153b).

John Henry Newman has observed: "If we take a survey at least of Europe, we shall find that it is not those religious communions which are characterised by devotion towards the Blessed Virgin that have ceased to adore her Eternal Son, but those very bodies which have renounced devotion to her" (Pelikan 2004:7).

The veneration of Mary is not confined to Christianity. In the Islamic tradition, Allah has chosen her above all other women in the world. The Koran defends her perfect virginity and states that she was miraculously strengthened and nourished against insult and shame. For centuries and still today it is common practice for Muslims to visit the Christian shrines of Mary to satisfy their devotion (Graef 1985:160).

Dever (2005:236) connects this extremely popular cult within Roman Catholicism with popular piety and as a continuation of the Asherah-belief which is like the Hathor-belief which is like the Isis-belief. In Christian art there are many pictures of Madonna and Child that very closely resemble very old depictions of Isis and Horus.

"Laud and love her simply as the one who, without merit, obtained such blessings from God, sheerly out of his mercy, as she herself testifies in the *Magnificat* (Luke 1 :46-55)" (*Luther's Works* Vol 43:39 cf Braaten 2004: viii).

## 7.3    The Collyridians

T. George (Braaten 2004:112) says that *Epiphanius* of Salamis (ca 315 – 403 CE) attested to the existence of a community of women in Thracia – an area north of the Aegean Sea – and also in Upper Scythia – an area populated by non-Greek and non-Roman people (barbarians) north of the Black Sea – who made circular cakes and offered them to the Virgin Mary whom they had come to look upon as a deity. The group was called the Collyridians after the shape of the cakes in their ritual. On a certain day of the year they would spread a linen cloth on a square throne or chair and place bread on it and offer it in the name of Mary, and all partook of this bread (Graef 1990:73).

Is this perhaps an account of the survival of the custom that Jeremiah scorned? It is certainly the honour and veneration of a Queen.

## 7.4    Heresy

"Heresy was…whatever the papacy explicitly or implicitly condemned" (Lambert 2002:8).

In the early centuries of the Christian Church heresy forced the church to define its doctrines and to anathematize deviant theological opinion. After Constantine, the Church effectively held the power of State which was used to impose uniformity of belief.

In both the Eastern and Western Empires heresy was regarded as deviant behaviour. It was written into law that apostasy would be severely punished. Heresy was not understood as the product of 'speculative intelligence'; heresy was believed to be the 'work of the devil' (Lambert 2002:4).

The development of Papal canon law in the 13th century encouraged autocracy and the tendency to equate heresy with disobedience to the pope (Lambert 2002:198).

The only way in which Medievalists could contemplate alternative ideas was behind a barrier of secrecy.

The Templar persecution in France was the abuse of power by both church and state in unmitigated circumstances without regard to the rule of law.

## 7.5    Summary of Chapter 7

North of the Temple Mount is the Church of St Anne built in honour of the parents of Mary, Mother of Jesus. It stands on a traditional Christian site at Bethesda near to the Sheep Pool, the place where the animals to be offered in the Temple were washed and the place where Jesus performed many of his miracles.

A tree in the forecourt of the church, said to have sprung up at the birth of Mary, is visited by women unable to bear children. Tradition states that the wood from the cross of Jesus was cut from a tree that stood by the Sheep pool.

These traditions are the link between the rod from the Tree of Paradise handed to Adam as the tangible expression of Divine intervention linking creation, revelation and redemption (ref 1.11) and the cross of Jesus personifying redemption.

Solomon is associated with a tree that he was unable to use in the construction of his Temple. Sometimes the story is linked to the Sinai rods of Moses and Aaron other times to a fabulous tree bearing three different types of leaves. This useless wood was thrown into the Sheep Pool. Daily it was visited by an Angel of the Lord, hence the moving of the waters. It was through the sacredness of the tree that the sick were healed. In the same way the animals would have acquired the quality of holiness, thus becoming an acceptable sacrifice for Yahweh.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus was closer to the hearts of the people than the incomprehensible Godhead. The Council of Ephesus ruled that Mary was the Mother of God. Mary is venerated and prayed to as an intercessor; she is honoured as a mediator because she is close to God.

Protestantism, emulating the ideal monotheism of the post exilic scriptures, has generally removed Mary from their corpus of belief. A re-evaluation of persistent tradition would allow Biblicism to temper an imbalanced paradigm.

The Marian cult could well be a continuation of the Asherah belief – the veneration of the Great Mother Goddess.

The Collyridians were a community of women who made circular cakes which they offered to Mary perhaps a continuation of the custom related in Jeremiah 44.

Heresy was used to impose uniformity of belief; it was considered to be deviant behaviour and was severely punished.

Chapter 8 describes the Crusades, the Knights Templars and their association with the Temple Mount, the Social context of the Middle Ages, the role of the Franciscans in Jerusalem and the Medieval Kabalists in Europe. These historical circumstances and the groups of people active at that time are discussed in terms of providing a plausible link between the Temple Mount as the site of the Temple of Solomon as well as the Dome of the Rock and Scotland and Rosslyn Chapel. Celtic religion, the ancient belief system in Scotland is briefly examined.

# Chapter 8  The Crusades 11th – 13th Century CE

## 8.1    The Political & Religious Background to the Crusades

"The Crusades were born of faith and faith was rekindled by the Crusades" (Prawer 1972:113).

Liberating and defending the Holy Sepulchre was an ideal that became an aspect of one's inner life and imbued a sense of obligation.

Christianity in the 11th century in Europe was more than a religion. It was a culture in which Athens and Rome blended with Jerusalem.Christians were taught to view themselves as heirs to the claims and privileges of the Jews. The Hebrews, the Chosen People had forfeited their privilege by rejecting the Saviour. For rich and poor alike, the Holy Lands and the sites of the miracles of Jesus were strangely real places.

No Jew ever forgot the Promise given their forefathers to inherit the Holy Land – the Promise which was never abrogated or alienated.

The Emperor of Byzantine, as head of a Christian Empire and Guardian of Christian Orthodoxy, was responsible for the defence and expansion of Christendom. The role was inherent in his title and was part of his legacy as successor to the first Christian Emperor, Constantine the Great.

Palestine under Byzantine rule from the 4th century until the early 7th century CE was pre-dominantly non-Jewish both as a result of conversion to Christianity and immigration of Jews to the Diaspora. There was in place a formal prohibition against Jews from living in the Holy City. They would contemplate their beloved Mount from the Mount of Olives.

Less than fifteen years after the flight of Mohammed from Mecca to Medina (622 CE), the Prophet's warriors had penetrated from Arabia into Palestine, Syria and Asia Minor in the north and into Egypt and Northern Africa in the west. Damascus became the Capital of the Omayyad dynasty (661 – 650 CE). The entire southern Mediterranean seaboard - from Spain in the west to Syria and Palestine in the east was lost to Christianity.

Fortunately Islam regarded itself as the latest Divine Revelation inherited from Judaism and Christianity alike and this is what saved the Holy Places of Palestine from utter destruction.

Christians and Jews as 'People of the Book' were tolerated by Islam. Despite destruction of churches and synagogues by al-Hakim, Fatimid ruler of Egypt (1012 CE), Jerusalem never became a totally Moslem city.

Corsica and Sardinia fell to the Moslems in the 8th century and were the first areas to be reclaimed by Christians in the 11th century by a group known as *reconquista.* This heralded the beginning of an affront from Western Christianity to reclaim territory lost to Islam and the birth of the phenomenon known as *The Crusades*.

The over-arching ideal that initiated the Crusades was to liberate the Holy Sepulchre from the yoke of Islam. The venerated names of Jerusalem, Nazareth and Bethlehem stirred the imagination of millions and created a messianic longing that exploded into a religious frenzy.

Medieval men were essentially religious, almost always superstitious and credulous. Communion and confession, saints and their relics, great and solemn festivals of the Christian calendar were not only religious rites but an integral part of their way of life.

### 8.1.1    The Shame of Christianity

During the spring of 1096 CE, all across Europe, hundreds of thousands of peasant families, lords, princes, squires began to mobilise themselves. The Pope promised absolution to all who joined the crusade. It was tacitly accepted that the Lord of the Manor would not prevent his serfs from leaving the land and an accepted rule that the liberation army would be a force of free men.

*Franci* referred not only to France and later to all Europeans it also meant *Free Men.* Once the Holy Land was conquered the liberators would remain free.

However the envisaged well-ordered military expedition turned out to be an undisciplined rabble of mobilized fanaticism. Noble ideals were soon challenged. Latent hatred of the Jews erupted. Many thousands of Jews who refused to be baptized were slaughtered, families committed suicide, entire towns and villages were wiped out. Within a few months, flourishing Jewish communities, some of which dated back to the Roman Empire, disappeared and centres of learning and culture were destroyed. By the autumn of 1096 this Popular or Peoples Crusade had ended outside the walls of Constantinople; only very few people had survived (Prawer 1972:19).

In the meanwhile the better organized and more disciplined Knights Crusade began moving across Europe in the midsummer of 1096. All in all four large armies were mobilized. Their composition was based on geographical divisions and local, ethnic or linguistic loyalties.

The armies met in the spring of 1097 at Constantinople. Baldwin took the city of Edessa and created the first Crusader principality.

The Crusaders reached Jerusalem and began a five week siege of the city (7$^{th}$ June – 15 July 1099). Raymond of St Gilles received the capitulation of the Egyptian commander of the citadel. The fall of Jerusalem was followed by an atrocious massacre of Jews and Moslems that lasted for three days (Prawer 1972:27).

### 8.1.2    The Kingdom of Jerusalem

Godfrey of Bouillon (of Lower Lorraine) was elected Defender Holy Sepulchre. On Christmas Day 1100, his successor Baldwin I, had himself crowned King of Jerusalem and successor of King David in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, hereby underscoring his claim to the royal inheritance of King David (Campbell 1937:12).

Cosmopolitan Jerusalem was a 13$^{th}$ century Global Village. The Kingdom was wedged between the Syrian capital of Damascus adherent to the Sunnite caliphate of Baghdad and Cairo, the Fatimid capital of the powerful Shi'ite caliphate of Egypt. Constant vigilance had to be maintained against attack from without or revolt and sabotage from within.

After the capture of Jerusalem in 1099, the masses who had fulfilled their vows returned to Europe. It was established that at the Battle of Hittin in 1187 – four generations later, only a quarter of a million Europeans were established in the Levant – this number of people was not sufficient to make the Christian colonies viable political entities. Within their own boundaries, the Crusaders were outnumbered by about four to one. Fortunately for the Crusaders, Islam was unable to mobilise its resources for more than 150 years.

As a ruling minority in an almost constant state of war, they concentrated themselves in fortified cities and castles. The earthly Jerusalem despite its spiritual values had to be ruled and defended. Although the Holy Land was under Christian domination Jerusalem never became a Christian city.

Feudalism was the only social system known to these Westerners. Those who remained in the Holy Land did not belong to the great houses of European nobility; they were lower knights of the lordly households. Fiefs were established throughout the kingdom, all dependent upon the crown of Jerusalem – the successor of King David (Prawer 1972:76).

The Crusaders never mixed socially with the indigenous people and left them to their own governmental devices as well. No missionary work was ever initiated among the Muslims or the Oriental Christians. Conversion never became part of the Crusader program.

"The Crusader Kingdom was the creation of Europe's finest hour… it was the embodiment of Europe's belief in and consciousness of its faith" (Prawer 1972:82).

The existence of the small Crusader colonies in the east depended entirely upon Europe; not only for large scale immigration but for financial aid as well. For almost two hundred years Europe took care of the Kingdom; immigrants were sent over and the Crusader treasuries were subsidised. France and Norman England felt the strongest bond with the Kingdom.

The Frankish Knight despite his speech and dress was not French but a Near Eastern Frank. The fact that no university was ever founded in the Crusader colony (despite that in this age all major European centres were dotted with institutes of learning) is not an indication of a lack of intellectual pursuit. Their over arching interest lay in the law - Feudal as well as Roman law.

"Their mastery of the subject was such that some of the works of the Crusader jurists remained classics in European legal literature…and were used and quoted down to the French Revolution" (Prawer 1972:92). A law treatise was often written as a vademecum on how to circumvent the law!

By 1111 the whole Syro-Lebanese-Palestinian coast was occupied by the Crusaders. Crusader forces never captured the great Moslem capital of Damascus. There was an agreement that the fertile farmlands of the Golan Heights would be demilitarised and income derived from here would be divided equally between Damascus, the Crusaders and the Peasants who tilled the lands.

The Latin occupiers of the Holy Land must have been amazed by the numerous enclaves of diverse Christian belief – particularly Monophysite churches including Jacobites, Nestorians and

Marionites. Paganism had disappeared completely; Christianity and Judaism had survived like islands in the sea of Islam. King Baldwin I adopted a policy of toleration.

Although many Jews lost their lives during the Crusader invasions, those who lived in the villages of Galilee and the Samaritans had not been attacked by the Crusaders and began to flourish.

They were treated as second rate citizens but permitted to pursue their own ways of life and worship. This attitude together with the improved facilities of communication with Europe resulted in Jewish communities being rebuilt. Many Jewish Scholars from Spain and France came to settle in Tyre, Acre and the Galilee area. The 13$^{th}$ century saw a great revival of Jewish life in the Holy Land (Prawer 1972:65).

Edessa was recaptured in 1146. The feelings of shame and vengeance that a Crusader state should fall to the infidel motivated a Crusade led by Kings from France and Germany. It ended in failure (1148) because they decided to attack Damascus!

Saladin, the Kurd was undoubtedly an astute and gifted statesman. After he became vizier of Egypt he gained control of Moslem Syria and the popularity of the masses before he began his affront against the Crusaders. After 88 years of Christian domination the gates were opened to Saladin on the 2$^{nd}$ of October 1187.

The loss of Jerusalem was the loss of the Holy Sepulchre.

In 1228, Emperor Frederick II of Sicily, strangely excommunicated by Pope Gregory IX, was a person who had respect for and an understanding of the mind of Islam. He entered into negotiations with Sultan el-Malik of Jerusalem and al-Kamil, Ruler of Egypt. Through marriage to Isabella daughter of John Brienne, heiress of the Kingdom, Frederick already held the title *King of Jerusalem*. In 1229, Bethlehem, Nazareth and Jerusalem - excluding the Temple Esplanade and the mosques – were ceded to the Crusaders! The corridors from Jaffa via Ramla to Jerusalem and from the Bay of Acre through Galilee to Nazareth became Christian (Prawer 1972:46).

The Templars were especially bitter when they heard that al-Kamil would not surrender the Temple Mount – no treaty would be acceptable to them that did not make provision for its return to them (Campbell 1937:158).

In 1244 Jerusalem fell to the Mongols. In 1260 the brilliant Mameluke, General Baybars, defeated the Mongolians at the decisive *Battle of Ain Jalut*. This battle determined that the Near East would remain Moslem and not Mongolian.

The Knights Templars represented the highest ideal of the Middle Ages. For two centuries they were prepared to die for what they believed to be the most noble of all vocations – the custody of Jerusalem.

The Templars had failed to hold the Holy City and seven centuries were to pass before it was restored to Christian rule. On December 11, 1917 when the troops of General Allenby marched into Jerusalem, the Knights Templars were not forgotten; in the Temple Church of London, the effigies of the crusading warriors were crowned with laurels! (Campbell 1937:349).

## 8.2    The Knights Templar

Military Orders were the most sublime realisation of the two great ideologies of Medieval Europe. Monastic life and Knighthood were the most profound expressions of the ethos of the Middle Ages.

The Order of the Templars was established by Hughes de Payne, a Knight from Burgundy in 1118. He gathered a small group of knights in voluntary association to serve as armed convoys to protect Pilgrims on their way through the dangerous and hilly terrain of Judea and Galilee. The organized military convoys became part of the Crusader scenery.

The Knights Templar was to become the first truly disciplined army since the Roman legionnaires. Unlike other Knights who owed allegiance to a specific king, duke, baron or nobleman, the Templars were to be holy warriors answerable only to the Pope but were not a papal army (Duquette 2006:53).

An early seal of the Order shows two of the Knights mounted on the same horse, an indication of poverty as well as brotherhood (Campbell 1937:20).

King Baldwin I gave the site of the Aksa Mosque on the Temple Mount to this fledgling military Order. It was not long before a legend sprang up about the 'miraculous antiquity' of the Order. It was not Hughes de Payne, the Provencal Knight, who had founded the order; its origins were pushed back 1200 years. The Templars associated themselves with the Maccabees of the second

century BCE. The Maccabees were Jewish national heroes who had liberated their country from the Hellenistic rulers of Syria. "The purifiers of Jerusalem and restorers of the Temple became the ancestors of the Templars" (Prawer 1972:117).

