Palmyrene Aramaic Inscriptions and the Bible

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The Aramaic inscriptions from Palmyra are a sizable corpus of ancient texts which have at times been employed with profit for the interpretation and illumination of biblical texts, and which continue to constitute a valuable resource. A more detailed exposition of this assertion is given in this author's "Palmyrene Aramaic Inscriptions and the Bible, especially Amos 2:8,"[1] which may be consulted as the introduction to this article, a series of three notes continuing this general topic, touching: (A) the name *yhwh ʾlhym* in Genesis 2-3; (B) Abraham's purchase of tomb property, and (C) the biblical Hebrew terms for 'goddess.'[2]

A. Genesis 2-3 "The god Yahweh and the Naked Couple"

Since its beginning Pentateuchal criticism, with its abandonment of the idea of authorship by Moses in favor of a discrimination of various sources (of later date), has depended heavily on the pattern of the names for the deity in the first five books of the canon. A small, but troublesome anomaly in the more or less clear pattern of divine names that can be observed is the combination of two names usually kept apart, *yhwh* and *ʾlhym*. This dual title *yhwh ʾlhym* is prominent in the first narrative portion, the creation and paradise story of Genesis 2 and 3. There is good reason to think that this is a passage that comes from the "Yahwist," one of the principal sources distinguished by critics. So scholars have had to seek some kind of explanation for the unusual combination, since elsewhere the "Yahwist" uses just the so-called Tetragrammaton.

The problem remains unresolved in the sense that after more than a century of Pentateuchal source-criticism, there is no agreed-on explanation. For a delineation of

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the issues involved I have profited much from the concise but thorough and judicious survey by S. Japhet.[3] The distribution of the phrase *yhwh 'lhym* in the Bible is "distinctive," in Japhet's term. Ignoring the predictable textual variations found in various manuscripts and editions, which are not numerous or serious, and on which one may consult Japhet's detailed treatment, *yhwh 'lhym* (or *h'lhym*) is found twenty times in the "Yahwistic" Eden story, twelve times in Chronicles, and nine times elsewhere, including the one other occurrence in the Pentateuch, Exodus 9:30. Usually the word *'lhym* is without the article, but we find *yhwh h'lhym* in 1 Chron 22:1, 19; 2 Chron 32:16.

It is impossible, and I hope unnecessary for the present purpose, to review all the explanations given by scholars for the unusual combination. Probably very much in the minority are those who, like Cassuto, have tried to explain the combination of names as conveying a particular, definable sense.[4] In Cassuto's case, his discussion of the divine names in this passage is only part of his pervasive reflection of source criticism; throughout the Pentateuch he wishes to find not a different source, but a different religious sense, which is signaled by the choice of *yhwh* or *'lhym*. Unless, then, one would wish to follow his major contention, his explanation of *yhwh 'lhym* in Genesis 2 and 3 cannot be persuasive.

This possibility having, then, been generally rejected, many scholars have been led to explain the double name as in one way or another the result of a process of editing, either in that sources have been combined, or that a Yahwistic source has suffered the addition, over time, of the name *'lhym* after the original Tetra-grammaton.

A minor offshoot, something of an oddity, is represented by E. Speiser, who, following Tur-Sinai, wished to compare use of *'lhym* here to use of the determin-ative *preceding* (not following) divine names in cuneiform writing. This is ingenious, but otherwise seems to me to have merit perhaps only in this, that as a desperate resort it points to the inadequacy of previous explanations.[5]

Before proceeding to the possible contribution of epigraphic evidence, note that Japhet, who discusses *yhwh 'lhym* in the context of a broader review titled "The Names of God," does not find that this double title is somehow inauthentic; instead she concludes: "The usage in Chronicles may indicate that the epithet was no innovation."[6] This restrained judgment contrasts favorably with the sweeping and somewhat incautious pessimism of Westermann's initial summary statement: "The

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[3]   *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought,* Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des Antiken Judentums 9, transl. A. Barber (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989) especially the section "YHWH Elohim," pp. 37-41. Another useful summary is that of C. Westermann, *Genesis,* BK I/1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974) 270-71.

[4]   U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1961).

[5]   Prof. William Hallo, the distinguished Assyriologist, in oral comment on this paper, called my attention to ambiguities and peculiarities in the interpretation of the DINGIR sign, ordinarily a determinative, in ancient Akkadian royal titles and elsewhere. These problems are best pursued by Assyriologists, and seem to me to constitute at most a possible qualification of what is said in this paragraph.

[6]   Japhet, *Ideology,* 41.

designation of God as *yhwh ʾlhym* presents considerable difficulties, beginning with how to explain the grammar of the combination and running on to the question of authorship."[7]

The contribution which Palmyrene texts offer to this discussion is this: a combination such as "the god Yahweh," *yhwh ʾlhym*, is well-attested in texts of considerable antiquity, from Palmyra and elsewhere. At Palmyra, there are abundant examples following the pattern: "(Divine Name), the god." This occurs in both singular, and (after two or more divine names) in plural. Thus: *lbʿlšmn ʾlhʾ* "to Baalshamin, the god" or "to the god Baalshamin"[8]; *lhrtʾ wlnny wlršp ʾlhy* "to Herta and Nanay and Reshef, the gods."[9] Dozens of examples could be added.