"During the Crusades, the Knights Templar, **who thought the Dome of the Rock to be a remnant of the Temple of Jerusalem**, made their headquarters in the Al-Aksa Mosque adjacent to the Dome…" (Worley 1907: v).

The original full name of their Order was *The Poor Fellow Soldiers of Jesus Christ and the Temple of Solomon* although they were never called by this rather long title. They became the most powerful, rich and influential monastic Order that the west would ever know; they built the economic foundation of what would become modern Europe.

**Hughes de Payne**, the founder of the order, **was a relative by marriage to the St Clairs of Roslin!** In 1128 he travelled to Scotland and visited the St Clairs. So impressed were they by what they learnt from de Payne that they granted the new Order a tract of land at Balantrodoch to be their headquarters in Scotland (Duquette 2006:53).

From around 1130 the two military Orders, i.e. the Templars and the Hospitallers, assumed the defence of key military positions. Fortified points, towers and castles were handed over to the Orders. Very soon the entire road and communications network was policed by their patrols.

The Templars established a navy at Tyre and the Bay of Acre. They also built fortified garrisons in most parts of the Christian occupation. They were traders and became excellent builders. The Templars acquired the financial resources that the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem so often lacked.

"Christians and Moslems alike acknowledged the power of the fighting monks"
(Campbell 1937:172).

Templar Communities also sprang up throughout Europe. The base of the Templar Empire remained in Troyes in France. Templars begged admission to the Order in a determined liturgy *"…for the **love of God and our Lady Mary** let me share in the brotherhood and deeds of the Order…"* All vows sworn by the candidate were sworn *"...**to God and our Lady Mary**"* (Campbell 1937:150).

It is interesting to note the similarity between the format of a will of the father of the second wife of Sir William St Clair of Roslin and that of the Templar prescription described above. St Clair's father-in-law requested that his body be buried in the crypt at Rosslyn. A paraphrase from his will dated November 1456 reads: *'I give my soul to **Almighty God of Heaven** and to **His Blessed Mother**, the glorious Virgin Marie and to all the whole company of Heaven…'* (Oxbrow & Robertson 2005:106).

The Orders grew rich. The Hospitallers allegedly possessed 18 000 manors in Europe. The Templars, certainly no poorer, were the first Christians to be involved in finance. They became the great European Bankers of the 13th century.

The Templars created vast networks of credit transactions and soon grew very wealthy. The safety of the well guarded towers called 'the Temples', assured the security of the deposits and their affiliation with the Church provided asylum from lay intervention. The Orders many branches facilitated the transfer of credit from place to place without the actual transport of money over dangerous roads and seas (Prawer 1972:118).

In the early years the Templars retained their desire for offensive action many decades after the other Settlers in the east wished to confine military operations to defensive measures. It was only in the 13th century that the Templars tended to favour peace and enjoy the privileges of membership of a rich and powerful Order. The Grand Master ranked as a Prince at royal courts and in the Council of the Church, he sat with the Bishops (Campbell 1937:174).

The Templars always carried a portable chapel in their military operations. The tent of the Grand Master was always right next to it and the tents of the other knights were pitched around it (Campbell 1937:176).

The elaborate proceedings for the election of a new Grand Master are also of interest and provide an insight into the sincerity of these monks. After the Death of the Grand Master and his funeral, which would have been conducted with pomp and display, the principal officers of the Temple were convoked and an intermediate *Grand Commander of the Election* was chosen. He with two or three other monks selected a *Commander of the Election*. A second brother was singled out to confer with the *Commander of the Election* and the two spent the night together in prayer. The next morning they would appear before the chapter and announce the names of two more Knights to join them in their deliberations.

This process continued until there were twelve knights. A Priest was then selected to join their deliberations. The thirteen retired for confidential and undisclosed discussion. After they had reached a discussion they returned to the Chapter and the *Commander of the Election* addressed himself to the successful candidate. The Chapter would not challenge the selection nor could the candidate decline the honour.

The complete Rule of the Order was a very confidential document which few of the Templars ever saw. The simple knight knew only a small number of the regulations. As a brother rose in the hierarchy, he was instructed in further sections of the Rule and might have a copy of some of the paragraphs but the complete set of statutes for the government of the Temple was confined to the very greatest offices. From time to tome complete copies would be revised and unnecessary copies withdrawn and supposedly destroyed.

Everything was done to keep the Rule secret – one of the most serious offences that a brother could do was to reveal any part of it. "The Templars loved to surround regulations and ceremonies with mystery, a childish indulgence for which they later paid in frightful tortures" (Campbell 1937:181).

## 8.3 Masonic Tradition

Butler & Ritchie (2006:181) support the 'persistent rumours' that Hughes de Payne and other Templar Knights, during their years of occupation of the Aksa Mosque, explored beneath the Temple Mound. Within old versions of Scottish Free Masonry rites there are very specific accounts of what they found there. The account is to be found in the degree of *'The Holy Royal Arch'* Tradition

The Masonic liturgy of the '*Royal Arch Ceremony'* tells the story of three masons from Babylon who came to offer their services to Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel infers there are only lowly tasks left to be filled. Their job will be preparing the foundation of the *Most Holy Place*. They are supplied with tools and instructed that as they clear the ruins – should they make any discovery of importance – they are only to communicate to the Three Principals sitting in Council (Sanhedrin).

"Early this morning on resuming our labours we discovered a pair of pillars of exquisite beauty and symmetry; proceeding with our work we discovered a second pair of equal beauty, which

from their situation appeared to be the remains of the subterranean gallery leading to the Most Holy Place" (Knight & Lomas 1997:263).

Removing stones from an arch, one man lowered himself into the vault, there he found a scroll and a marble pedestal engraved JAH-BUL-ON *'I Am and Shall Be Lord in Heaven, Father of All'*.

[The authors dispute this translation and think it is merely the names of each of the three gods of the Jews, Canaanites and Egyptians (On was the City of Ra)].

"The idea of a single and same God under many names … is central to the order of Free Masonry" (Knight & Lomas 1997:266).

The whole narrative is told as from the perspective of the exiles from Babylon clearing the ruins of the First Temple. However it might better refer to the ruins of Herod's Temple and be recounting the discoveries of the Knights Templar.

The type of arch described in the ceremony is an arrangement of stones supporting each other in compression to form a curved load-bearing structure. Knight and Lomas claim this type of structure was unknown at the time of Zerubbabel.

Mare (1987:75) comments on a translation of 1 Kings 6:31 which interprets a pointed arch above the double door entrance of the *debîr* of the Temple of Solomon. In a footnote he refers to the pointed arch at the famous Lion gate at Mycenae in Greece, which dates from an earlier period (ca 1400 BCE).

Knight & Lomas comment that their actions are not consistent with those of a mason. They remove the keystones of an arch, without in anyway shoring up the rest of the arch or showing any concern for the now compromised integrity of the arch.

If the ritual is a reliable account of a genuine event and it certainly reads as such and if it is transposed in time from the destruction of the Temple of Solomon, to what may lie beneath the Dome of the Rock, it is certainly a reasonable account of a 12th century CE archaeological excavation.

## 8.4     The Order of Hospitallers

Immediately after the capture of Jerusalem, a knight named Gerald gathered together a group of knights to care for the sick and wounded in an improvised hospital. The innovation was that it was laymen – knights and not nuns or monks who assumed the care of the needy and not in terms of almsgiving or visiting – a unique contribution in the realm of social consciousness.

The knights of the "Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem," commonly known as the Hospitallers, devoted themselves to caring for pilgrims, and set up a hospital and a hostel near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

**Figure 16        Knight of the Order of St John (http://jeru.huji.ac.il/ef34.htm)**

The military Orders comprised a new institutional framework, the creation of the Crusader kingdom and its needs.

The description of John of Wurzburg (which probably covers the period 1160-1170) records: "Opposite the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which we described before, on the other side of the street leading south, there is a beautiful church built in honour of John the Baptist, and adjoining it there is a hospital in whose various rooms they gather great numbers of the sick, men and women, and heal them at great expense. When I was there, I saw that the numbers of the sick reach two thousand, of whom they sometimes carry out about fifty a day for burial - they die, and as many new sick people arrive there. What can I say? This foundation serves as many people outside as are within, and also assists with alms for the poor who beg for bread from door to door and have no house to live in, so that it is difficult to calculate the expenses of the foundation and the expenses of its overseers and labourers. Moreover, this foundation maintains many people in different fortresses, who are entrusted with the task of defending the land of the Christians against the invasion of the Saracens" http://jeru.huji.ac.il/ef34.htm.

The Hospitallers occupied the hospice of the church of St John and the nunnery of St Mary, which soon expanded to fill a whole quarter of the city. They associated themselves with St John

the Baptist. The Knights of St John eventually developed a military wing. Military orders were also developed by laymen.

## 8.5    Gate of the Chain

An ornate gate that still stands today was built during Crusader times.
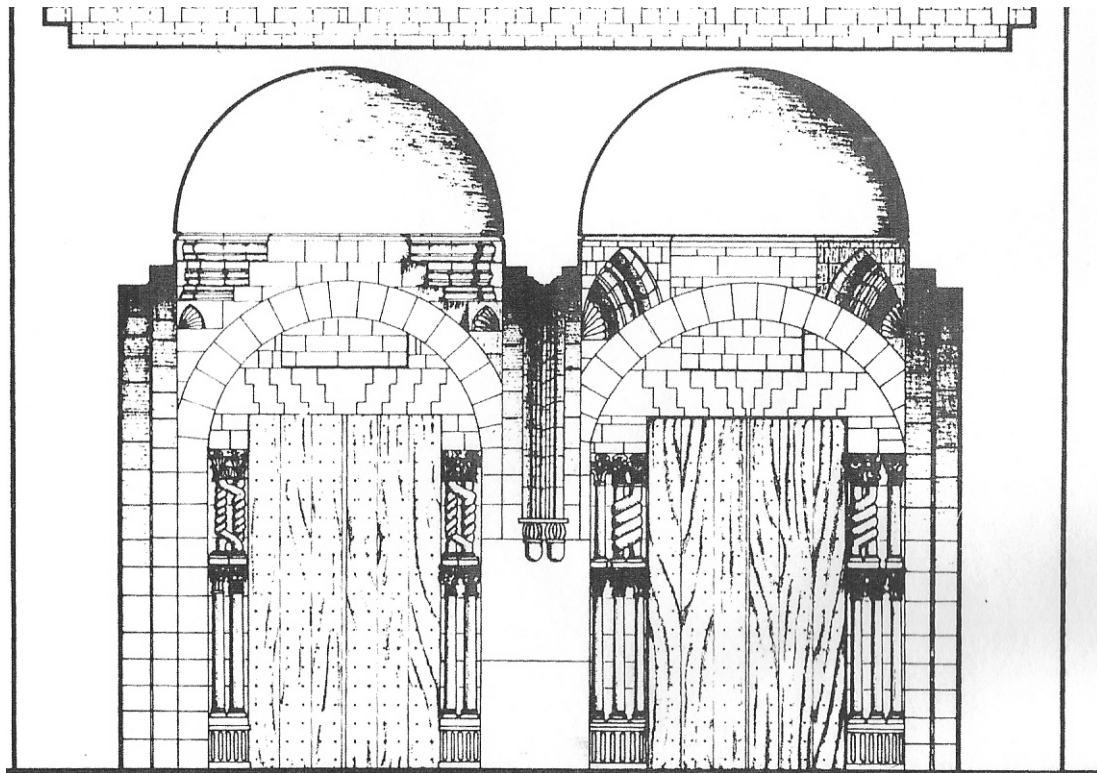


**Figure 17      The Gate of the Chain   (Ben-Dov 1990:64)**

A splendid gate was built as the main entrance to the Temple Mount enclosure where the Knights Templar had established their quarters and military command. Already from Herodian times a gate had stood there at the head of what would become known as Wilson's Arch. In the early days of Moslem rule, the arch was restored but at a lower level. At its head, twin gates were built whose names are known to us from 10th century Moslem sources. One was always called David's Gate and the other was sometimes referred to as Solomon's Gate, Abraham's Gate and even as the Gate of the Shekinah! (Ben-Dov 1990:64).

What is interesting about the Gate that stands there today is that it is largely of Crusader design – "its style among the finest examples of Crusader artistic creation…" (Ben Dov 1990:64).

The double portals of the gate are similar but not identical. Medieval art considered beauty to lie in the **absence of symmetry** in spatial relations – a move away from the absolute symmetry and proportion of Hellenistic art.

This new style is clearly apparent in the design of the façade of the Gate of the Chain. On either side of the southern entrance are three rows of free standing pillars superimposed on the other; whereas the northern side is adorned on each side by a similar arrangement comprised of two pillars rather than three. The capitals of the pillars on the southern door are carved with floral motifs; those of the northern one are embellished with intertwined figurines and floral motifs.

On one of the capitals, lions were fashioned and between them a figure of a man – Daniel in the Lion's Den became a popular motif in European medieval reliefs.



**Figure 18      Capital belonging to the Gate of the Chain   (Ben-Dov 1990:65)**

This is perhaps one of the first examples of a style that two centuries later would dominate the interior design of Rosslyn Chapel. The capital of Daniel in the Lions Den looks very much like a precursor to the figurines atop the capitals in Rosslyn chapel – a story carved in stone!

## 8.6      History of the Fall of the Templars.

The Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem had founded four military orders: the Knights Hospitallers, the Teutonic Knights, the Knights of St Lazarus and the Knights Templar.

The Templars were answerable only to the Pope. They were not bound to serve kings and owed no allegiance to any country. They were sworn to defend the pilgrim routes to Jerusalem.

Within two hundred years the Holy Land had been gained and lost to the Moslems and there was no realistic prospect of another crusade to win it back for Christendom. During that time the Templar Order had grown immensely, however their *raison d'être* was gone.

The Templars on leaving the Holy Land, after the disastrous end of the last crusade and the fall of Acre (1291), took temporary refuge in the island of Cyprus. After a few vain attempts to regain a footing in Palestine and to renew their contest with the Infidels, the Knights left Cyprus and returned to different *Commanderies* in Europe among which those in France were the wealthiest and the most numerous.

The 'poor' knights had grown rich and unpopular. The French King Philip IV wanted the lands and the wealth of the Templars. There was also a lot of disappointment at the failure of Christendom to recover Jerusalem. The Templars, considered a suitable scapegoat, were denounced and declared heretic in 1307.

The order was totally suppressed in France and its possessions confiscated. In October 1307 the French King Philip IV gave orders that all Templars across the whole of his kingdom were to be seized and imprisoned. Not a single member, high or low acknowledged a Secret Cult. The Templars, led to the flames proclaimed their orthodoxy again and again and affirmed their belief in the teaching of the Roman Church to the end.

It was not until March 1314 that the last Grand Master was burned at the stake. Recently researched historical documents found in the Vatican show that Pope Clement V did act against the Kings persecution and tried to save the Templars (Oxbrow 2005:180).

It does not seem that anyone outside France believed the charges against the Templars (Lambert 2002:199). Other monarchs in Europe also abolished the order but they did not execute its members. Templar Knights who escaped persecution in France must have fled to other countries.

There were Knights Templar in Scotland because we know that a Papal Bull was acted against them in December 1309. The Temple was very popular in Scotland and all but two of the brethren found refuge against the authorities, who did not seem to be at all anxious to capture them. At the Scottish inquisition (1309) these two prisoners were brought before the archbishop.

Forty two witnesses were produced against them. Henry St Clair, father of William gave evidence that they 'were not willing to offer hospitality to the poor' were 'very anxious to

acquire property of others for their Order by fair means or foul' and said that *their* fathers had asserted that 'if the Templars had been faithful Christians they would in no way have lost the Holy Land' Such feeble evidence convinced the court to pronounce the Order innocent and released the two accused (Oxbrow & Robertson 2005:126).

On 6th May 1312, Pope Clement issued a Bull in which he announced the abolition of the Temple. In Scotland, the Temple was united with the Hospital and the combined Order, under the name of St John and the Temple, survived until the Reformation (Campbell 1937:335).

What appears to be a genuine Templar seal was found about a mile away from the Rosslyn Chapel in the village of Roslin. In the Middle Ages a seal was the recognised way to show that a document was genuine. "…it certainly appears to be genuine and we have no reason to doubt its authenticity" (Oxbow & Robertson 2005:135).

The Templar Preceptory (community of the Knights Templar) was at Balantrodoch only a few miles south east of Rosslyn. It was founded in the 12th century by King David I. on the land that the St Clairs had given to their son-in law Hughes de Payne when he visited Scotland.

There is a story that tells of other Templars becoming part of the thirty thousand strong army of Robert Bruce, who was Robert I, King of Scotland. His army marched to victory against the hundred thousand men of King Edward of England. The Templars distinguished themselves at the Battle of Bannockburn (1314).

Oxbrow & Robertson (2005:235) recount another story of a Templar called D'Aumont who with seven others, disguised as Operative Masons, fled into Scotland, in order to escape from the persecution that followed the suppression of the Order by the King of France.

In Scotland these Templars founded a new Order. They called themselves Franc Masons. They wanted to preserve the Templar traditions as well as to honour the Masons in whose clothing they had escaped. The word Franc means both France and Free, since most of the Templars were French, the title *Free Mason* was a subtle way of retaining their memory.

"As the ancient Order had been originally established for the purpose of rebuilding the Temple of Jerusalem, the new Order maintained their bond of union and preserved the memory and design of their predecessors by building symbolically spiritual temples consecrated to Virtue,

Truth and Light, and to the honour of the Grand Architect of the Universe"
(Oxbrow & Robertson 2005:235).

This tradition devoid of sound historical evidence has nevertheless "exerted a powerful influence on the Masonic organization of even the present day" (Oxbrow & Robertson 2005:237).

## 8.7 The Social Context of the Middle Ages

## The European World as it was just before the Construction of Rosslyn Chapel

The ethos of chivalry was the most sublime expression of the spirit of the Middle Ages. It was a system of ideals expressed in rules of behaviour, which existed for many centuries before they were recorded and codified. It was a code of conduct that endorsed bravery in battle accompanied by loyalty and solidarity with comrades-in-arms.

When Italian merchants started to bring soft silks and brocades to Europe, armour was exchanged for softer clothing and women began to adorn themselves in these beautiful materials and would appear in the castle halls, often as the centre of social life and the focus of the noble household. Courtesy and manners befitting the assembly were created. "Chivalry (has) survived in the concept of the gentleman…and in rules of behaviour appropriate to a civilised society" (Prawer 1972:100).

Faith was a never questioned reality, it was an integral part of everyday life which accompanied feasts and seasons and all major events in life from birth to death.

"Nothing was nearer to the heart of medieval man than rites and **symbols**. This mentality was partially a legacy of earlier belief in the magic (power) of the rite and the spoken word and partially the outcome of living in a world…that everyday language described only with difficulty, a reality more easily expressed by the symbol, which was often taken for reality itself" (Prawer 1972:108).

Medieval men, though often on the road, were seldom absent from their homes for long periods. This was not the case for the men who joined the Crusades. Provided he survived disease, exhaustion, pirating and war, a Knight would be away for at least two years – an unusually long period of time.

The Church took the lead in transforming the fighting man into a Christian Knight. The honour of Christendom was at stake. The occupation of Jerusalem by the Moslems made the Christian life shameful. The righteousness of the wielding of arms was attributed to a moral cause. The Crusades provided the first opportunity for Knights throughout Christendom to come together under the banner of a common goal (Prawer 1972:105).

Going on a Crusade, like everything else in the code of Chivalry turned into a rite. The act of bestowing Knighthood was performed by an older man officiated over by a Priest who bestowed a blessing on the young man which extended to his sword and his lance.

The tie between chivalry and the Crusades remained a force for two hundred years. It included some ten successive generations of movement to the Orient and another two hundred years in military expeditions against the Mamelukes, Mongols and Turks.

French culture was almost universally dominant in Crusader society. Latin was used in correspondence but French was the *lingua franca* spoken throughout the area (Prawer 1972:119).

In time the Crusaders struck their own gold, silver and copper coins. The most curious Crusader coins were those struck in the middle of the 13th century on which an Arabic inscription praised the Holy Trinity (Prawer 1972:139).

The period of the Crusades coincided with the first great exploration of the inhabited world. The crusades had created physical and psychological conditions conducive to exploration. By the 12th century, European merchants would no longer wait at ports for camel caravans they found their way into the hinterland and by the 13th century, the 'line of profit' had reached beyond the limits of the Euro-Asian continent.

Wider knowledge was to be found among the people engaged in transport rather than among scholars. The medieval man had an acute feel for the marvellous. The new world which was perceived in a fog of description, together with the tangible proofs of its existence in the form of oriental wares, was one more of God's marvels.

Towards the end of the 13th century and even more so in the 14th century, the Crusades were anachronistic with the development in European life. The Pan-Christian ideology of the 11th century was split in a struggle between spiritual and temporal polarities which had

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disempowered authority and weakened Europe on all fronts. Disillusionment and criticism of the crusades necessitated a different solution to the problem of access to the Holy Land. A new idea was promulgated – conversion – preach the Gospel to the infidel!

Dominicans and Franciscans accepted this challenge and established small local communities in distant places – the zeal of mission had begun!

## 8.8    The Franciscans

The Roman Catholic Church is represented in Jerusalem by the Franciscan Order. They are the self-appointed custodians of the Christian holy places.

At the beginning of the 13th century, Christendom was greatly troubled. Moslems were at its doors in the east, west and south. For over a century vast amounts of energy, money and manpower had been poured into the Crusades – yet very little had actually been achieved. By the end of the first quarter of the 13th century an even greater danger had appeared on the horizon – the Mongols from the depths of Asia under the bold and resourceful leadership of Chengis Khan.

How could an even greater effort be made to rally the faithful to give of their best in the cause of God's Holy war and by crushing the heathen to make Europe safe for Christianity forever?

To exchange the sword and force for the Cross and love became the preferred idea. The Friars Minot of St Francis were seen as ideal for the task of evangelising the Saracens – since they had 'everything to gain and nothing to lose' (Moorman 1968:226).

St Francis himself had undertaken an expedition to Egypt (1219 – 1220) and had returned full of zeal for the work which he had begun. It was natural that the Friars should wish to gain a footing in the Holy Land. The capture and possession of the places associated with the earthly life of Christ had been a fundamental objective of the Crusades. It was also an idea which appealed strongly to the followers of St Francis.

In 1244 Jerusalem was lost. In 1291 Christians were driven out of the Holy Land altogether leaving only ruins behind them. During these troubled years the Friars had done their best to keep a footing in the Holy Land. After the fall of Acre (1291) the Friars had to conduct their work from the island of Cyprus where they had established five convents.

Meanwhile various attempts were being made to get back into Palestine. In 1322 King James II of Aragon, after persistent requests to the Sultan, received permission to send twelve Dominican Friars to the Holy City to take charge of the Holy Sepulchre and reopen it as a place of pilgrimage for Christians.

Shortly afterwards the Dominicans were replaced by twelve Franciscans. Thus it was that after many years the first of the Holy Places came back into Christian custody.

Five years later the King and Queen of Naples offered the Sultan a large sum of money for the acquisition of the *Cenaculum* – the house in which the last supper is believed to have been held – and for the two chapels that were adjacent to it. They also acquired the Valley of Jehoshaphat, the traditional Sepulchre of the Virgin Mary as well as the Grotto of the Nativity at Bethlehem.

By 1336 the Franciscans had charge of four Holy places associated with the Birth, Passion and Death of Christ and the death of His Mother.

In 1353 a hospice was established in Jerusalem which was also placed in the custody the Franciscan house. In that year, a traveller called Ludolf, who stayed in a monastery in Jerusalem, occupied by a number of Friars wrote: 'All pilgrims and merchants and even the Saracens themselves, are full of praise for the work which the Friars are doing' (quoted by Moorman 1968:436 – his reference Golubovich *Biblioteca* iv: 25).

"One by one the places associated with the life of Christ, of the Apostles and John the Baptist came under the care of the Franciscans, who remain, to this day, their guardians" (Moorman 1968:437).

### 8.8.1    The Franciscan Cross
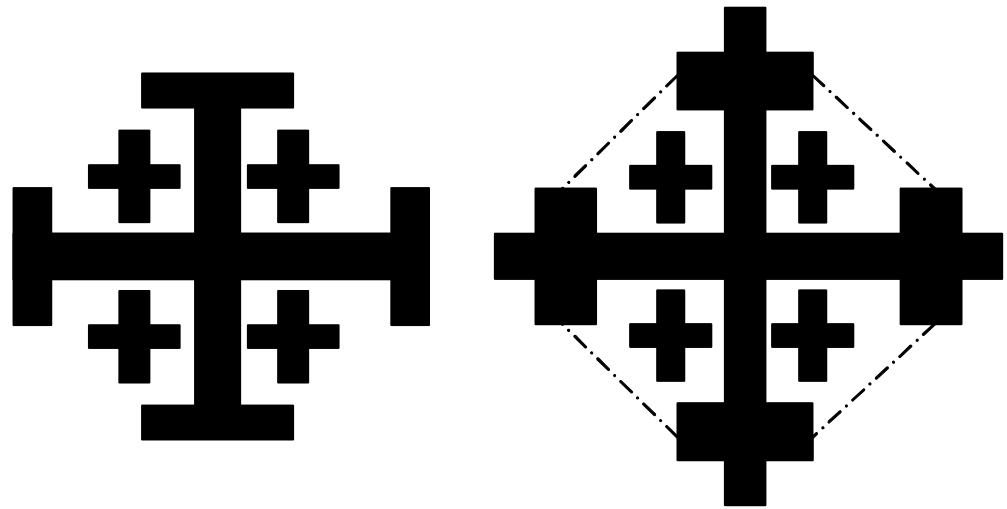


**Figure 19       Franciscan Cross   (M Parker-Wood)**

The Franciscan Cross is also a symbol of Jerusalem. The extended figure demonstrates the eight-sided, octangular-shape encapsulated within the design and also by extension the presence of eight crosses.

The drawing on the left is the Franciscan or Jerusalem Cross. If one looks at the extrapolation in the drawing on the right, one can see that besides the obvious eight sides, the badge also comprises eight crosses. Since this dissertation is inclined towards the evidence that the Dome of the Rock was originally a Christian construction it could be that this cross is a way in which this information could have been preserved.

The eight sides of this emblem of Jerusalem are to be found throughout Rosslyn Chapel. Since we know that the Templars equated the Dome of the Rock with The Temple of Jerusalem it is reasonable to presume that they were honouring this Temple within the building they were creating in Scotland.

## 8.9    Balantrodoch

Balantrodoch was one of the first pieces of land donated to the Knights Templar outside the Holy Land. In 1128 the St Clair family had given the ground to Hughes de Payne. It was given to the Templars by David I of Scotland a few months before the Order was officially recognised at the Council of Troyes in January 1129. A surviving letter of thanks for the land written to David by their patron, Bernard of Clairvaux, is dated June 1128. (Although the Council of Troyes is dated as January 1128 in contemporary records, because the New Year began in March in the Middle Ages, this would be 1129 in modern reckoning).



**Figure 20        Ruined Templar Church at Balantrodoch   (www.mcnap.com)**

The name 'Balantrodoch', by which the area was known before it was occupied by the Templars means 'settlement of the warrior'. It is a terrace of land in a bend of the South Esk, about 10 miles south of Edinburgh and only 4 miles from Rosslyn Chapel.

Balantrodoch became the Templar headquarters in Scotland throughout the two centuries of the Order's pre-eminence. The Preceptor of Balantrodoch was one of just two Templars brought before a Church court during the suppression of the Order in the years 1307-1312.

The church built on the estate by the Templars in the 13th century passed into the possession of the Knights Hospitallers in 1312. In 1535, in the religious reformations ordered by Henry VIII, it became the parish church of the village, which was renamed Temple in 1618. Today the church stands derelict but in a relatively intact state in the centre of the village.

## 8.10    Pillars in Scotland in the 13th Century at Dunstaffnage

The three photographs below were taken at the ruined chapel at Dunstaffnage which was built during the 14th century on land belonging to the Castle. The site is about five miles north of Oban on the west coast of Scotland. It was to this castle that the *Stone of Destiny* was brought from Ireland via Iona. The stone was used at the coronation of Scottish kings and today can be seen in the Edinburgh Castle.

This chapel was built in the middle of the thirteenth century, about the same time as the main walls of the castle.

All the doors and also the windows around the main altar were highly decorated, providing an impressive setting for worship by the castle's inhabitants. The main entrance was on the south side. The chapel was divided into two parts by a wooden screen, which fitted into a socket high up in the north and south walls. To the east of this screen was the chancel which housed the main altar. West of the screen was the nave, where the layfolk gathered for worship, and for whom there may have been additional altars.

In 1740, long after the chapel had become ruinous, a burial enclosure was built against the east wall for the Campbells of Dunstaffnage.

**Figure 21      History of the Chapel at Dunstaffnage   (Photograph M Parker-Wood)**

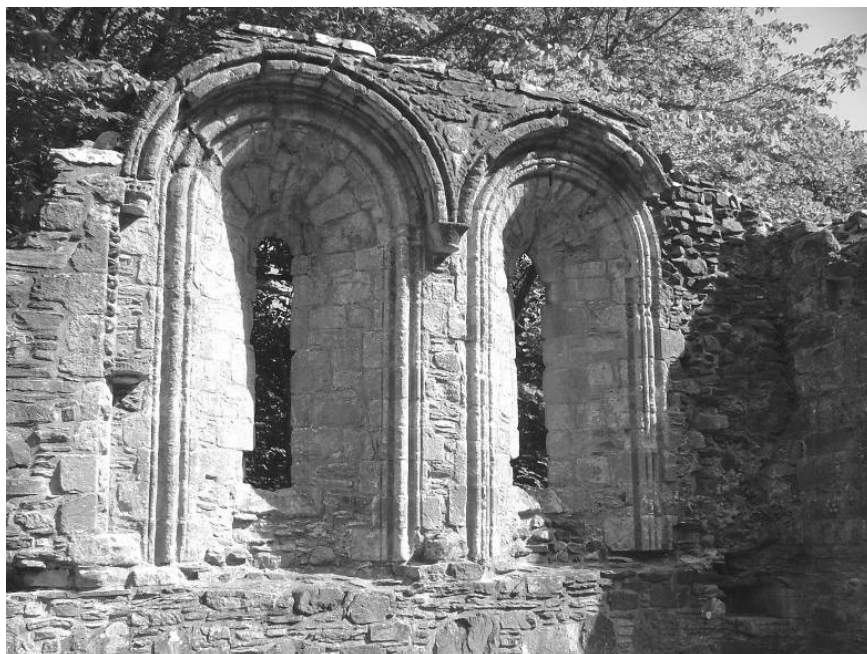**Figure 22     Re-creation of the Chapel of Dunstaffnage   (Photograph M Parker-Wood)**



**Figure 23     Arched Forms at Dunstaffnage Chapel   (Photograph M Parker-Wood)**

The second photograph is a re-creation of what the chapel would have looked like. It is of interest because of the prominence given to the two, non-identical pillars. If one looks at the structure of the roof over the altar area it is obvious that it is an incomplete octagon.

The twin-arched forms repeat in the chapel. These configurations are reminiscent of the tablets of Moses. There is no evidence of a Christian cross. Except for the clothing of the monks the *Sitz im Leben* of the decoration belongs to the Israelite tradition.

## 8.11    The Kabalistic Tradition

The Kabala is an explanation of the way God brought forth creation, the relationship between heaven and earth and how this knowledge should enable humankind as manifest spiritual beings to interact with the un-manifest, metaphysical realm, during our physical sojourn on earth.

Moses de León considered to be an author of the Zohar, was influenced by the Maimonidean interpretation of esotericism which was based on "letting that which is hidden appear and that which appears remain hidden" (Wolfson 1999:149).

This mystic tradition included a feminine figure 'Shekinah' which represents God's presence on earth. For the medieval Kabalists the concealed name is correlated with the masculine and the revealed name with the feminine. Consequently the feminine is assigned the paradoxical role of representing that which cannot be represented.

The Zoharic attitude towards the hermeneutics of esotericism demonstrates time and again that concealment and disclosure are linked in dialectical tension. Even when that which is hidden is revealed, the revealed still remains hidden. Affirmation of both presence and absence is evident in the Hidden God who in concealment reveals the presence of concealment to us.

*"… 'O my dove,' this is the Community of Israel. ' In the cranny of the rock.' This is Jerusalem for it rises above the rest of the world. Just as a rock is supernal to and stronger than everything, so Jerusalem is supernal to and stronger than everything. 'Hidden by the cliff.' This is the place that is called the Holy of Holies, the heart of the world. Therefore it is written 'hidden by the cliff', for there the Shekinah is hidden like the woman who is modest (senu'ah) in relation to her husband and she does not depart from the house to the outside, as it is written, 'Your wife should be as a fruitful vine within your house' (Psalm 128:3)"* (Zohar 1:84b cf Wolfson 1999:136).

Concealment is always linked to the feminine. The intrinsic hiddenness of the feminine is linked to the verse from Song of Solomon where the woman, a virgin, is compared poetically to the images of a locked garden. 'She is a garden enclosed, a sealed fountain' (Song of Songs 4:12).