The Aramaic inscriptions from Hatra, which belong to the same major phase of Aramaic as Palmyrene, contribute examples as well. To cite but one in extenso: *dkyr wbryk qdm bʿšmyn ʾlhʾ* "May PN be remembered and blessed before Baashamin the god."[10] From approximately the same period is the Old Syriac inscription from Edessa, a dedication of a statue, with this phrase *lsyn ʾlhʾ* "for Sin, the god."[11]

Such a locution is even older than appears from these "Middle Aramaic" texts, and by curious chance occurs also with the name *yhw*, (presumably pronounced approximately *yāhû*). An alternate form of *yhwh*, this shorter form is familiar from use in biblical personal names such as *yirmᵉyāhû* (Jeremiah). In the famous appeal by the Jews of Elephantine, after the destruction of their temple, we find not only the name of an Egyptian deity written *hnwb ʾlhʾ* "Khnub, the god" but also, several times, *yhw ʾlhʾ* 'Yahu, the god'; the dual name, or combination of name and title, occurs in another text as well.[12]

These phrases found in extra-biblical Aramaic texts are, in my opinion, the formal equivalent of *yhwh ʾlhym* in spite of a difference in detail, that is, that in the Aramaic form we regularly have the article following the noun "god", whereas more commonly in the Bible one finds the form *ʾlhym*, without the definite article. Bearing in mind, at the outset, that the use of the "status determinatus" of Aramaic is not completely equivalent to use of the article in biblical Hebrew,[13] it is significant

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[7] Westermann, *Genesis*, 270: "Die Gottesbezeichnung *yhwh ʾlhym* bietet erhebliche Schwierig-keiten, angefangen von dem grammatischen Verständnis der Zusammensetzung bis hin zu der Frage des Autors."

[8] *BS III* 18:3 = *PAT* 0174:3.

[9] J. Cantineau, "Tadmorea (suite)," *Syr* 17 (1936) 267-355; p. 268, text no. 17 line 6.

[10] B. Aggoula, *Inventaire des inscriptions hatréennes,* Institut Français d'archéologie du proche-orient, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique tome CXXXIX (Paris: Geuthner, 1991), pp. 18-19, no. 23, line 1; cf. also pp. 21-22, no. 26, line 2; pp. 58-59, no. 82, lines 3-4. Numbers of the edition of Vattioni are, for the texts cited above, the same; see F. Vattioni, *Le iscrizioni di Hatra*, Istituto orientale di Napoli, Supplemento n. 28 agli Annali, vol. 41 (1981), fasc.3.

[11] Conveniently available in the collection of H.J.W. Drijvers, *Old-Syriac (Edessan) inscriptions* (Leiden: Brill, 1972); phrase cited is p. 10, no. 14 line 3.

[12] B. Porten and A. Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt Newly Copied, Edited and Translated into Hebrew and English,* Vol 1: *Letters* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1986); texts cited here are A4.7 (= Cowley 30) line 5; lines 6, 24, 26; and A4.10 (= Cowley 33) line 8.

[13] It is possibly relevant that the Greek usually translates *yhwh ʾlhym* by κύριος ὁ θεός with the article.

that the use of *ʾlhym* or *hʾlhym* in the Bible, where this is both a common noun and at other times a proper name, a divine name, presents a situation that is not neatly compartmentalized; there is inconsistency in use with or without the article, or, to put it another way, these categories overlap. In this connection it is particularly significant that *yhwh hʾlhym*, with article, *does* occur in the passages notes already by Japhet in her discussion and cited above: 1 Chron 22:1, 19; 2 Chron 32:16. It is interesting to note that in 1 Chron 22:1 the full phrase is: *byt yhwh hʾlhym* ... *wmzbh lʿlh lysrʾl* "the house (i.e. temple) of YHWH the god ... and altar for offerings, of Israel" compare Elephantine *ʾgwrʾ zy yhw ʾlhʾ*, "the temple of Yahu, the god" and the common occurrence in Palmyrene of *DN* (Name of deity) *ʾlhʾ* "DN, the god," in connection with dedications of shrines and altars.[14] To cite one example in full: *ʿlwtʾ ʾln qrbw PN wPN lbʿlšmn ʾlhʾ* "PN and PN offered these altars to Baalshamin, the god" (*BS III* 24 = *PAT* 0180:1-3).

In addition to the three biblical passages cited above as attesting the combination *yhwh hʾlhym* there are three others which deserve citation. Japhet did not overlook these, but lists them only in a footnote; in her opinion these three (1 Sam 6:20; Neh 8:6; 9:7) are not the same as her three sure examples, but rather show use of *yhwh ʾlhym* as what she calls "a general term"[15] But such a designation is obviously vague in the extreme as a linguistic description. Instead, these passages confirm and then extend the overlap of biblical and extra-biblical usage. Nehemiah 9:7 is just *ʾattāh hûʾ yhwh hāᵉlôhîm* "You are the LORD God" in the traditional English rendering; in that advanced here: "You are the god Yahweh." Neh 8:6 adds an epithet: "Ezra blessed *yhwh hā ᵉlôhîm hag-gādôl* "Yahweh, the great god." Compare the inscriptional use of the extended pattern: 1) Deity Name, 2) *ʾlhʾ* and 3) epithet, as *lšdrpʾ ʾlhʾ tbʾ* "to Shadrapha, the good god" (CIS 3972:3 = *PAT* 0318) or *ʿzyzw ʾlhʾ tbʾ wrhmnʾ* (CIS 3974:-3 = *PAT* 0320) "...Azizu, the good and merciful god." Many, many more could be cited. Semantically close to the *yhwh hāᵉlôhîm hag-gādôl* of Neh 8:6 is *bl ʾlhʾ rbʾ* "Bel, the great god" in a Palmyrene inscription (J. Cantineau, "Tadmorea," *Syr* 14 [1933] p. 177 line 4 [Tad 3] = *PAT* 2756).