Another passage in the Zohar 3:74b describes the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple as a separation of the Matrona from The King. Conversely **the construction of the Temple below as the place of dwelling for the divine glory parallels the unification above between the masculine and the feminine aspects of the divine,** the blessed Holy One and the Shekinah. The Shekinah will be concealed within the rebuilt Temple like a woman who is compared metaphorically to the fruitful vine hidden within the house (Wolfson 1999:138).

*"Your wife is a fruitful vine*
*in the inner places of your house"*

(NJB Psalm 128:3).

Male modesty is dependent on the female "just as the concealment of secrets is dependent on the enclosure of the feminine potency within the proper spatial boundaries of the idealized Holy of Holies" (Wolfson 1999:141).This sacred area provides a shelter to cover and protect the Shekinah. This picture brings to mind the beautiful cherubim that are reported to have shielded the ark within the Holy of Holies in Solomon's Temple.

The enclosure of the feminine within the masculine is portrayed in the geometric image of the midpoint of the circle. Wolfson (1999:143) suggests that the point of the centre of the circle signifies the aspect of the female that is anatomically homologous to the male. [homologous: having a related position but a different function (Collins)].

When the feminine potency is concentrated in the centre of the circle she is described in overtly phallic terms as the foundation stone or the spring that overflows and sustains all things.

The concealed feminine represents the body of secrecy, but in that hiddenness she has been transposed into the male. For the exclusively male Kabalists the 'the locus of secrets' would be in the female envisioned as part of the male (Wolfson 1999:143).

The Jewish convert is compared to overlaying or dressing the esoteric in exoteric apparel – the dissimulation of the Jewish soul and the donning of the garment of Christianity. Superficially the two would appear to be diametrically opposed "but for the wise one …the two are not radically

distinct at all, for the truth of the internal is beheld precisely from the external covering" (Wolfson 1999:144).

The Zohar (2:214b cf Wolfson 1999:145) also sees the Ark of the Covenant fulfilling the essential role of the female to contain the male – the Shekinah that contains the mystery of the divine anthropos. It is understandable how this line of thought led Christians to refer to Mary as the Ark of the Covenant (7.2 above).

The hidden woman is the modest wife secluded in the house, which parallels the enclosure of the Shekinah in the Holy of Holies. The female is united in secrecy with the male and as a result of that union she becomes the fruitful vine - an image that clearly conveys the act of bestowal and fruition, traits that are generally associated with the male. "The woman who is sealed up in the house becomes the fruitful vine, for she is transformed into the male, and the power that receives is the power that bestows" (Wolfson 1999:147).

Kabalists were operating with a clear-cut principle of gender transformation rooted in an unambiguous androcentric perspective. The principle of the male androgyne as the containment of the female in the male; ***the left in the right*** (Wolfson 1999:151). Their androcentric paradigm was so pervasive that even the obviously feminine such as birthing and lactation were seen as masculine traits.

This does not mean that the Zohar celebrated the female any less than the male – only that the "positive characteristics of the Shekinah are predicated on a gendered axiology that Kabalists shared with other men living in medieval European cities, enhanced as well by biblical and rabbinic sources" (Wolfson 1999:153).

Some Kabalists believe that although the Jews are dispersed around the world and the Temple no longer exists – the Shekinah can still be invoked during the preparations for the Sabbath – for many Jews the Shekinah and the Sabbath are synonymous since both represent *'The Bride of God'*. Friday evening attains cosmic significance as they celebrate the divine as well as their own sexual union on the Sabbath. The Shekinah is God's own consort – the man is filled with 'additional soul' which comes to be within his body during the time of Sabbath.

The Shekinah was enormously popular in Jewish Folk religion – as people found their real needs met once again as Asherah had met them long ago.

## 8.12　Celtic Religion

"Celtic religion bears the impress of nature on earth far more than nature in the heavens" (Anwyl 1906:67).

Other people raised temples to their gods; for the Celtic tribes, it is in the wild solitude of the sacred woodland, where they meet with their gods. Their mythical world is a sacred forest, pathless and unbounded, which is inhabited by mysterious powers (Sjoestedt 1994:92).

Every strange feature of the land is the crystallisation of a myth. There is a continuity in space and time between our physical world and the other world or worlds.

Everywhere amongst the Celts there is this dialectic between the sacred and magic. The gods are regarded as master magicians. "The sacred and the magical are not distinct notions" (Sjoestedt 1994:13).

One is struck by the multiplicity of the names of the gods. Of 374 names attested from inscriptions 305 occur only once. So many names would suggest that these were tribal gods (Sjoestedt. 1994:14).

Triple figures are important. Gods that have three heads or three faces and groups of three goddesses are commonly found. The triad formula which combines three facts or three precepts is a genre which dominates the Celtic tradition.

The earth came to be regarded as the Mother, the Queen, the Long-lived one, from whom all things came. The progeny of the Earth Mother were the spirits of the springs, rivers, mountains, forests, trees and corn. Animals and other natural phenomena were also endowed with spirit.

Oak tree groves, the oak tree itself, its leaves and acorns and the parasitic mistletoe (provided it was attached to an oak tree) were held in high regard.

The most dearly loved goddess was Brigit - she survives today in the Christian Saint Brigid. "The saint has faithfully preserved the character of the goddess: being a *Mother-Goddess*, she watches over child-birth and modern folklore makes her the midwife of the Blessed Virgin; as goddess of prosperity, she brings abundance to the country hearths which she visits, leaving her

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footprint in the ashes; as seasonal goddess she has her feast on the day of the great pagan feast of purification, *Imbolc*, the first of February" (Sjoestedt 1994:25).

Some of the mother goddesses appear as warriors. These goddesses of war are not warriors rather they reign over the battlefield without joining in the fray. They do not have to strike a blow to cause confusion and confound an army. Whenever Morrigan is induced to participate in warfare – mystical influence will win the day. She comes to the fight in disguise, as an eel which winds itself around the legs of the antagonist, or as a wolf driving frightened herds against him or as a red cow with horns.

There is a sacred Tree of Medb (*Bile Medba*). Her personality represents the complete type of deity who is at the same time a mother and a warrior. This tradition extends into modern folklore in the form of *cailleacha* (old women) in Ireland and Scotland and *mamau* (mothers) in Wales.

The religious mind of the Celts was drawn to a contemplation of the earth and her varied life. The bonfires of the First of November, New Year (*Samain*) and also on First of May (*Beltane*), Midsummer and August were associated with the seasonal cycles of her being and the spirits that were her children.

This is the time when the invisible magic partition which separates the natural and the supernatural world from each other, is withdrawn and the two worlds become one.

*Samain* is one of the four great feasts of the Celtic year. It is not the feast of any single deity rather of the whole world of spirits whose intrusion into the physical world takes on a threatening and warlike air. This was a time when people from outlying areas came together in a sacred place to celebrate the feast. The year began with the night (just as it does now with Scottish Hogmanay!) Then, time was counted not by days but by nights. The night belongs to neither one year nor the other, it is free from temporal restraint and the supernatural world is attracted to this corridor.

The Christian church has incorporated this Feast of all Spirits into the Feast of all Saints – First of November is All Saints Day. Despite a distinct change of nuance between the two festivals in terms of the reciprocal relationship between the visible and invisible worlds, the mythological significance has not been obliterated.

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The Celtic calendar is not regulated by the solar year i.e. solstice and equinox but by the agrarian and pastoral year; the beginning and the end of the tasks of cattle raising and agriculture. Celtic mythology is dominated by goddesses of earth; there are no solar deities (Sjoestedt 1994:52).

The Celtic mind did not regard the male god Dagda, father, nurturer, and protector of the tribe, warrior, magician and craftsman, the male principle of society as being in opposition to the female principle of nature. The social group had to conciliate its activity with and within the forces of nature. Their religious worldview encompassed an integrated multiplicity of form and function. "All is magic, and no activity can be effective unless it has an element of magic" (Sjoestedt 1994:94).

The Romans called the people they encountered in the area we call Scotland, 'Picts'. They were highly skilled craftspeople. They created beautiful silver jewellery and carved fabulous, symbolic stones of deer, eagles and magical sea creatures. When Christianity arrived amongst these people they incorporated into their symbolic work carved wheel crosses covered in intricate knot-work and decorative spirals.

The Celtic mind was preoccupied with the all pervading and animating spirit of the picturesque landscape. Celtic scenery and myth has added a charm to the Celtic lands which has been absorbed by their inhabitants and is transformed into a fierce and indefatigable national pride.

### 8.12.1    The Druids

The Druids were associated with the Celts. "Diodorus Siculus calls attention to the Druidic doctrine that the souls of men were immortal, and that after the lapse of an appointed number of years they came to life again, the soul entering into another body" (Anwyl 1906:46).

Julius Caesar encountered the Druids in Britain. They held immunity from military service and the payment of tribute. The Druids did not commit their religious teaching to writing. Training could take up to twenty years. Reliance on writing would impede the cultivation of the memory.

He too recalls that their cardinal doctrine was that the soul did not die; after death it passed from one person to another. "This they regarded as a supreme incentive to valour; since with the prospect of immortality, the fear of death counted for nothing" (Anwyl 1906:50).

They were also interested in the movements of the stars, the greatness of the universe, the nature of things, and the strength and power of the immortal gods who could not be appeased unless a human life was sacrificed. Let us not forget that this idea is not far removed from the Christian doctrine of vicarious atonement.

## 8.13    Summary of Chapter 8

From the early 7th century CE Islam gained control of the southern Mediterranean seaboard. Not until the 11th century did the Holy places create a melancholic longing within Christians that developed into a religious frenzy. Faith and the Crusades were inextricably linked their mission was to free the Holy Sepulchre from Moslem control.

Jerusalem was captured in 1099. Baldwin was crowned King of Jerusalem in Bethlehem establishing his claim as a successor of King David. He gave the Al-Aksa mosque on the Temple Mount to the Knights Templar. They identified themselves with the Maccabees of the second century BCE and regarded the Dome of the Rock as a remnant of the Temple of Jerusalem. The Order was founded by Hughes de Payne a relative by marriage to the St Clairs of Roslin who granted the new Order land at Balantrodoch.

The Templars always carried a portable chapel during their military operations; the tents of the knights were pitched around it. They had a passion for mystery. The Rule of the Order was kept confidential. Brothers were only instructed in the sections relevant to their rank. Templar liturgy always addressed God and Lady Mary together. The Gate of the Chain presents beauty as it is to be found in asymmetry. It also shows two sets of non identical pillars and has capitals which incorporate the Proto-Aeolic fronds as well as stone carvings of lions and Daniel in the style found in Rosslyn Chapel. Jewish communities were rebuilt in Galilee, Tyre and Acre.

The Templars surely explored below ground. The Masonic Royal Arch Ceremony is detailed to show what exploration might have been like but also because this tradition has survived. The second hypothesis of this dissertation is based on the probability that the Templars found old texts and perhaps artefacts beneath the Dome of the Rock where the Temple of Solomon is thought to have stood. Despite being loyal Roman Catholics they may have been led to an understanding of Early Israelite Religion that differed from how it is presented in the Old Testament.

The period of the Crusades coincided with the first great exploration of the world. Italian merchants brought beautiful materials to Europe. Noble women began to participate in social life. Chivalry was a code of conduct based on honour that required men to be brave in battle and behave appropriately towards other men and women. Faith was a reality in the lives of people. The magic of symbols and the power of the spoken rites were still relevant; the symbol could be taken as reality itself.

The number of Europeans was too small to secure the Christian colonies in the Middle East as political entities. By the end of the 13th century the Knights had been expelled from Palestine; from Cyprus they returned to Europe. In 1307 Philip IV of France declared the Order of Knights Templar heretic, confiscated their properties, tortured and executed their members. There were Templars in Scotland at that time.

The Franciscans were able to retain control of the Holy Places in Jerusalem. Their unique cross is the symbol of Jerusalem. It represents of the eight sides of the Dome of the Rock. The bases of the pillars in Rosslyn Chapel are all octangular.

Kabala is a medieval mystical metaphysic that distinguished between a masculine *Name of God* and a feminine *Presence of God* or the Shekinah. Concealment, Absence // Presence, Revealing. These attributes are not opposite to each other. Each single concept defines itself in terms of the other three concepts; and exists only because it is in relation to each of the other three concepts. Each word, which is only the symbol of the idea, can be used to describe each of the other three separate ideas. Each word / idea becomes the other. The four ideas are actually the one reality of God. Consider the yin / yang hemispheres or the dot in the centre of the circle or Lapps cultic stand where Yahweh was 'present' in the empty space, 'absence'.

Concealment is always feminine. The virgin is locked in the garden; the Shekinah is hidden in the 'Holy of Holies. The feminine is hidden within the masculine and in this most secret place the feminine becomes fruitful and at this sacred time when the masculine is concealed within the feminine, the gender roles are switched. The gender that gives is the same as the gender that receives. This fluidity is not capricious but characteristic of a God who is at the same time present and absent; revealed yet concealed. .It is also a good description of Yahweh and his a/Asherah.

This androcentric philosophy was relevant to people on different levels. For Official Religion it offered a monotheistic God who both creates and nurtures. For ordinary folk it deepened their experience of the Presence of God as they welcomed the Sabbath as the Bride of God.

Celtic religion was centred on nature; understanding of the sacred was in terms of mystery and magic. It was bound to the earth and experienced in the solitude of the sacred woodlands. Earth was the Mother and Queen from whom all things came. The children of this Earth Mother were the spirits of the springs and rivers, mountains and forests. Animals and all natural phenomena were endowed with spirit. The Celtic calendar followed the agricultural year – there are no solar deities. Festivals included times of transition when the supernatural and the natural world integrated in a sacred merge.

# Chapter 9   Summary of Israelite Religion and History

Religious Background of the Early Israelites and History linked to Rosslyn Chapel

The quintessential cornerstone of this thesis is the Worldview of the Ancient Israelites that held that any created thing is not in itself inherently holy – it receives the quality of holiness only through its relation to Yahweh. Yahweh is the source of all Life and Yahweh is primordially associated with the sea. Asherah bears the pseudonym *Lady of the Sea.*

Today we know that the Old Testament is a post-exilic redaction of earlier texts that were censored by early rabbinic scholars to create the impression of a pure monotheistic patriarchal religion that was supposed to have been accepted by All Israel. Their work can be seen as a theological attempt to understand the Exile and to ensure that such a calamity did not happen again. Their interpretation of the Exile was essentially that it was a punishment from God because they had erred from the Covenant. If things were to be set right again, obedience to God and proper worship had to be practiced.

Textual criticism has unveiled for us the presence of many different theologies within this apparently purist theology that we have inherited. Linguistic studies and reworked translations now provide us with a picture that is different to what has always been put forward.

The old dichotomies have become strangely blurred but the new vision does not destroy the old. Rather it complements and gives a more human character to the pre-exilic Israelite perception of the Divine.

The Israelites arrived in the Hill Country ca 1200 BCE and were immediately surrounded by Canaanite culture and religion. The Old Testament has always posited *Canaanite* and *Baal* as the unacceptable *Other.* Since the discovery of the Ugaritic Texts we have learnt of the sacred stories of the religion of the Canaanites and know that some of their traditions were already part of or were soon accepted into the Israelite belief system.

El and Asherah, the major role players in the Ugaritic Texts were acknowledged by the Israelites. Canaanite theology was founded on family relationships. Yahweh subsumed many of the attributes and characterises of El as well as the Lady Asherah. They played an important role in the developing concept of Yahweh. Already in these texts the idea of an intercessor between the

one who has a need and the Divine is clearly evident. The roles later taken on in Israelite religion and Christianity by Prophets, Priests and Mary, were performed only by Asherah.

The Old Testament has not hidden the fact that the Early Israelites worshipped in High Places – *bamôt*. They are known to have erected stones and altars; at that time Israel was a heavily wooded country; it was natural that these places would be surrounded by trees. The numinous of these shaded areas led to Asherah being associated with the tree; later to become stylized in the form of the palmetto and still later in the form of Aeolic style capitals. After the Exile the menorah becomes a Jewish symbol. Its early form is reminiscent of a stylized tree (Figure 1).

Through the centuries the image of the feminine divine undergoes subtle changes in Israel's attempts to present a monotheistic religion. In the wisdom literature, Wisdom is introduced as a feminine complement to Yahweh. Lady Wisdom is identified with the Spirit and Word of God. She was present when God made the world and continues to fill and hold in being God's creation. Not a person separate from God but identical to the Spirit of God *"...a pure effusion of the glory of the Almighty"* (NJB Wisdom 7:25b).

The Rod is a symbolic link between the Tree in the Garden of Eden, Moses the Jewish Patriarch and the Cross of Christianity. It takes on the role of the Chain of the Forefathers, which connects, creation, revelation and redemption. Here is the earliest link with the two pillars in Rosslyn chapel. The pillars of Boaz and Jachin are decorated with filigree, probably stylized chains, as are the two pillars in Rosslyn Chapel. There is a tradition that Solomon placed the rod in his Temple in Jerusalem.

Israelite Religion was never monochromatic. Three layers of religious practice are discernable. The Monarchy particularly in the Southern Kingdom ruled by Divine Right and sort to control and subsume religion under the rubric of the Jerusalem Temple. The existence of the a/Asherah (asherah as the pole or Asherah as the goddess) appears to have been common. It is testified to by the royal pogroms of Hezekiah, Manasseh and Josiah as well as the tirades of the Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Micah.

The Ancient Israelites interpreted the prohibition against imaging in different ways. For El and Yahweh this edict is never compromised although they did make use of signs and symbols. We are aware of *massebôt*, altars and the sacred pole or tree. If the *massebôt* were considered to be holy they must have been related to Yahweh. In numerous places including, Jerusalem, Arad and

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Megiddo archaeological excavation has revealed stones carefully laid on their sides and deliberately buried – presumably as an act of reverence for that which was considered to be holy. The figuring of the cherubim was never condemned. They were the protectors of the Holy Name and the empty space filled by Yahweh. There is evidence of pillar-based clay figurines that were popular for over four centuries including the post-exilic type that continued well into the Persian period.

The Kuntillet 'Ajrûd inscription may indicate that Yahweh was linked either with the goddess Asherah or with the sacred pole, established in certain geographical areas such as Samaria and Teiman – which may in any event have been a symbol of the goddess.

The building of the Temple in Jerusalem is attributed to King Solomon. It was built on Mount Moriah either on or very close to the site of the present day Dome of the Rock. It is similar in style to other ANE temples. It contained a *debîr* or Holy of Holies but was different to all other temples in that it did not house any kind of image or representation of the Holy Name of God.

The Old Testament gives a detailed, but fanciful account of two tall pillars that stood outside the Temple. These pillars were given different names which may have referred to attributes of the divine such as Constancy and Faithfulness. The pillars were only clad in bronze. The unadorned pillars may have been left behind after Ahaz had used the Temple treasures to pay tribute to the Assyrians. Other 10th century ANE Temples made use of Proto-Aeolic capitals that incorporate the stylized palm tree motif associated with the goddess, particularly Asherah.

Solomon's Temple was spoiled by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. The Persians, under Cyrus, allowed exiles who so wished, to repatriate. Zerubbabel, as their civil leader, was given the responsibility of restoring the Temple.

Israelite religion survived the exile in the form of personal piety. The experience of family relationships once again became attached to Yahweh. It is well established that the terracotta figurines of this period belonged to the household. It was during the Persian period that vaulted rooms are first found.

Post-Biblical Judaism created a new concept of feminine divinity in the Shekinah. The Shekinah is not separate from the Divine. This feminine element of the Spirit of God is regressed in history

to become the Cloud of the Exodus, the Spirit that filled the Temple and progresses to become the Bride of the Sabbath.

Ostensibly Herod's temple was a contemporary architectural form. It is thought that the fashionable additions were built around the original Temple. This Temple was only raised after the rebellion of the Jews in 70 CE – thereafter no Jew was permitted to live within Jerusalem. After the end of the ministry of Jesus, there existed in Jerusalem a group of people known as Messianic Jews; after appeal, Vespasian granted them permission to return to the city.

The Dome of the Rock stands on the Temple Mount. There is controversy as to when it was built since its architecture, construction and decoration do not fit the pattern of other Moslem buildings of that period such as the Al-Aksa Mosque and the Great Mosque in Damascus. It is possible that the blueprints for its construction and decoration were determined during the time of Constantine, in consultation with the Messianic Jews. There is a vast space beneath the Al–Aksa mosque and it is believed that a similar space exists beneath the Dome of the Rock.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus was a significant figure in the life and interpretation of Jesus. The old traditions of the rod of Moses reappear. The tree that the builders did not know how to use in the Temple is revived. The wood from which the Cross was made is cut from this tree that grew at the Pool of Bethesda, the pool in which the animals were washed before being sacrificed in the Temple. Solomon had thrown the tree into the pool because he had been told that one day the Kingdom of the Jews would be destroyed by One who would hang upon that tree. Roman Catholic appreciation of Mary differs significantly from Protestant understanding. Be that as it may more than eighty percent of Christians acknowledge her as *Theotokos* whose intercession and assistance never fails.

The Collyridians were a group of women, mentioned in the 5th century CE who had continued the practice of making cakes for the Queen of Heaven, as had been reported by Jeremiah.

Initially heresy helped the Church define its doctrines by forcing the Church Fathers to take note of various theological opinions. Later it was a cruel tool used to maintain orthodoxy.

The Knights Templar are the link between the old Israelite religion and the 15th Century Rosslyn Chapel. The order was founded shortly after the capture of Jerusalem, by Hughes de Payne, a relative by marriage to the St Clairs of Roslin. They established themselves in the Al Aksa

Mosque – so for nearly 200 years they lived right next to the Dome of the Rock. Around this time King David I of Scotland gave the Templars a piece of land at Balantrodoch. The ruins of the church that was built there can still be seen today (Figure 20).

It was during this time that the paradigm of the Dark Ages began to change. Due to the relative safety offered by the protection of the Templars, travel, particularly in the form of pilgrimages to the Holy Land and trade flourished. With travel spread knowledge and new ideas. Fine wares that were brought back to Europe from the East began to affect Court life. Both men and women adorned themselves in these beautiful materials. Women presented themselves at Court functions. Codes of conduct had to change in these refined surroundings and for gentlemen, chivalry became the accepted practice. Jews were allowed to return to Palestine even if not to Jerusalem, they established many religious schools in the Holy Land. Kabalistic ideas were widespread throughout Europe of the 12th to the 14th century. They established the necessity of a feminine attribute to God in the form of the Shekinah.

The Templars were also builders and here is found another link between Jerusalem and the Rosslyn Chapel in the form of the Gate of the Chain. The fraternal-twin gates are each flanked by non-identical double pillars each with a twisted pattern in the same style yet with a different format of a chain (Figure 17). One of the capitals belonging to this gate is Aeolic with double stylized palm fronds. Daniel, in the centre is flanked on each side by lions (Figure 18) – a *Story in Stone* too similar to the style found in Rosslyn, to be unconnected.

The Gate of the Chain is a physical and artistic link to Rosslyn whilst the Kabalistic metaphysics establishes a spiritual and intellectual link. The new appreciation of women in the upper echelons of Society provides a sociological paradigm. Collectively these criteria create a mindset that would not only permit, but require a feminine expression of deity.

The Temple in Jerusalem was the place of dwelling for the Divine Glory, the Place where the masculine and feminine aspects of the Divine – the Holy One and the Shekinah were unified. The destruction of the Temple separated the Matrona from the King. The next section shows that the Earl of Rosslyn and Sir Gilbert Hay would have been aware of these ideas and through the use of sacred symbol, sacred geometry and sacred architecture would re-unify the masculine and feminine elements of the Divine within the Edenic countryside of Roslin and within a paradigm that would not be perceived by the Church to be heretical.

Today the Franciscans oversee the Christian sites in Jerusalem. Their insignia incorporates eight crosses; the number of sides of the Dome of the Rock and in numerology eight is the number of material satisfaction - of manifestation. It is the Dome of the Rock, as *axis mundi*, that manifests sacredness for all nations and for all religions for all time.

I discovered a ruined chapel at Dunstaffnage which has images of two pillars reminiscent of Jachin and Boaz (Figure 20).

Finally, an overview of Celtic religion shows a way of life grounded in nature and magic that allowed for fluidity between time and space, between the physical and the supernatural. The male god Dagon, as father and nurturer of society was not seen to be in opposition with the female principle of nature. The social group had to function with and within the confines of Mother Nature.

The next four chapters present the enigma of Rosslyn Chapel: starting with the beautiful lithograph of Thomas Baines and an interior floor plan followed by a brief overview of the context and content of this medieval monument.

Chapter 11 is concerned with the history of the Chapel and the people involved in its design. Chapter 12 presents some of the esoteric features to be found in the Chapel. Esoteric refers to something that may be difficult to understand because it may be hidden, obscure or abstruse. Exoteric is what is easily understood from what is shown on the outside. The pillars are discussed in Chapter 13. Finally, Chapter 14 based on all the evidence presented, shows that it is reasonable to accept both hypothesises: firstly that the pillars in Rosslyn Chapel can be correlated with the Jachin and Boaz of Solomon's Temple and secondly that esoterically the Chapel is a recreation of Ancient Israelite theology and that the Chapel is a representation of a *High Place.*

# Chapter 10    Rosslyn Chapel



**Figure 24    Rosslyn - 'Chapel midst the Woods'   (Earl of Rosslyn 1997:35)**

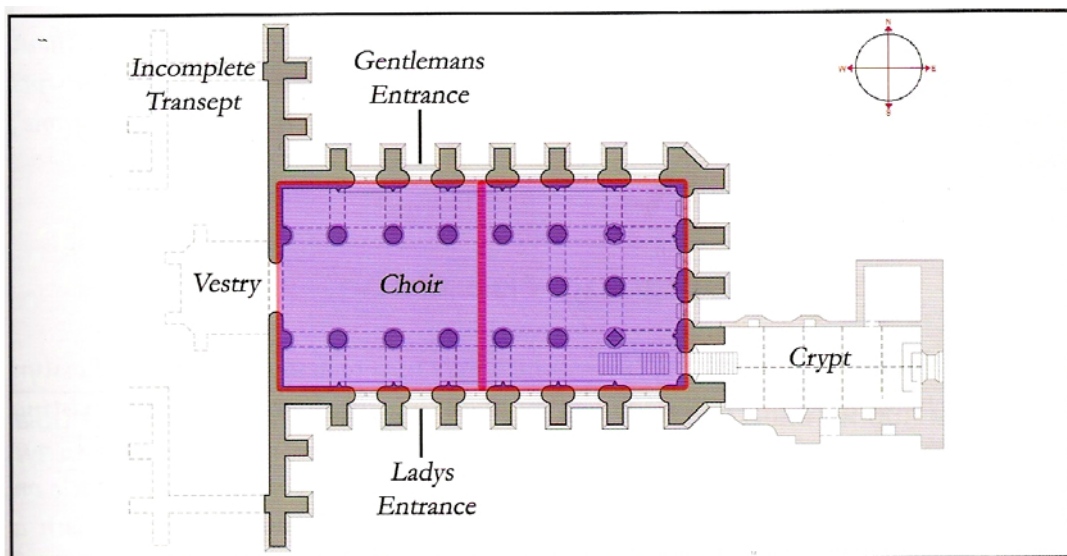Lithograph by Thomas Baines 1823. View from the East facing the crypt and East Window.



**Figure 25    Rosslyn Chapel - Interior Floor Plan   (Cowie : 2006:19)**

## 10.1    Introduction to Rosslyn Chapel

***The Chapel is an Arcanum - mysterious and profoundly secretive***

Rosslyn chapel is to be found in the village of Roslin, about 9 miles south of Edinburgh in Scotland. Roslin village dates back to 203 CE. The village was shaped like a cross with the chapel at its head.

Rosslyn Chapel is a fine example of Gothic Architecture. The full name of Rosslyn Chapel as recorded in a 1523 charter, as the Collegiate Church of Saint Matthew the Apostle and Evangelist of Rosslyn, in the diocese of Saint Andrew. In the fifteenth century collegiate churches were being built across Scotland. Their purpose was to convey intellectual and spiritual knowledge in an age when the first Scottish universities were founded. Many had schools attached to them. Knowledge and learning were important to Sir William St Clair. This pre-Reformation church would have been 'Roman Catholic'. Today it is Episcopalian.

The work was begun in the middle of the 15th century. It was built one hundred years before the Reformation and before Caxton invented the printing press. The foundation stone was laid in 1446 and the college was dedicated on St Matthews Day, 21-09-1450. In 1456 James II appointed Roslin a burgh.

Rosslyn chapel was originally intended to be built as a large cruciform church. Its interior dimensions range between 69 feet 8 inches to 72 feet from east to west and between 35 feet and 36 feet for its breadth. Cowie believes the 72:36 ratio was the actual measurement used (Cowie 2006: 19).

Today it looks like a ruin of a much larger structure yet it is known that there never was one. The chapel was not finished as was intended, either in its own right, or as the first section of a much larger and grander building. It is generally believed that the existing church only represents the choir. The original plans and designs for this church have never been found.

Work halted with the death of Sir William in 1484. At this time only the choir of the church was nearing completion. Sir Oliver St Clair inherited the lands and properties of Rosslyn. He and his sons roofed the building but stopped work on the original grand plan for the large cruciform church. In time the choir became known as Rosslyn Chapel.

## 10.2    Sacred Symbols

An insight and recognition into ancient universal religious symbols can add to the depth of our understanding of the richness of the imagery found within this beautiful yet extraordinary chapel. Dominant symbols tend to have a highly constant meaning.

The word temple derives from the Latin word *templum* which originally meant a vast open space; open on all sides from which one could survey the whole surrounding landscape as far as the horizon (Parry 1992:29 from The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology).

These sacred areas, which included sacred water, sacred trees and height, were associated with theophanic experience. All four categories were present within the Israelite religious system.

In terms of these definitions, Rosslyn chapel certainly fulfils the criteria of *Temple*.

The quintessential requirement for a location to be a sacred space is the Abiding Presence of the Deity to be there. Union with the divine is a central element of the religious experience. Paradoxically holiness is a function of the strict preservation of the borders between the human and divine domains.

The World Tree or *Axis Mundi* is a universal concept. It literally means 'the place around which the heavens revolve'. It represents a means of communication between the material world in which we live and the spiritual world that is beyond our normal senses
(Butler & Ritchie 1996:101).

The idea of *centre* is of the greatest importance in all the ancient traditions. "The Centre is…the point of departure of all things; it is the principle point, without form and without dimension, therefore indivisible, and thus the only image that can be given to the primordial Unity"
(Guénon 1962:46).

Let us look at Rosslyn Chapel as such a Centre. For whatever reason, the man who conceived the idea to create this structure envisioned a Sacred Centre. It would have been built in an unspoilt Scottish countryside, an Edenic paradise par excellence. The very name begins to inform us that it is a distinct possibility that this is a valid supposition.

*Ross* is derived from the Celtic word which means rocky promontory and *Lynn* is a waterfall. The chapel stands on the ridge of rising ground known as College Hill which slopes down to the incredibly beautiful North Esk River. In olden times it was known as the *Chapel midst the Woods* (Rosslyn 1997:34).

Roslin Glen is the largest surviving tract of ancient woodland in Midlothian, in which over two hundred species of flowering plants and sixty species of breeding birds have been recorded. Several of the plant species are rare. The valley is a mixed deciduous wood of oak, ash and elm. The ground flora, wood sorrel, wood-rush, opposite-leaved golden saxifrage, to name but a few, is characteristic of ancient woodland with continuous tree cover (Rosslyn 1997:34).

Guénon (1962:64) emphasises that in all traditions 'place essentially symbolizes state'. A primordial place would symbolise the Edenic state and thus the accessibility to the Divine is a spiritual possibility.

Rosslyn Chapel is a beautiful representation of the Primordial Tradition. There are many examples that show that this building is a manifestation of traditional orthodoxy.

The *'Centre of the World'* is the original point at which the *'Creative Word'* is uttered and it is also that *Word* itself. There is no disagreement that the intention of this chapel was to *'Speak a Message'*.

It is certainly a multidimensional message. This dissertation is only concerned with the message that might indicate that the architect had some knowledge of ideas that would have been associated with the Old Temple of Solomon.

## 10.3   Eden

Artists and poets have found inspiration for their image of the Garden of Eden from the Biblical Song of Solomon. The garden is used as a metaphor to complement the bridegroom's virginal bride.

"The Song of Solomon was seen as a spiritual allegory in which the enclosed garden symbolised the Virgin Mary" (Oxbrow & Robertson 2005:190). In medieval paintings and tapestries, the walled garden symbolises the purity of the Virgin Mary. A fine example of this idea is that of the German masterpiece known as 'The Garden of Eden' in which the unknown artist has placed the

Virgin Mary and her companions within a beautiful garden filled with flowers, bees, birds and butterflies and surrounded by medieval castellated walls.