In conclusion, the biblical combination *yhwh ʾlhym* is not grammatically difficult, and not artificial, in the sense that it is a mechanical or unidiomatic creation that came about in the course of redaction or transmission of the texts where it stands. In a given instance, of course, its presence in the text may indeed result from deliberate redaction, but even if that is sometimes the case, the redactors resorted to a genuine, existing form of divine title, one which is attested in documents of considerable antiquity.

In my opinion, the use of *yhwh ʾlhym* in the creation and paradise story of the Yahwist is motivated; it reflects an intention or need on the part of the original narrator. We may suppose that this story-teller shared the tradition reflected in the inscriptions, of frequently adding an identifier "(the) god" after the name of a deity. Where not just custom, in a polytheistic world this would have been partly reverential, and partly parallel, for divine names, to the inclusion of an identifier

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[14] *BS III*, 1 = *PAT* 0158; *BS III* 3 = *PAT* 0160; *BS III* 10 = *PAT* 0167; *BS III* 18 = *PAT* 0174; *BS III* 24 = *PAT* 0180; *CIS* 3983 = *PAT* 0329, and so on – many other instances could be cited.
[15] Japhet, *Ideology*, 38, note 88, citing M. Segal, *Tarbiz* 9 (1937-38) 129 note 1.

after a human name, e.g. "So-and so, the butcher" – which approaches being a surname, as „So-and-so Butcher."[16] This practice would also have served to clarify matters in a world which men shared with gods to the extent that men and gods occasionally even had the same names.[17]

We may also reasonably suppose that the repeated and concentrated use of *yhwh* *ʾlhym* in Genesis 2-3 is partly due to the work of transmitters and editors of the text, with motives having to do with fitting this story with the foregoing, with the rest of Genesis, and indeed, with Israelite religion. I would not wish to maintain that *every* recurrence of the term is original. But if provisionally we may accept the insight that the sense started out as "the god Yahweh," we may proceed to a rereading of the story.

For readers not acquainted with that line of study which connects the myth of Genesis 2-3 to other Near Eastern myths, I wish to emphasize that by no means all of what is stated in the following pages is new. On the contrary, most of it is prepared for in the detailed studies of others. Building on these, my brief retelling, foregoing elaborate foot-noting, is meant to stress an angle of approach opened by the new evidence introduced in this essay. The reader will understand, too, that I hope only to make a sensible contribution to an ongoing conversation about this story, and have no illusions about having the final word on the subject!

It seems useful to provide at the outset a summary of the way the story will be read. The garden is the primordial garden of the gods, especially of Yahweh. Man is made to work there, to spare the gods the labor. Man is created mortal, from the start. The snake tells the truth and the god Yahweh lies. The story has nothing much to do with sex, and a lot to do with clothing. The eating of the fruit represents a gain, but an ambiguous one, and the false step which incurs the fear of the god Yahweh and expulsion from the garden is a mutual step by man and woman, with the order of action and dramatis personae: snake, woman, man dictated by the narrative desire to reach a climax, culminating in the curse on the man.

The garden is the primordial garden of the gods. The geography is mythical, with the source of all earthly rivers coming from the midst of the garden, giving rise to the four great rivers of the world. The puzzling mention of the gold and precious substances in connection with one river is an allusion to a theme that is prominent in the description of "Eden, the garden of the gods," (Hebrew: *bᵉʿēden gan ʾᵉlôhîm*) in

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[16] In the Palmyrene inscriptions, a name may of course be followed by a whole series of patronymics, but in not a few cases a name is followed, not by a patronymic, but by a common noun, providing either a gentilic, a military rank, a civic or religious title, or the name of a profession. Examples of these categories, which sometimes overlap, are: *PN tdmwryʾ qštʾ* "PN, the Palmyrene, the archer"; similarly: *PN qštʾ; PN hptyn* "PN, centurion's servant"; *PN grmtws* "PN, the scribe"; *PN ʾpklʾ dy ʿzyzw ʾlh* "PN, apkalla (a kind of priest) of the god Azizu"; *PN krwzʾ* "PN, the herald"; *PN ʾmnʾ* "PN, the craftsman"; *PN tbh* "the butcher (or: cook)"; *PN mksʾ* "PN, the tax-collector." For precise references, see the "Glossary" in *PAT*.

[17] J. Teixidor, "Remarques sur l'onomastique palmyrénienne," *Studi epigrafici e linguistici* 8 (1991) 213-23, especially 217-18.