Medieval Europe resembled a vision of hell. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were dominated by plague, famine and war. Scotland was no exception. About 300 000 people, roughly a third of the population of Scotland succumbed to the Black Death. In the early 1400s, Scotland was struck by series of dreadful famines. In France the Hundred Years' War against England seemed to be a war without end .The Wars of Independence saw Scotland locked in horrific conflict with England.

"The Earthly paradise was a marvellous vision of peace amid a world full of death and horror" (Oxbow & Robertson 2005:191).

The earliest medieval gardens were monastic gardens devoted to the day-to-day needs of the monastery and the wider community. Vegetables and herbs were grown for the kitchens; ponds were stocked with fish and medical plants were used to tend the sick and wounded.

The largest medieval hospital in Scotland, the House of the Holy Trinity was located at Soutra, 12 miles from Roslin. Here the monks cultivated and worked with medicinal herbs, plants and fungi and as archaeological excavations have shown, carried out sophisticated surgical procedures using early anaesthetics (Oxbrow & Robertson 2005:192).

The Scottish nobility adopted the fashionable garden designs from Continental Europe. Plants flowers and even gardeners were brought over from France to create beautiful and sophisticated gardens.

Oxbrow & Robertson (2005:193) affirm that Sir William St Clair and his wife Elizabeth were profoundly influenced by their time in France. It is known that they remodelled Rosslyn Castle in the Continental style.

They also see Rosslyn Chapel as an expression of Creation, "a Garden of Eden carved in stone" (Oxbrow & Robertson 2005:194). Rosslyn Chapel is a rectangular building whose four walls can be considered to "enclose a garden that symbolises the blessed Virgin" (Oxbrow: 2005:195). Vines, curly kale, roses, lilies and oak leaves abound everywhere.

They also place the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil within this allegorical Garden of Eden of Rosslyn Chapel. Medieval legend told that the Cross of Christ was made with wood from the Tree of Knowledge.

The Aisles have stone benches along the side wall, reminiscent of those in all ANE shrines and temples. It is only when one moves away from under the low arches of the aisles into the choir that one can see the high stone ceiling with its flowers and stars like the open sky above a medieval garden.

## 10.4    The Interior of Rosslyn Chapel

### *A Book in Stone*

According to the Earl of Rosslyn – the founder intended to provide visual instruction, in the carvings throughout the entire chapel. There is no accurate guide to all the thousands of carvings within the chapel.

Except for the modern additions of pews and an altar railing, the entire chapel is carved in stone. Some of the carvings are weather-worn and difficult to make out others are still in good condition even though they do belong to the original period. Angels and other insignia have been added over the centuries. The effect is quite overwhelming and one has to take time to examine each carving. Some are very high up and difficult to make out. There are carvings depicting scenes from both the Old and New Testaments. It is not the presence of the carvings but their sheer number that is astonishing.

Portrayed is the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Isaac, the Annunciation, the Presentation of Christ in the Temple and Jesus the carpenter. Only one parable appears – the prodigal feeding the swine. No miracles are depicted. The representation of the Crucifixion and descent from the Cross, by ladder, are placed high up and receive no more prominence than any other carving. Also shown is the Lord seated in glory with kings prostrate at his feet.

All the carvings are not from scripture. Strange gargoyles on the north side are meant to keep away evil spirits. Foliage is extremely common, heads and hands carrying foliage, appear in all sorts of places. The constant presence and power of death is evident. The Dance Macabre is an allegorical representation of the supremacy of death over humankind – it is no respecter of rank or status.

The niche above the central pillar is different in design from the others The Principal altar almost certainly stood beneath this niche. The figure of the Virgin and Child is modern. All the original statues throughout the chapel were destroyed at the time of the Reformation.

The barrel vaulted roof is ribbed into five compartments which contain daisies, lilies, flowers, roses and stars. Among the stars are to be found four angels, the moon, the sun, a dove and the face of Christ with his hand raised in blessing.

## 10.5   Green Men

There are over two hundred Green Men dotted around Rosslyn Chapel. They abound in cathedrals, churches and castles throughout Europe but to find so many in one building is unique.

The Green Man is an ancient figure, a wild spirit of nature. A supernatural being that is young each spring, fertile and beautiful in summer, autumnal and overgrown as the leaves fall, old and dying in winter then reborn with the new growth of the ensuing spring. "The Green Man…an eternal figure representing the cycle of life death and rebirth" (Oxbrow & Robertson 2005:197). This is a precise description of the Baal Cycle in Ugaritic Texts – Baal performed this function by causing rain and storms to awaken the whole process!

The style and positioning of the Green Men within the Chapel confirm that they are associated with the annual cycle. The faces of those in the east of Rosslyn Chapel are youthful; each young face has a single vine emerging from the corner of its mouth. In the South, the Green Men are bearded and in the prime of life their overgrown faces are surrounded by leaves and wild foliage.

The Green Men depicted on the north side of Rosslyn Chapel are dead and dying figures. The foliate heads include a peg toothed decaying face and skull with vines twisting from between its teeth and out of its empty eye sockets. From the cold, winter, darkness and death of this northern side the youngest Green Man is to be found in the north east corner. He is the embodiment of rebirth, the dawn of a new spring with the promise new growth and the beginning of life.

There is at least one example of a Green Woman – these are very rare. She is to be found to the right of the altar, guarding the wall that separated the chapel from the entrance to the crypt. She is in that part of the chapel that has always been known as the Lady Altar. She is very near to the Apprentice Pillar (Butler& Ritchie 2006:28).

The earliest Green Men are found on classical Roman tombs in the Mediterranean area. The Green Man moved north along the pilgrim routes from Northern Spain through France and into Britain. "The Green Man is widely seen …as an ancient fertility god that somehow survived a thousand years of Christianity to reappear in churches and seasonal festivals" (Oxbrow & Robertson 2005:88).

## 10.6    Mary and Rosslyn Chapel

A central figure of Catholic Worship is 'Our Lady' the Blessed Virgin, The Mother of Jesus. At the east end of Rosslyn Chapel, beyond the Apprentice Pillar, lies the Lady Chapel. Each dawn the light of the sun rises through the East windows of the Lady Chapel.

One of Rosslyn's four altars was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. She is depicted cradling the infant Christ on one of the pendant bosses of the Lady Chapel along with the Star of Bethlehem and the manger in a nativity scene.

### 10.6.1    The White Lady of Rosslyn

It is often said that Scotland is the most haunted country in the world. Tales of over thirty White Ladies, Grey Ladies and Green Ladies abound. There are over forty Green Ladies haunting castles, hotels, theatres and hospitals from the Castle of Mey near John O'Groats to Comlongon Castle a few miles from the border with England. The divine lady is recreated in Lady Chapels, Lady Wells, devotional paintings, illuminations and church sculpture.

The White Lady of Rosslyn is often described as an Enchanted or Sleeping Lady. "Rosslyn's White Lady may in reality be more symbolic than supernatural". "To the Protestant Scots the phantom White lady of Rosslyn may have been the blessed Lady of the Catholic faith or simply a remembrance of Rosslyn's Catholic past" (Oxbrow & Robertson 2005:145,147).

## 10.7    Summary of Chapter 10

15th century Gothic Rosslyn Chapel is built on a hill in an open space surrounded by woodlands. Trees of Knowledge and of Life had been placed in Eden. Gardens were symbols of Creation and purity. This Sacred Place, originally cold, dark and mysterious is an effusion of stone carvings. Everyone could recognise local plants, angels and Bible stories. Carvings of the Green man follow the old Celtic annual cycle. There is a rare Green woman and an altar dedicated to Mary.

# Chapter 11    Rosslyn Chapel and its Founding Fathers

## 11.1    A Brief History of Rosslyn Chapel

Rosslyn Chapel is an enigmatic edifice that stands to remind us that faith endures throughout the ages whatever is put in its way or however many stories and legends grow up around it.

Oxbrow and Robertson (2005) have investigated the chapel and castle in the context of the history and culture of Medieval Scotland. Their point of departure has been to try to determine what the carvings meant in 15th century Scotland. "We have read the books that were written at Rosslyn as the chapel was being built and have traced the lives of the people who shaped Rosslyn's past" (Oxbrow & Robertson 2005:15). They admit that the history of Rosslyn is fragmented and full of legends.

In the 15th century when Rosslyn chapel was founded the Catholic congregation would have known who each figure represented and what each stone flower symbolised. It may have been less 'secret' but it would surely have still been a mysterious and relatively dark place.

At one time all of the noble families of Scotland had been Catholic. The Protestant Reformation in Scotland changed this situation and by the time that Mary Queen of Scots came to the throne she was a Catholic Queen in a Protestant country. In 1560 CE the Scots parliament formally abolished the authority of the Pope in Scotland and the celebration of the Catholic Mass was forbidden. Throughout her reign and imprisonment Mary Queen of Scots was supported by a small group of loyal Catholic families; she was eventually executed in England as a Christian martyr.

The St Clairs of Rosslyn were loyal Catholics who refused to give up their faith. However the end came in 1592 CE when it is recorded that the altars had been demolished and Rosslyn Chapel was abandoned as a House of God. After the Protestant revolution the St Clairs abandoned Rosslyn Chapel.

John Slezer (1693) accounts that the burial vaults were so dry that the bodies of the St Clair family still survived intact 80 years after they were interred. Father Hay informs us that he was actually present at the opening of the burial vaults. He also speaks of the remarkable preservation 'nothing was spoiled' and tells us that all the earls and lords of St Clair lay in full armour (Oxbrow & Robertson 2005:107).

In the early 18th century Rosslyn Chapel lay neglected and forgotten. It had been attacked by a Protestant mob, condemned as a Catholic '*monument of idolatries*' and abandoned to ruin.

Roger Gale (1739) "… we saw Roslin-Chapel, a most noble Gothic structure, exceeded by few…it has lain open to the weather ever since the Reformation, but has withstood all its effects, by the goodness of the materials, and the excellence of its work to a miracle; however the rain now penetrating through the roof, which is vaulted with stone, would in few years have dissolved it entirely, had not that true lover of antiquities and the liberal arts, Sir John Clerk, persuaded the present Lord Sinclair to put into complete repair"(cf Oxbrow & Robertson 2005:111).

Sir John Clerk intervened with Sir James St Clair, the Lord of Rosslyn to save the chapel. In 1739 (250 years after the chapel was built) he drew up conservation plans and personally supervised the restoration of the fragile medieval building.

In 1837 the black slabs in the north aisle of Rosslyn Chapel were removed. Two coffins were found to be lying across the inner opening, preventing access to the vault. The slabs were replaced. **It is possible that just as the Israelites at the temple in Arad as well as in the Cave in Jerusalem had carefully buried their sacred altars, *massebôt* and figurines, so had the 16th century Lord William St Clair taken the consecrated altars and statues of Rosslyn Chapel below ground to be preserved for a more tolerant age**.

Although Rosslyn Chapel was admired by many it lay abandoned until it was visited by Queen Victoria in the nineteenth century. Extensive and controversial restoration work was carried out under the direction of the Freemason and architect David Bryce. New angels were carved and added to the east wall. The chapel was rededicated as a place of worship in the 1860s. For two hundred years Rosslyn had lain empty.

## 11.2   The Founder of Rosslyn Chapel

The founder of the Chapel was Sir William St Clair third and last Prince of Orkney. William St Clair masterminded and personally supervised the whole construction of the building from its inception to his death in 1484 – two years before its completion.

**"*He wanted the chapel to preach the Story of the Bible – speaking in allegorical form*"**
(Earl of Rosslyn ca * 1977:28) (* No publication date is given; this author died in 1977).

This is a feature unique of Rosslyn chapel. Other chapels and cathedrals have not used allegory, portrayed in stone, to teach the story of the Bible.

It is not known but thought possible that Sir William was the architect. He had plans drawn and every carving – however small – was first created in wood by the carpenters and submitted for approval. The patterns were given to the masons to be carved in stone.

Although the chapel is built wholly of stone it is known that the number of carpenters outnumbered the other tradesman. At the time of construction of the chapel, Sir William St Clair built a town for the artisans; that was only about ½ mile away from their place of work. Each mason was given a house and land. Master masons received £ 40 per annum; other workers £ 10 per annum.

It is also not known if each workman exercised his own ingenuity or if conformity to the basic wishes of Sir William was supervised by a Grand Master Mason.

There are many *Fleur- de- Lis* designs throughout the chapel; this may suggest that the artisans came from France. The *Fleur de Lis* is also associated with the Virgin Mary. "The medieval St Clair's of Rosslyn had close ties with France" (Oxbrow & Robertson 2005:60).

Earl of Rosslyn (*ca 1977:10) says that it is clear that there was a 'foreign' influence in the building of the Chapel. He compares similar architectural features from churches in Italy, Spain and Portugal. Craftsmen were drawn from these areas to join those from Scotland.

Sir William died in 1484. Sir Oliver did not finish the chapel according to the original plan of his father.

### 11.2.1   Sir William St Clair – A Unique and Privileged Man of His Time

Sir William St Clair (1415-1484 CE), Third Earl of Orkney (1434 CE) and founder of Rosslyn Chapel grew up surrounded by the romances of King Arthur, Merlin and the Knights of the Round Table.

It is very likely that the impetus to create the collegiate church of St Matthew came from Elizabeth Douglas and Sir Gilbert Hay. Sir Gilbert Hay was a graduate of St Andrews, Scotland's first university. The plan to build a huge cruciform church seems out of proportion to

Roslin village but not if the intention was to create a great centre of learning
(Oxbrow & Robertson 2005:171).

In 1436 the Earl, as Admiral of the Fleet, escorted Princess Margaret, daughter of the King of
Scotland, to France for her wedding to the Dauphin (the title of the heir to the French throne).

In 1445, Sir Gilbert Hay returned from the French Court to Scotland and went to live in Rosslyn
Castle (not to be confused with Father Hay of the 18th century). In 1446 work was begun on the
building that was to become Rosslyn Chapel.

Elizabeth Douglas, a cousin of William, was the daughter of Archibald, Fourth Earl of Douglas
and First Duke of Touraine in France. A papal dispensation was granted for their marriage.
Elizabeth was noted as a devout and godly lady. "It may well have been she who inspired her
husband to found Rosslyn Chapel" (Oxbrow & Robertson 2005:76). Elizabeth died in 1452.

The University of Glasgow was founded in 1451 at Glasgow Cathedral. Its first classes were
held in the Cathedral's Chapter House. The Chapter House is a building attached to a Cathedral
or Collegiate Church in which the Chapter meets. A Chapter refers to the members of a monastic
or knightly order.

In the early fourteen hundreds, fire had ripped through the cathedral after it had been struck by
lightening. Elizabeth's brother, also called Archibald, Fifth Earl of Douglas, helped to fund the
reconstruction work that needed to be carried out on Glasgow Cathedral.

Rosslyn Chapel is closely modelled on the East Choir of Glasgow Cathedral – 'though carried to
an exuberant excess'. Although the choir in Glasgow is larger than at Rosslyn and the ceiling in
Glasgow is wood rather than stone; they both have an arched ceiling, the same number of
windows and the same number of pillars in the same configuration. The six eastern most pillars
are spaced differently because Rosslyn has a proportionally larger Lady Chapel.

There was certainly a notable library at Rosslyn before the Reformation. Some of these
manuscripts survived theft and Protestant looting and are preserved in the Bodleian Library
(Oxbrow & Robertson 2005:157).

Sir William was patron and friend to some of Europe's finest scholars. Medieval Rosslyn was home to writers, poets, minstrels, stonemasons, carpenters, craftsmen and artisans. Rosslyn Castle nestled amid woods and fields, deer parks and orchards.

The world of the St Clairs of Rosslyn was one of Knights, Lords and Kings, a world of battle and bloodshed but also a world of poetry, story and romance (Oxbrow & Robertson 2005:176).

## 11.3    Gilbert Hay

Gilbert Hay (born c1403) was a very well travelled man, conversant in at least 16 languages, had access to some of the most important books and manuscripts of the day and was familiar with Greek philosophy and ancient cultures.

His name is recorded in 1418 and 1419 as being one of the first students of the newly founded St Andrews University (1413) in Edinburgh. He was knighted soon after he completed his Bachelor and Master of Arts Degrees. He became attached to the French Court where he stayed for nearly thirty years eventually becoming Chamberlain to the French King Charles VII.

During his reign a particularly close alliance arose between Scotland and France. An elite regiment of Scottish soldiers was formed, known as *Garde Ecossais;* they became the personal body guards of French Monarchs.

Gilbert was appointed as sole custodian of the personal library of King Charles VII, which at that time held the most complete collection of acquired human knowledge. During his sojourn in France, he travelled to Italy, the Holy Land, parts of Africa and across much of Asia and as far as China or Cathy as it was known at that time. He was undoubtedly one of the most educated men of his day. It is known that by 1456, Gilbert had returned to Scotland. Butler & Ritchie speculate that he came back specifically to be involved in the building of Rosslyn Chapel
(Butler & Ritchie 2006:47).

### 11.3.1    Fire in Rosslyn Castle

Sir Gilbert Hay, after he left the French Court, was engaged at Rosslyn Castle, in translating continental books into Scots at Sir William's request. William, also known as Prince of Orkney, had a fine manuscript library at a time when books were written by hand on parchment pages. On the 6th November 1447, a fire broke out in the castle. As the fire raged Sir William's chaplain

stayed behind to rescue what he could of the Rosslyn library. Four trunks of precious manuscripts were saved. He threw the trunks from the dungeon window before using a rope to lower himself to the ground. When the Prince knew that his charts and writings were safe "he was sorry for nothing… and became cheerful…" (Knight & Lomas 1996:307).

## 11.4 Summary of Chapter 11

Sir William St Clair, Third Earl of Orkney and Admiral of the Fleet masterminded and was possibly the architect of the Collegiate Church of St Matthew which was intended to be a large cruciform church. After his death in 1484 his son Sir Oliver only completed the work which had already been started and that is today known as Rosslyn Chapel

Sir Gilbert Hay, a well educated man was attached to the French Court of Charles VII for over thirty years. He was custodian of King Charles' personal library which at that time had the most complete collection of acquired human knowledge.

The medieval St Clairs had close ties with France. In 1436 it is known that the Earl visited the French Court. In 1445 Sir Gilbert left France and went to live in Rosslyn Castle. In 1446 work was begun on the Collegiate Church. There was also a notable library in Rosslyn Castle. After a fire broke out in the Castle, Sir William's Chaplain had been able to rescue four trunks of precious manuscripts

Sir William married Elizabeth Douglas, daughter of Archibald who was both Fourth Earl of Douglas in Scotland and First Duke of Touraine in France. Elizabeth's brother, the Fifth Earl of Douglas was involved in the reconstruction of Glasgow Cathedral after it had been damaged by a lightning strike. Some of the architectural features of Rosslyn Chapel closely resemble the East Choir of Glasgow cathedral. Although the Choir in Glasgow is larger than at Rosslyn, Rosslyn has a proportionally larger Lady Chapel.

In 1560 the Scots Parliament abolished the authority of the Pope in Scotland and the celebration of the Catholic mass was forbidden. The St Clairs were loyal Catholics but by 1592 the altars of Chapel had been demolished. It lay open to the elements, abandoned and abused until Queen Victoria visited it in the 19th century and commissioned its restoration. It was rededicated as a place of Worship sometime around 1860.

# Chapter 12      Esotericism within Rosslyn Chapel

## 12.1    Masonic Traditions

The heads of the St Clair family were hereditary Grand Master Masons of Scotland and throughout the Lady Chapel there are figures of angels whose distinctive positions are significant of the rites of masonry.

## 12.2    Theory of Knight and Lomas

They regard the symbolism as Egyptian, Celtic, Jewish, Templar and Masonic. Christian imagery was introduced in the Victorian era. These would be the stained glass windows, the vestry on the west side and the statue of the Madonna. Even after its completion it was not used as a chapel – there was a family chapel in the castle.

They believe that Roslyn is a post-Templar shrine built to house scrolls found under the Holy of Holies of the last Temple in Jerusalem: "a deliberate replication of the burial place of the secret scrolls" (Knight & Lomas 1997:306). They surmise that around 69 CE the Qumranians were instructed to put their most treasured scrolls beneath the Holy of Holies of the still extant Temple of Herod in Jerusalem.

## 12.3    Shekinah in the Chapel

The Shekinah within the Jewish tradition meant the Presence of God within the Community of Israel, demonstrated in some way such as the column of cloud and pillar of fire in the Sinai story. It was also said to be the Presence of God that dwelt within the Holy of Holies and whose power filled the whole Temple.

Although the Shekinah was not generally thought to dwell outside the Land of Israel the universal concept of God that emerged after the exile as well as the reality of the Diaspora and the belief that God would not desert his chosen people, must have included the belief that the Spirit and Wisdom of God was also present in other places.

Fascination with secrecy has held great power over the Jewish imagination through the generations it is often linked to the verse: "*To conceal a matter, this is the glory of God, to sift it thoroughly, the glory of kings*" (NJB Proverbs 25:2).

## 12.4    The Alignment of Rosslyn Chapel

It is not unusual for Christian Churches in England to be orientated to the position of the rising sun on the Feast Day of their Saint of dedication.

Butler & Ritchie (2006) as well as Cowie (2006) declare that the chapel is on a 'true' east / west alignment. It is situated on latitude just below 56 deg north. Therefore it is not possible for the sun to shine ***directly*** through any window or any aperture on any day of the year.

The calendar was in much disarray during the Middle Ages, particularly in Britain. It was not until 1752 that that country adjusted its calendar in terms of the Edict issued in 1582 by Pope Gregory XIII. This had come about because of the inaccuracies that had occurred two centuries earlier.

We can accept that Gilbert Hay was well aware of the discrepancies and would have been in a position to make the necessary adjustments so that the chapel could face the rising sun on the 21st September, the Feast Day of St Matthew. However if the chapel was to be orientated directly towards the sunrise on the Feast of St Matthew it could not face due east.

In Western tradition St Matthews's day is celebrated on 21st of September. In the northern hemisphere, this is the autumn equinox; the time when the sun is directly over the equator and the length of day and night / light and darkness are closest to each other. It also heralds in the winter cycle. In religious belief where the goddess is synonymous with the earth – it is at harvest time that nature itself makes a supreme sacrifice for the benefit of humankind. It was also at this time of the year that both the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem had been dedicated and that Jewish New Year and Yom Kippur, Day of Atonement are observed.

From an unnamed planetarium program Butler and Ritchie (1996:87) show that at 6 AM on 21st September 1456 there would have been an alignment between the planets of Venus and Mercury. The phenomenon would appear on the horizon as a very bright white light which would increase in intensity as the sun rises immediately below the horizon. As the first rays of the rising sun

appear the planet conjunction turns blood red, soon to disappear into the light of day. This planetary conjunction is said to have occurred around 40 BCE and previously around 1448 BCE.

Butler & Ritchie were aware of a 'persistent rumour' that on a particular day (unspecified in the legend) the rising sun would stream in and illuminate the niche of a now missing statue.

While discussing an early photograph of the chapel, dating back to 1840 – before the Victorian restoration, someone commented: *"I see the small hole for the light to pass through on St Matthew's Day was already there on the old east window"* (Butler & Ritchie 2006:141).

## 12.5   The East Window



**Figure 26      The East Window   (Photograph: M Parker-Wood)**

The central east window of Rosslyn Chapel is a fine example of the significance of sacred geometry. Symbolically squares represent earthly things. Circles are perceived as perfect and infinite and represent the divine. Medieval designers drew a cross within a circle to represent humankind; surrounded by and connected to the divine. Note how the equal arms of the cross extend beyond the square of physical boundaries and are thus able to make contact with the divine. This beautiful engrailed window encapsulates the One-ness of Human Beings and Heaven and Earth.

## 12.6    The Light Box

The 'Light Box' is to be found in the very centre of the east end of the building at the top of the central east window. It is in the shape of a pentagon. It is visible in Figure 26 right above the upright arm of the cross.

Butler & Ritchie estimate it to be about seven to eight inches across. It is lined with something that is intensely reflective. On only fairly close examination it appeared to be 'something that was heavily faceted, like the surface of a gemstone' (Butler & Ritchie 2006:159).

They were able to conduct an experiment from the gantry that presently surrounds the chapel. They shone a very bright light from the outside through the aperture. From the inside instead of the faint glimmer expected the Light Box became an orb of steady, strong, blood-red light. At the centre was a bright spot of white light (Butler& Ritchie 2006 157 – 164).

They think that the light box was built not simply for sunlight but more likely to let the concentrated light of **Venus** shine into the chapel (Butler & Ritchie 2006:147).

Any light source entering the Light Box must be positioned just above the horizon in a due east position. This scenario happens quite often when Venus appears as a Morning Star and rises well ahead of the sun. The light from Venus should shine into the Light Box on at least one day in most years, though there are years in which it does not and others when the phenomenon happens twice (Butler & Ritchie 2006:148).

Cowie (2006) also believes that the Light Box is connected with the planet Venus.

A regular pentagon shape enshrines the 'Golden Mean'. As a line ratio, this formula can be expressed as AB:AC::BC:AB or mathematically as 1,618:1. This fundamental proportion is evident throughout the universe.

Eight Earth years are equivalent to five cycles of Venus, to within a couple of days. The ratio is 365,25 days:584 days (as seen from earth). This ratio is very close to being a true Golden Section fraction – 584 ÷ 365 = 1,6.

Cowie (2006:90) has determined that in 1446, the equinox would have occurred on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September. He set up an astronomical program to that date at Rosslyn Chapel location and discovered that on that morning Venus would have risen 30 degrees above the horizon or 60 degrees azimuth, (from the mid-heaven) before the sun appeared at 90 degrees azimuth on the horizon.

On this day Solar and Venus cycles united in perfect geometric harmony and synchronicity.

This information enabled him to plot a triangular Venus shadow onto a square Sun shadow. A geometric pattern that (he has argued in his book) is so evident in Rosslyn Chapel's geometric design. Knight and Lomas (1996) have determined a similar grid.

"Out of a possible 2,920 days in any given eight-year Venus cycle, this was the chosen day. Did somebody choose a day when **god and goddess** could be woven into the very foundations of the building?"(Cowie 2006:91).

## 12.7    Summary of Chapter 12

Although this Chapel is purported to be a Christian edifice, the symbolism is neither exclusively nor typically Christian. Knight & Lomas theorise that it was built to house scrolls found under the Temple area in Jerusalem. The location and decoration of the Chapel establishes it as a Sacred Place endowed with the Spirit of Wisdom and the abiding Presence of God – the Shekinah.

Christian churches in England are often orientated towards the rising sun on the feast-day of their Saint of dedication. Rosslyn Chapel has and east / west alignment; because of latitude the rising sun would not shine directly through the East Window on the 21<sup>st</sup> September, St Matthews Day.

This significant date is the autumnal equinox in the northern hemisphere and is associated with religious rites of harvest as well as the dedication of the First and Second Temple in Jerusalem.

The sacred geometry encrypted in the beautiful East window symbolises the One-ness of Human Beings, Heaven and Earth. The pentagonal Light Box is at the top centre of the East window. Although its purpose has yet to be determined it is thought that when Venus appears as the Morning Star, the Light Box focuses the light of Venus to shine into the Chapel.

The fundamental proportion of the Golden Mean line ratio applies to the ration between an Earth year and a Venus year. On the Equinox day of 1446, which is the year that the foundation stone of the Chapel was laid, there was a geometric alignment between Venus and the Sun symbolising the harmony and synchronicity between god and goddess.

Chapter 13. Esotericism continues into the next chapter as the kabala and the symbolism of the carvings on the Mason's and Apprentice pillars are discussed

# Chapter 13    Pillars in Rosslyn Chapel

Deity is always the ultimate source of holiness in a Temple setting. What is the message contained within the symbols of these beautiful columns?



**Figure 27     LEFT The Mason's Pillar   (Earl of Rosslyn *1977:25)**

**RIGHT The Apprentice Pillar   (CD Rom Rosslyn Chapel)**

Were it not for these two unique pillars within Rosslyn Chapel, this chapel would be discerned to be little different from other village churches.

One enters Rosslyn chapel from the west side as opposed to the Temple of Solomon which was entered from the east side. Positioned on the east side of the chapel at the end of the nave and thus corresponding directionally with those of Solomon's Temple, are these two unique, entirely different, special and quite splendid pillars.

They have been called the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge. These pillars may be of structural importance but their significance is surely more complex and profoundly religious such as those pillars and trees of the original Solomonic Temple.

## 13.1   Kabala and the Pillars

In the Kabala, the Tree of Life is composed of three columns rather than a single trunk. The Tree contains ten orbs or *sephirot* which are joined by twenty two pathways.

"All the pillars and the *sephirot* they contain exist to achieve one objective – to access the Divine" (Butler & Ritchie 1996:102).

The three pillars, from left to right, are named Severity or Judgement, the middle pillar is the Pillar of Mildness and on the right hand side is the Pillar of Mercy. The second *sephira,* Chochma is below and to the right of Kether, which is the first *sephira*. Chochma represents Wisdom in its purest form; it resides on the masculine Pillar of Mercy. It holds within itself a creative energy, the soul of an idea. Binah is on the left hand side and on the feminine Pillar of Judgement. Binah embodies complete Understanding and encompasses the Perfection of Creation; it is a developmental energy, a pathway to creative freedom (Wolf 1999:90).

Rabbi Wolf (1999:86) explains that *Duality* is a characteristic of the cosmos. Kabala reflects this duality by attributing masculine and feminine qualities to all things of existence. So although Chochma is masculine compared to the feminine Binah, both Chochma and Binah are masculine vis-à-vis the seven *sephirot* of Emotion which are feminine and the nine *sephirot* from Chochma through Yesod are masculine relative to the tenth *sephira* of Malchut which is then feminine.

The motif of passing on secrets, which may be referred to as the generative nature of esoteric knowledge, is associated in the Kabalistic tradition, with the dynamic of flow and containment. It is the (male) master who bestows and the (female) disciple who receives. In the receiving there is as much, if not more power than in the bestowal (Wolfson 1999:120).

Interfacing the Rosslyn pillars with the Kabalistic Tree of Life is an exciting insight into Kabalistic understanding of the masculine principle within the feminine and the feminine principle within that of the masculine.

Butler and Ritchie say that if the three pillars were designed to represent the three pillars of the Kabalistic Tree of Life then the correct way to view them would be, not from the body of the chapel, but from the East window.
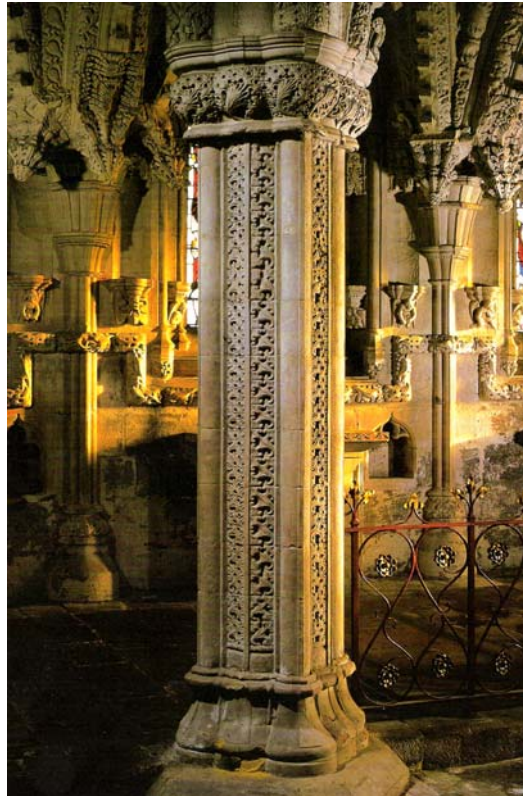
## 13.2   The Mason's Pillar



**Figure 28      The Mason's Pillar   (Earl of Rosslyn \*1977:25)**

Facing east the left hand side pillar is known as the Mason's Pillar – it is situated in the north east corner – "beautifully proportioned and elegant". It is the priestly pillar known as Jachin.

The Mason's pillar has often been associated with the ***Tree of Life***. The bases of both the Mason's and Apprentice Pillars are not perfect octagons. They are of the same design and orientation yet they differ significantly from the other pillars.

The Mason's Pillar is quietly understated but also very intricate. The whole conception of the Mason's pillar revolves around the number eight. Besides the unequally sided octangular base, eight 'feet' rise to become the form of this essentially square pillar. A double pattern of carving is found on each face; hence eight beautiful designs ascend to a handsome capital, also comprised of eight orbs.