Ezekiel 28:18, part of a chapter as fascinating as it is textually and linguistically difficult.[18]

In the garden of the god Yahweh, the first man is set to work. The presupposition is an original situation like that plaintively depicted at the start of Atra-ḫasīs: "When the gods like men bore the work and suffered the toil."[19] Everything in the story implies that man is made mortal, subject to death: he is made out of the ground, and the story climaxes in a revelation of what he is, not a change of what he is: "For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" *kî ʿāpār ʾattāh weʾel ʿāpār tāšûb*. Compare Job 1:21: "Naked I came out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there." "Dust" is in the scriptures practically an unequivocal metaphor for death.[20]

The snake tells the truth throughout: the man and woman do not die, and their eyes are opened; they become like gods in their knowledge and consciousness. For readers with any shred of orthodoxy left in them, whether Christian or Jewish, or even with a cherished memory of what was learned in religious instruction, it may be disconcerting to confront the corollary: the god Yahweh lied when he said they would die, and concealed the truth about the real effect of the fruit of the forbidden tree. This necessary conclusion is if not upsetting then apt to create suspicion also for readers of this ancient sacred book who, free of any theological concern, will ask whether such a story about the god of ancient Israel is thinkable within their sacred literature?

It is well to recall, with such a concern in mind, that there are other rather appalling statements about Yahweh in the Bible. In these chapters, Genesis 2 and 3, we are within a collection of tales which have a special character. O. Eissfeldt separated it from other Pentateuchal strands, calling it "L," for "Laienquelle," the "Lay source," which he deems "particularly crude and archaic." This is a cycle where (in the Tower of Babel story) "Yahweh is anxious about his power."[21] J. Goldin, the well-known professor of Midrash, once summed up for me, in conversation, the aim of

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[18] The Hebrew text seems to say that the primordial man of Ezekiel lives "on the holy mountain" amidst what are called (translating etymologically) "stones of fire (*ʾabnê ʾēš* – perhaps the sense is 'artifical gems' cf. Ugaritic *abn ṣrp*). The phrase *gan hāᵉlôhîm* has a tantalizing echo in a grammatically puzzling Palmyrene reference to a sanctuary as *gntʾ ʾlm* (*BS III* 45:12). The Aramaic is: *wʾhd bgntʾ ʾlym* "and one in the *sacred garden*" and whatever the grammar of that Aramaic phrase may be, some such translation is justified by the Greek version of the same inscription: [ἐ]ν ἱερῷ ἄλσει "in the sacred grove"; see also J.T. Milik, *Dédicaces faites par des dieux (Palmyre, Hatra, Tyr) et des thiases sémitiques à l'époque romaine*, Recherches d'épigraphie proche-orientale I (Paris: Geuthner, 1972) 4-8; Milik restores *gnt[ʾ ʾlym]* in another Palmyrene text, *Inv* 11 80:6 = *PAT* 1505; note also *RSP* 162:4 *gntʾ dy mtq[dštʾ]* "the conse[crated(?)] garden" = *PAT* 1944.

[19] W.G. Lambert and A.R. Millard, *Atra-Ḫasīs, The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969). The translation of Lambert and Millard for Tab I i lines 1-2 is given above; the Akkadian is: *i-nu-ma i-lu a-wi-lum ub-lu du-ul-lu is-gi-lu šu-up-ši-[i]k-ka*.

[20] See D. Hillers, "Dust: Some Aspects of Old Testament Imagery," in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East,* edd. J. Marks and R.M. Good (Guilford, Conn.: Four Quarters, 1987 [Marvin Pope volume]) 105-09.

[21] Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction,* trans. P.R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, c. 1965) 194-99.

midrash as being. "… to domesticate the god of Israel." In Genesis 2-3 we meet a god who is not so domesticated.

The story has much to do with being clothed as opposed to being naked. The first state of man is not so much one of innocence as of ignorance. His nakedness is a sign that he is like the other animals. Nudity in this story is not in the first place a symbol of a state of sexual development or experience. He was naked because he did not know any better – what has passed so long as the story of "the Fall" is the story of a rise.

The god Yahweh himself is not a male Greek god, proud in the magnificence of his human torso. This is a Near Eastern god, and like kings and important people, the gods (with certain exceptions) wear clothes. Thus we must conceive of Yahweh as walking in his garden to enjoy the cool part of the day, lightly clothed perhaps, but not naked!

Even if we did not have all the artistic depictions of gods recovered by archaeology, we would reach the same end through textual evidence within the Bible. In Isaiah 6, the "train" of God's robe "fills the temple." In the late book Daniel, the Ancient of Days wears "clothing as white as snow" (Dan 7:9). On the opposite side, there was an abhorrence of exposure within ancient Israel, reflected often in the law codes and in the prophets. We recall, too, the Gilgamesh epic, where an important part of the civilizing process for the savage-man, Enkidu, was (in the Old Babylonian version) getting some clothes. The prostitute "pulled off (her) clothing; With one (piece) she clothed him."[22]

Not incidentally, attention to the origin of an important feature of human society, in this case clothing, is continued in other parts of the primordial story. In the line of Cain we have a technogony of some detail. Already in these preceding chapters we may detect the view that the origin of clothing preceded the first domestication of animals, metallurgy, and music.[23]

If we reread the story from 2:25-3:11, we note, how prominent the theme 'naked vs. clothed' is, culminating in the accusing question of the angry god who stands before the naked couple: "Who told you that you were naked?"

I do not wish to limit the implications of Genesis 2 and 3. It may be suggestive of all kinds of things, including sex. But, one may argue, it is not sexuality that set man apart from the gods or animals. Everything and everyone had sex, from beasts to gods, in polytheistic conceptions of the world. This turns up, of course, in early stories of Genesis, where we read that the gods, not content with their own kind, so to speak, had intercourse with human women: "… the gods saw that the human

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[22] The translation is that of E.A. Speiser, in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament,* ed. J.B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University, 1955) 77 lines 27-28.

[23] See R. Oden, Jr., "Grace or Status? Yahweh's Clothing of the First Humans," *The Bible without Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, c. 1987) 96, on the invention of clothing as part of a technogony. Oden aptly compares the *Phoenician History* of Philo of Byblos, where in a section on the development of the arts of civilization, a culture hero is said to have discovered skin clothing. The whole essay (92-105) is worth consulting on the detail of the clothing of Adam and Eve in the exegetical tradition (I am grateful to Prof. Kyle McCarter for calling my attention to Oden's work). Focused on this detail, Oden reaches a conclusion opposite to my own: the clothing "is an authoritative marking of the pair as beings who belong to a sphere distinct from the divine."

women were good-looking, and took as wives anyone they chose" (Genesis 6:1 and especially 4).

Like Barr, I hold that a main focus of the story is how man lost a chance for immortality by becoming like a god.[24] Another major feature, the one stressed here, is that the gain and loss are summed up in the contrast 'naked' as opposed to 'clothed'. Since the tale is about origins, about an event at the beginning, we are right to read it as intended to speak, in a sense, of universals of human life; yet we must not overlook that the story is culturally determined, that here a Near Eastern or Israelite attitude toward the naked body shapes the telling.

My reading of the Garden of Eden story is, at least in intention, independent of the question of dating of the story, or of source-critical considerations, that is, of the JEDP terminology that is the stock in trade of students of the Pentateuch. Ideally, reading and comprehension precedes such questions. But since, in my opinion, the reading advanced here turns out to have implications for Pentateuchal origins, let me sketch an opinion on this subject.

Some contemporaries think that the origin of the earliest sources of the Pentateuch was in a national "epic," in the sense of an extensive poetic composition from very early in Israel's history as a people. There is a certain *a priori* plausibility in some form of such a view, since verse was the common and socially prized medium for long and unified narrative. Moreover, since 1930 we have possessed impressive examples of such narrative poems in the Late Bronze epics from Ugarit. It is also common for scholars to regard certain poems, such as the Song of Deborah and some others, as the very earliest elements in the Bible. The general view is expressed in the title of F. Cross's *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* and in its content;[25] the continuity of biblical narrative and an earlier poetic narrative form is stressed in S. Parker's treatment of Ugaritic stories under the title *The Pre-biblical Narrative Tradition.*[26]

The problem is that the stories of Genesis, notably those which deal with the primeval time, are nothing like that: they are typically short, folklike, and not notably unified, and are, astonishingly, prose. Whenever or however it happened, it is more plausible to suppose that a popular narrative form, the brief prose tale, underwent a process of collection and elevation to higher status, through incorporation into the body of literary works that the Israelite elite thought worth preservation and study. If something like that happened, as I suppose it did, the eventual canonization did not mean that the "milk of the word" was homogenized. The tales were not reduced to an insipid orthodoxy.

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[24]   J. Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis: Fortress, c. 1992) 66. Though I agree with Barr's principal thesis, a smile is irresistible when Barr verges on speculation about what we might call the "private life of Adam and Eve" in saying: "In my judgment it is far more natural to understand that the human pair did make love in the Garden of Eden."

[25]   *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1973).

[26]   *The Pre-biblical Narrative Tradition: Essays on the Ugaritic Poems Keret and Aqhat* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989).

B. Abraham's Purchase of Tomb Property

The tale of how Abraham bought a burial-place for Sarah at Machpelah (Gen 23) is clear enough so that modern readers can follow it, and even appreciate its charm. Even so, close students of Genesis have not been wrong in perceiving problems in this account. The very expansiveness and richness of detail leads to questions, at least for the reader who is separated from the social and historical context in which the story was written. Why are we given so much detail here, and what do the individual elements mean? Why does Abraham behave and speak in just the way he does, and what are the motives of the "Hittites" with whom he deals?

In expounding the story of this legal transaction, commentators have done their best to exploit what is now known of ancient Near Eastern law. In 1953, an important phase in these researches was initiated by M. Lehmann, who attempted to show that the background of the story was to be sought in ancient Hittite law.[27] In the time since, this hypothesis has called forth responses and objections from other students of ancient law, who by now have brought evidence contesting, and refuting Lehmann's claim that there is some specific link between the legal situation presupposed by Gen 23 and Hittite law. Where these scholars have advanced a positive view of their own, it has been in favor of seeing a resemblance between elements in Gen 23 and the Neo-Babylonian "dialogue" document of sale.[28] In some cases, a dominant interest of students of legal aspects of the chapter has been historical rather than expository, that is, the problem of the "Patriarchal Period" or the historicity of the Abraham has been the point at issue, so that the legal background is discussed, but not fully exploited for a reading of the narrative.[29]

The early study (1971) by R. Westbrook, reprinted unchanged as chapter One of his *Property and Family in Biblical Law* of 1991, deserves separate mention at this point, less perhaps for its conclusions than for the wealth of suggestive detail and observation it contains.[30] Westbrook concedes that there is a good deal to be said for the "dialogue document" theory, but prefers to see in the narrative the pattern of a "double transfer" legal device characteristic of legal practice in certain areas during the second-millenium B.C. His interest is, in the end, in the date of the narrative and the historical background presupposed. In my opinion, the evidence Westbrook advances, from Ugarit and elsewhere, is unconvincing, and the sensible principle he announces: "It is not to be expected that the narrative form of Genesis 23 … will conform to the tight juristic dialogue document" (p. 31) seems to undercut much in his own argument.