Symbolically a straight line symbolises the masculine aspect.
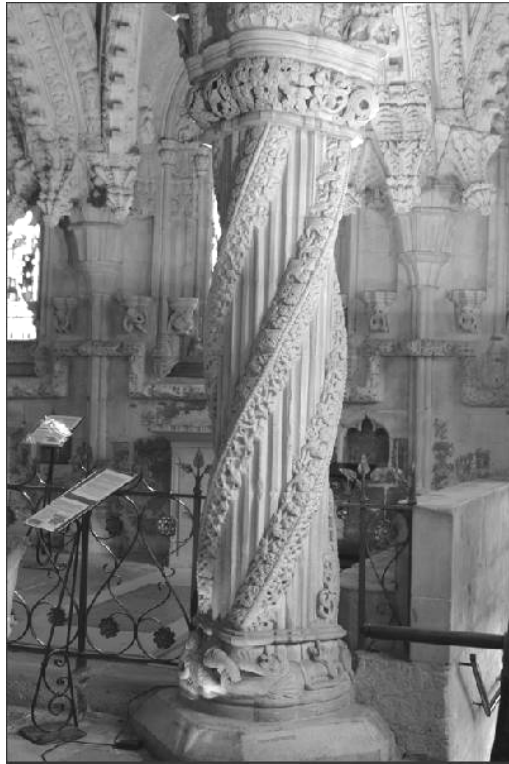
## 13.3    The Apprentice Pillar



**Figure 29        The Apprentice Pillar   (CD Rom Rosslyn Chapel)**

The Apprentice Pillar is quite different in the grandeur and sophistication of its carving from that of the Mason's Pillar. The delicacy in the chiselling of the spirals of double foliage of this inimitable pillar is quite unique

The Apprentice pillar – situated in the south east corner – is the Kingly Pillar called Boaz and often called the *Tree of Knowledge*.

The pillar is lavishly decorated with four floral swathes which the Earl of Rosslyn (*1977) describes as spiralling downwards and around the fluted centre from the corners of the capital to meet the base.

The eight vine stems actually **arise** from the mouths of eight dragons and unite to form a double helix of intricate, exquisite and quite extraordinary decoration. Some have commented on a similarity between strands of DNA, the encrypted building blocks of life and the carved double helix bands that entwine this pillar.

At the crown of the pillar is a carving depicting Abraham, his son Isaac and the ram in the thicket; a motif of sacrifice. Other carvings in this area also depict this same motif.

From the evidence of seals and other depictions we know that Asherah was depicted as the 'Tree of Life' later stylized as a wooden pole. The vines of this stone-carved pillar represent wood. A careful observation will show that they spiral upwards into infinity.

It could be that the Apprentice pillar is an allegory of the feminine. If the double helix bands around the Apprentice pillar are collapsed they would form a circle, the symbolic symbol of the feminine aspect. As discussed earlier, the paradigmatic role of the feminine is different in kind from that of Creator and Redeemer.

The sheer beauty and delicacy of this unique pillar epitomises the Presence of God within the Shekinah, within Wisdom and Mercy within both romantic love and deep veneration for a nurturing and interceding Mother Goddess. This pillar is a veritable a/Asherah. Any sculptor aware of medieval esoteric thought would have had no difficulty in encapsulating the esoteric Shekinah into the exoteric a/Asherah.

Although the Apprentice Pillar stands in the Lady Chapel, and seems to encompass so much that of the feminine, it does not have the profile of Mary. Mary is never presented aniconically, she is seldom presented alone and when she does appear as a solitary figure it is always in the attitude of prayer.

### 13.3.1    Story of the Apprentice Pillar

There is a legend that after the foundations had been laid Sir William discussed the creation of an intricate pillar with the Master Stone Mason. He asked for permission to travel to Rome to seek inspiration for the design of this 'kingly' pillar and to learn from the finest Italian craftsmen. The mason did not return for a long time. Meanwhile an apprentice approached Sir William and was given permission to begin the pillar. Some say the boy had a dream with a vision of the finished pillar; others claim that a heavenly angel guided his actions. A most incredible pillar began to appear from the rough stone.

The story goes that when the Mason did finally return he was so astounded by the work of the apprentice that in a rage of anger and jealousy the Master viciously struck the boy on his head

and killed his junior on the spot. It is known that the Master Mason died with a noose around his neck; either for his evil deed or that he took his own life.

The first written account of the legend of the murdered apprentice of Rosslyn dates to approximately 200 years after the building of the Chapel (Oxbrow& Robertson 2005:56). There are similar legends associated with churches and castles elsewhere in Scotland and in France.

The building of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem is a central theme of Freemasonry. The Freemasonic legend tells of a Grand Master named Hiram who was in charge of the building of the Temple of Solomon. Hiram is murdered because he will not share the secrets of his degree with those fellows of craft less skilled than a master mason. He is attacked and killed with a mason's maul, by three assailants of an inferior grade (Oxbrow& Robertson 2005:62).



**Figure 30      Easter Column at St Michael's Hildesheim ca 1020
               (Colish 1997: Illustration 11)**

This pillar could have been similar to the ones the mason is reputed to have gone off to study. It is a faithful reproduction of the Bible Story.

### 13.3.2    The Base of the Apprentice Pillar

Scottish folklore is resplendent with dragon sagas and immortalized in St George who slew the dragon. This motif is not unique to Scotland and is very popular throughout the Mediterranean area.

Around the base of the Apprentice Pillar we find dragons 'chewing at the roots of the vines in order to keep this wisdom away from those who are not worthy'. Again the Apprentice Pillar is associated with sacrifice. (Oxbrow & Robertson 2005:63).

Eight dragons are carved with great detail on the base of the Apprentice Pillar. Their fore-legs are in the form of a fin or flipper which shows that they belong to the sea. The style of their flipper is not unlike the wings of the cherubim on the Samarian ivories.



**Figure 31        Dragons at the Base of the Apprentice Pillar**
**(Photograph: M Parker-Wood)**

They are plump with a mean looking tail. They are reminiscent of Rahab and Tiamat and our Lady of The Sea - Asherah as she is called in Canaanite theology. The sea that was ruled by Leviathan, and Apsu, the sea that in ANE creation mythology is associated with the very

beginning of Creation. In the Genesis 2:6 account of Creation, the ordering of the waters was of prime concern.

Dragons and Dolphins are emblems of water. Hidden, deep within the ocean they are infused with the sacred power of the abyss. They bring rain and flooding and thus govern the fertility of the world. "The dragon stands for the spirit of water where harmonious fluctuations feed life and make all civilization possible" (Eliade 1958:207).

Water is the primal substance from whence all life emerges – "it precedes all forms of life and upholds creation" (Eliade 1958:188.

The *Devy-Upanishad* tells how the gods asked the Great Goddess who she was and from whence she came. She replied '*My birthplace is in the water inside the sea. At the beginning the goddess was the origin of all things: I produced at first the Father of the World*' (Eliade1958:210).



**Figure 32**   **Dragons showing stems coming out of their mouths (Photograph: CDR Rosslyn Chapel)**

If the blow-up of the photograph is carefully studied it can be seen that the floral swathes actually spiral **upwards.**

The figures at the base of the Apprentice pillar are Sea Monsters from whose mouths spew vines. They are depicted as life-givers.

The beauty and love that is encapsulated in this magnificent work of art can only be an expression of a deep love, unconstrained by space or time for the feminine that nurtures and cares not only for Creation but for the individual hearts of each human being. The Goddess who intercedes on our behalf.

The motif of suffering and sacrifice is included in much of the imagery surrounding this pillar (such as the binding of Isaac).It intimates concern perhaps for all women, honouring their unique suffering and self-sacrifice throughout the centuries, their faithfulness at the foot of the cross and even the probability that the entire chapel might have been the brainchild of Elizabeth Douglas, wife of William St Clair.

(Since the Apprentice Pillar is so different in execution one cannot help but wonder if any evidence will ever come to light that it may have been done by a woman, disguised as a man!)

### 13.3.3   Norse Legends

It has been suggested that the dragons carved around the base of the Apprentice Pillar are a depiction of Norse legends; that the Apprentice Pillar represents Yggdrasil – the Tree of Knowledge at the end of the world.

Odin hung suspended upside down from the branches of Yggdrasil to obtain wisdom and knowledge. Odin was the Norse god associated with death, wisdom and magic. So great was Odin's search for knowledge that he was prepared to sacrifice himself to learn the secret alphabet of the runes. He hung upside down on the great tree for nine days and nights with neither food nor drink.

At the base of Yggdrasil is a well said to hold the deepest wisdom. A dragon called Nidhogg who lives in Niflheim, the lowest of the nine worlds, protects this wisdom.

Even in a different mythology the Sacred Tree is associated with wisdom and the protection of wisdom.

## 13.4    The Twelve Pillars

Besides the unique Mason's and Apprentice pillars, which are towards the east end of the chapel, in the nave which is towards the west there are twelve other pillars. Each identical column rests on an identical octangular base but each is crowned with a different capital comprised of different species of magnificent foliage.



**Figure 33        Base of Free-Standing Pillar   (Photograph: M. Parker-Wood)**

The eight sided pedestal brings to mind the Dome of the Rock – the building that the Templars regarded as the successor of Solomon's Temple.

The configuration of these pillars is also strange. Ten pillars are arranged in two rows of five columns in the nave of the church. The other two pillars do not form part of this design. One stands between the Masons and Apprentice pillars and the other to the west of it.

Campbell (1937:177) is of the opinion that this number represents the Twelve Apostles and the priest the Lord Jesus. Steeped in an Old Testament paradigm as the Templars were, it is more probable that these pillars represent the Twelve Tribes of Israel. The ten pillars in the nave would represent the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom and the two apart and closer to the centre of the Divine Presence would represent the two tribes that made up Judah, the Southern Kingdom.

Whatever the interpretation there are twelve individual pillars in Rosslyn chapel each of them on an eight sided base with a differently carved capital of local plants.

## 13.5 Summary of Chapter 13 and Review of Chapter 14

The Mason's and Apprentice pillars are introduced – two very striking and totally different pillars which are situated at the entrance to the Lady Chapel at the east end of nave.

The Mason's pillar is strong and masculine, not without beauty. Eight beautiful patterns ascend from eight 'feet' and end in eight orbs.

The Apprentice pillar is delicate and feminine. Eight vines spew from the mouths of eight dragons to unite and form a double helix of four floral swathes. Such inimitable work is bound to the legend of the murdered apprentice. The pillar is also associated with Norse mythology. The motif of suffering and sacrifice surrounds the Apprentice pillar.

Duality is a characteristic of the cosmos. Kabala reflects this duality by attributing masculine **and** feminine qualities to **all** things.

Chochma – Feminine – *Wisdom* – resides in the Masculine *Pillar of Mercy*
Binah – Masculine – *Understanding and Perfection of Creation* – resides in the Feminine *Pillar of Judgement.*

If the Apprentice pillar is considered to correspond with the *Pillar of Judgement* then these pillars should be viewed from the side of the East window.

If the Mason's pillar is considered to be masculine and corresponds to the *Pillar of Mercy*, then from this Kabalistic perspective it holds within itself the feminine Wisdom – a superb explanation of a monotheistic Yahweh and his a/Asherah.

Twelve other pillars are found in the nave. Their configuration is unusual and could indicate that they signify the ten tribes of Israel and the two tribes of Judah.

Chapter 14 draws together the strands of history, tradition and religious experience that connect the Old Temple in Jerusalem and the more contemporary Dome of the Rock with the chapel at Roslin in Scotland. The strands are drawn ever tighter showing convincingly that the pre-exilic Israelite religious practices and structures of Ancient Israel can be determined here.

Exoterically Rosslyn Chapel creates the same sacred scenario as did the Temple of Solomon. In this instance the Mason's and Apprentice pillars represent the Jachin and Boaz from the Temple Porch in Jerusalem.

Esoterically Rosslyn Chapel creates the more ancient scenario of a *High Place,* a sacred grove where a *massebah* and an asherah would be found. In this context the Mason's and Apprentice pillars would correspond to a *massebah* and an asherah and perhaps be called Yahweh and his a/asherah. There were times when these sacred aniconic symbols also stood in the Temple.

On the occasions when this was so – the *Bamah* was contained within the Temple in the same way as it is in Rosslyn Chapel. The feminine is contained within the masculine so that the Wholeness of the One is never conceded.

# Chapter 14      Concluding Remarks

Six years ago I read *The Hiram Key,* written and researched by Knight & Lomas (1996). I was fascinated with their information and ideas concerning the relationship of this small chapel in Roslin, Scotland and its link with the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. I have been fortunate to have visited Rosslyn Chapel in August 2005 and in August 2007 and the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

One may leave this chapel in its Medieval milieu but it could be that its deeper context is to be found in 'knowledge' or understanding that the Templars and other orders brought back with them from Jerusalem to Europe; in this case, most particularly to France before it found its way to Scotland.

It might be that this Chapel does not tell a story – rather it is a representation of a Theology – a Theology that is grounded in Creation. The predominant theme in Rosslyn Chapel is creation – particularly expressed through vegetation. It could be that Knight & Lomas (1996) are correct – this chapel is not only about Christianity – nor is it only about the tradition of Free Masonry – it is about an older tradition. A tradition dating back thousands of years that incorporates theology from both the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah and that was eventually incorporated into their holiest shrine – the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem.

It is not disputed that the Knights Templar who resided for over a hundred years upon the Temple Mount, explored beneath its surface. There are many speculations about what the Templars may have found hidden there beneath the Dome of the Rock.

They may well have found the vessels from Herod's Temple concealed from the soldiers of the Roman Emperor Titus. They may also have found old manuscripts similar to *The Book of the Law* found in the Temple of Yahweh by Hilkiah, the High Priest during the reign of Josiah (2 Kings 22:8).

It is also possible that they may have found pre-exilic manuscripts that dated to the time before the redaction of the Hebrew Bible.

We know that in the ancient Jewish mind what was considered to be holy would never have been discarded. It is possible that the a/Asherah that stood in the Jerusalem Temple before the Exile might have been taken down into the deep vaults before the Babylonian army ransacked the

Temple – just as the Tent of the Tabernacle is reported to have been packed away beneath the Temple when it was no longer required.

The Templars might have learned that there was a difference between the canon of the Old Testament and the original texts upon which it was based. If they spent much time studying these writings it would explain why they did not establish centres of learning and why so much of what they did appeared to be 'secret'. It would have been extremely unwise for them to compromise their unique position and the favours which they enjoyed throughout Europe and in Scotland and within the Roman Church.

They must have been able to reach a theological understanding that enabled them to interface their discovery of the Presence of a Goddess with medieval Kabalistic thinking in terms of the Presence of the feminine Shekinah as well as with the duality of feminine and masculine subsumed within each other.

It is well attested that they never waived from their Christian faith so their theology must have been similar to that of the early Messianic Jews. From the reference to the liturgy of the Templars (8.2) it can be seen that both God and Mary were always addressed together.

This dissertation has endeavoured to show that from Ancient times, the Early Israelites, in their own right and as the forerunner of the Jewish faith and consequently our Christian religion, have practically demonstrated the presence of the divine in both a masculine and feminine way.

It has emphasised the important influence of the Canaanite religion on the Early Israelites and the abiding presence of a feminine deity. The influence of Israel and Judah's neighbouring states never ceased to influence their theological reflection, perhaps never more than during and after the exile.

Despite attempts to subsume the characteristics of the goddess within the nature of Yahweh, Asherah, as we know she was called, continued to play an important role in the daily lives of the people of Israel. She was present even during the Persian period when Jewish theology was refining and defining itself.

The purpose of these meanderings through the centuries is to substantiate the hypothesis that Rosslyn Chapel is an allegorical High Place – a *Bamah.* The two pillars that stand unique and proud are an allegory of the ***Standing Stone and of the a/Asherah*** that were always associated

with the sacred groves of Ancient Israel. In good translations of the Hebrew Bible, the presence of these two features is no longer hidden.

It may be that the Mason's pillar is a *massebah* and the Apprentice Pillar represents Asherah, the Mother Goddess of Ancient Israel. The dragons at the base of the pillar are associated with the sea – Asherah is *The Lady of the Sea.* From the mouths of these beautiful carvings come forth the stems of a tree – the Tree of Life. The stylised tree has always been associated with Asherah.

***The symbol delivers its message and fulfils its function even if its significance escapes the conscious level*** (Parry 1991:15).

The recently published works of Butler & Ritchie (2006) and Cowie (2006) both associate Rosslyn Chapel with the planet Venus. Asherah was always associated with the Morning and Evening star – Venus.

In this study, time was taken to examine the different renditions in various translations and also the disparity between the accounts in the Books of Kings and Chronicles, which describe the 'filigree chains' that decorated the Boaz and Jachin pillars that stood in front of the Temple of Solomon. Nowhere is there any suggestion whatsoever that these pillars did not look the same; only that they were given different names which seem to have a different meaning.

Steadfastness and Faithfulness are quintessential to faith – 'the pillars' on which all theology rests.

The God of Israel is the One who creates by speaking and then speaks to those whom the One has created. *Words Act and Deeds Speak.* Rosslyn Chapel like God's Word – becomes audible within space and time – it does not die away into silence but continues indefinitely to the end.

**Transcendent Creator and the Great and Admirable Mother remain
and shall remain as long as the World stands.**

**Figure 34      Lady Chapel Warwick Cathedral   (Photograph: M Parker-Wood.)**

# Chapter 15    Bibliography

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