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[27] "Abraham's Purchase of Machpelah and Hittite Law," *BASOR* no. 129 (Aug., 1953) 15-18.

[28] Notable contributions to the discussion are H. Petschow, "Die neubabylonische Zwiegesprächsurkunde und Genesis 23," *JCS* 19 (1965) 103-20, and G. Tucker, "The Legal Background of Genesis 23," *JBL* 85 (1966) 77-84. For further bibliographic detail, see C. Westermann, *Genesis,* BK I/2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974) 455-56, with references also to previous bibliographic sections of the commentary.

[29] Thus notably J. van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University, 1975) 98-101; the historical problem is foremost also in other treatments.

[30] *Property and Family in Biblical Law,* JSOT Supplement Series 113 (1991) 24-35, reprinted from *Israel Law Review* 6 (1971) 209-25.

The outcome of this body of intense research is somewhat disappointing for the reader of Gen 23, for it seems that little more than a broad generalization is justified. Westermann's summary, which seems to me fair enough, is this: the extra-biblical parallels show that the sale in Gen 23 is depicted in a way that is in general consonant with both the usages and the atmosphere of ancient Near Eastern legal transactions, but that one should not think that any specific model was followed.[31] Modern commentators, then, may seem to have no better recourse than some form of the old explanation, that this story of protracted negotiations contains a good deal of exaggerated "oriental" courtesy.

The inscriptions from tombs at Palmyra introduce fresh evidence to the discussion, both because they supply details of legal terminology and because they deal specifically with the making of tombs and the sale of tomb property. In the following discussion I draw on the researches of Dr. E. Cussini, summed up in *The Aramaic Law of Sale and the Cuneiform Legal Tradition*.[32] I am indebted to this work both as a collection and analysis of Near Eastern legal materials, and as a stimulus for my reconsideration of Gen 23. Responsibility for the conclusions I draw about biblical matters is, of course, my own.

Acquisition of a piece of property is central to the narrative in Genesis 23.[33] Many parallels in detail to ancient sale-documents confirm this, as the work of previous students of the subject shows.

The corpus of Aramaic inscriptions and Aramaic-Greek bilinguals from Palmyra provides a considerable number of texts that give information on the peculiar legal consideration involved in building a tomb and in selling tomb property.[34] This, rather than the broader topic of sale of real property, is central to understanding of the biblical narrative. The point not to be missed in Gen 23 is that Abraham wants, and finally gets, "*tomb* property" (*ʾhzt qbr*).

In general, the history of various societies ancient and modern leads us to expect that burial places may be a special kind of property. The truth of the American proverbial dictum: "As difficult as moving a cemetery" is confirmed repeatedly, whenever a city of our time feels the need to make some other use of what has been a burial ground. This arises from strongly held notions of sacredness and permanence associated with burial of the dead. As an illustration from ancient times (not related to Palmyrene practice!), in Roman legal collections, such as the Institutes of

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[31] Westermann, *Genesis,* 455-56.

[32] Ph. D. dissertation, The John Hopkins University, 1992.

[33] The assertion that *ʾhzh* here means something other than transfer of land, and refers instead only to a right to use of land, deserves mintion, but does not seem to be based on extensive consideration of Near Eastern legal evidence; this is the view of G. Gerlemann, "Nutzrecht und Wohnrecht: Zur Bedeutung von *ʾhzh* und *nhlh*," *ZAW* 89 (1977) 313-25. A statement such as this about Abraham: "Er wird durch den Handel mit den Leuten von Hebron kein kanaanäischer Grundstückbesitzer" is perhaps provocative, but does not seem to be demonstrated.

[34] In addition to Cussini's "Aramaic Law of Sale," note that a convenient ordered collection of relevant texts, under the main categories "Foundation" and "Cession," follows the detailed treatment of Palmyrene tombs in M. Gawlikowski, *Monuments funéraires de Palmyre,* Travaux du Centre d'archéologie méditerranéenne de l'Academie Polonaise des Sciences, 9 (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe [= PWN-Editions Scientifiques dee Pologne] 1970).

Justinian, one finds that certain things belong to no one (*nullius autem sunt res*): – *res sacrae et religiosae et sanctae*, and that one way of making a place "religiosum," that is, sacred to the gods of the netherworld, is by burying a corpse in it.[35] In actual practice, as epigraphic evidence shows, the Romans did buy and sell property which was "religiosum" through burial, but judging from the legal statements, this kind of transaction seems to have been somewhat irregular, a gray area, where economic necessity was in conflict with important social and religious tenets.[36]

At Palmyra, the texts having to do with the foundation, that is, creation of tombs, use terms in part comparable to conventional legal terminology such as the following: the tomb is "made" and "built" by an individual, at his expense, for himself and his descendants (sometimes specifically restricted to male descendants), "forever." However, the special status of the tomb, in the intention of the creator, is marked in some cases by use of the verb "consecrate", either of part of the tomb or of all of it,[37] and conversely, unused niches are sometimes designated as "profane, unconsecrated" (*šhymʾ*).[38] There are sometimes explicit provisions against any future alienation of the tomb.[39] The special religious conception of a tomb is indicated explicitly in one case by a curse on any person who "opens" the burial; the protection of the tomb from violation in this way was widespread in antiquity, and was presumably widespread at Palmyra. Even construction of the temple to Baalshamin was interrupted for a time by encounter of an old tomb. This seems to account for the special inscription honoring an individual who "opened" the tomb and thus, we may deduce, enabled work to proceed.[40]

Moreover, in the grave of one Abdastor a curse is invoked against anyone who sells (*zbn*) something or other appertaining to the tomb (the specific sense of the term used, *ʿrb*, is obscure; if it does not refer to a part of the property, perhaps the

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[35]   J.A.C. Thomas, *The Institutes of Justinian: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Cape Town: Juta, 1975) citations from 65-66; Thomas writes (75): "Res religiosae were, in pagan times, those of the di manes, at all times, in effect, sepulchres and burial places." Cf. Francis de Zulueta, *The Institutes of Gaius*, Part I (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946) Book II, 2, 4-9.

[36]   See J. Crook, *Law and Life of Rome* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1967; paperback ed. 1984) especially 133-38, on the ambiguities and contradictions concerning *sepulchra*.

[37]   See for example [*qbrʾ*] *dnh bnʾ wʾqdš PN* "PN built and consecrated this [tomb]" *CIS* 4162:1, Gk ἀφιέρωσεν = *PAT* 0514; cf. the bilingual *CIS* 4214:1 = *PAT* 0570 with *ʾqdšt* "I consecrated" // Greek ἀφιέρωσα *ʾksdrʾ mqblʾ … mqdš* "the exedra opposite … is consecrated" H. Ingholt, "Two Unpublished Tombs from the Southwest Necropolis of Palmyra, Syria," *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy and History: Studies in Honor of George C. Miles,* ed. D.K. Kouymjian (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1974) p. 38 line 2 = *PAT* 2727; *gwmhyn trn bryyn ymnyyn mqdšyn* "two outer consecrated niches on the right" Ingholt, "Inscriptions and Sculptures from Palmyra II," *Berytus* 5 (1938) p. 124 (21 II):2-3 = *PAT* 0095. As Prof. Gawlikowski pointed out to me (oral communication), the use of some form of *qdš* at Palmyra is not especially common, in view of the great number of burial inscriptions. All the same, the evidence cited is perhaps sufficient to establish that the notion of "consecration" was part of the conception of a proper burial-place.

[38]   Of about six or seven examples, I cite H. Ingholt, "Inscriptions and Sculptures from Palmyra I," *Berytus 3 (1935) 96:2-3* =PAT *0047: šʾr ʾksdrʾ šhymʾ* "the rest of the unconsecrated exedra."

[39]   Thus *CIS* 4214 = *PAT* 0570, *CIS* 4215 = *PAT* 0571.

[40]   *BS III* 60:2, 5 = *PAT* 0208.

prohibition is against any legal transaction concerning the tomb, giving it as security).[41]

From the same tombs at Palmyra comes abundant evidence that, pressed by necessity in years after the construction of an elaborate family burial place, the heirs of the founder did after all sell parts of the tombs, also to those who were not relatives. The "cession" texts in the tombs, probably excerpts from fuller official archival texts, use enough of legal form to show that these sales were approximately on a level with transfer of any real property.[42] Yet perhaps the frequent resort to terms other than *zbn* "to sell" – especially reference to "partnership" – is at times a legal fiction, betraying a sense that these sales required treatment as something of a circumvention of a different set of norms.

This body of evidence for the special status of an *ʾhzt qbr*, a tomb property, yields an improved understanding of the course of the narrative in Genesis 23. At the beginning, Abraham announces what he wants: tomb property. The Hittites, who understand the implications of his request, make a counter-offer: permission to bury his wife's body in any of their tombs – generous and courteous, but less than what the patriarch is asking for. (The story presupposes that the Hittites have, already prepared, family tombs suited for multiple burials.) Abraham makes his desire still more explicit, the hypogeum (Hebrew *mʿrh*; Palmyrene *mʿrtʾ*) of Ephron and the ground around it, referring to "full price" (v. 9).[43] The counter-offer is again generous, this time grant of the land, but still short of what Abraham wants, which is a purchase with payment. Finally the terms are agreed on, the money is paid,[44] even its quality is described, and the hypogeum and the ground in which it was excavated passed legally (v. 17: *qm*) to Abraham, and he buried Sarah there. This last act resolves the situation set up at the beginning of the narrative, by the death of Sarah; at the same time, this is a consummation of the legal and social act; by carrying out the burial in the tomb Abraham has made it "consecrated," and thus sealed its

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[41] The text is H. Ingholt, "Inscriptions and Sculptures from Palmyra II," *Berytus* 5 (1938) 133 = *PAT* 0097; see also J.T. Milik, "Les papyrus araméens d'Hermoupolis et les cultes syro-phéniciens en Égypte perse," *Bibl* 48 (1967) 550 and footnote 2: "gage, caution, hypothèque"; so also the definition in C.-F. Jean and J. Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire des inscriptions sémitiques de l'Ouest* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), and in J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

[42] See Cussini, "Aramaic Law of Sale," for details.

[43] On "full price" see Westbrook, *Property and Family*, 25: "… the formula 'to give for money' exists as a standard expression for 'to sell' in Akkadian (*ana kapim nadānum*) and almost certainly also in Hebrew, and a fortiori Abraham's statement *bksp mlʾ ytnnh ly* in v. 9 can refer to nothing else. It recalls the formula *ana šīmim gamrim* in contracts of sale in Akkadian and *bedamin gemarin* in the contracts of Bar Kokhba."

[44] Westbrook, *Property and Family* (27-28) observes acutely: "It is noteworthy that many other passages in the Bible concerning purchase of property take care to mention that it was for a money price, even giving the exact price, although it is of no apparent significance for understanding the story. Of particular significance are two passages recounting the purchase of land from a pagan for the purpose of erecting a holy structure. In Gen. 33:19, Jacob buys land for a hundred *qśyth*. He intends to build an altar … Moreover, *the land is to serve later as the grave for the bones of Joseph* … (emphasis mine, DRH).

special status. Significantly, the legal term *qm* is repeated in the summary sentence (v. 20), and also the phrase I take to be central: "tomb property" (*ʾḥzt qbr*).

We my sum up the outcome of introducing evidence from Palmyrene tomb inscriptions in this way. Genesis 23 is the story of how Abraham acquires a special kind of property, secured to him and his heirs both by religion and by law.

Not only the cosmogonic chapters of Genesis, but also much in the later chapters about the patriarchs is part of the primordial and creative period for Israelite society, where existing institutions and arrangements of life are grounded in an earlier order by charter stories.

Bronislaw Malinowski, a pioneer of modern anthropology, formulated in a classic way the idea that myth functions in society as a *charter* for the society's fundamental structures and institutions. Even though he focuses on only one aspect of myth, his words are cited here as indicating a valid way of conceiving the nature of Genesis 23, and of many other stories of the patriarchs.

> Myth, as a statement of primeval reality which still lives in present-day life and as a justification by precedent, supplies a retrospective pattern of moral values, sociological order, and magical belief. … The function of myth, briefly, is to strengthen tradition and endow it with a greater value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher, better, more supernatural reality of initial events.[45]

C. 'Goddess' in Biblical Hebrew

In the lexicon of biblical Hebrew, for 'god, deity' we have, most commonly, *ʾlhym*, but for 'goddess' there is nothing generally recognized as a corresponding term. There are, however, various relevant words which come in for consideration in this connection: *ʾašērāh* and *ʿaštōret* or plural *ʿaštārôt*. This note is intended to state at some length what the relevant Palmyrene evidence is for a term 'goddess,' and then to consider how several biblical passages are clarified when seen from this vantage-point. This, in turn, contributes to observations concerning other divine names in the Bible.

In Palmyrene Aramaic the Semitic name of an ancient goddess appears in a variety of phonetic realizations, reflecting a long and variegated religious and linguistic history. Thus as names of a deity or deities we find both *ʿštrt* "Ashtart" and *ʿtrʿth* "Atargatis," deriving in different ways from older Northwest Semitic forms.[46] From Akkadian *ištar* "Ishtar" we have in Palmyrene a somewhat uncertain attestation of a

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[45] "Myth in Primitive Society," in *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1954; reprint of essay of 1926) 146.

[46] For *ʿštrt* see e.g. *lbl wlbʿšmn [wlʿglbwl wlml]kbl wlʿštrt wlnmsys wlʾrṣw wlʾbgl ʾlhy tbyʾ [wskryʾ]* "for DN … and for Ashtart and for DN …, the good and generous gods" *Inv* 12 55:2-3 = *PAT* 1568; *lʿštr[t] ʾštrʾ tbtʾ* "for Astarte, the good goddess" J. Cantineau, "Textes palmyréniens provenant de la fouille du temple de Bêl," *Syr* 12 (1931) p. 134 (no. 13):2-3 = *PAT* 2751. On *ʿtrʿth* Atargatis see e.g. *lmlkb[l] wgd tymy wlʿtrʿth ʾlh[yʾ] ṭb[yʾ]* "to DN and DN and to Atargatis, [the] good god[s]" *CIS* 3927:4-5 = *PAT* 0273.

form derived from the Assyrian dialect *ʾs[t]rʾ* [47] and several occurrences of *ʾštr*.[48] The phonetic value of *š* in this case is uncertain, but to judge from ordinary Palmyrene spelling, the letter probably reflects phonetic [*š*] rather than [*s*] (spelled with the ambiguous letter *š/ś*).[49]

As in Akkadian, so in Palmyrene the proper name *ʾštr* comes to be used also as a common noun meaning 'goddess.' Use of *ʾštr*, etc., in the sense 'goddess' is unmistakable especially when it follows the name of another deity and is modified by the adjective *tbʾ* "good", as in *lʾ štr[tʾ] ʾštrʾ tbtʾ* "...to Astar[te], the good goddess ..."[50] This is the feminine counterpart of a locution common in masculine form, used of male deities, thus *lšdrpʾ ʾlhʾ tbʾ* "... to Shadrapa, the good god ...",[51] which occurs also in the plural: "in honor of DN and DN (this name is feminine: *ʾlt* = *'Allat'*) and DN, the good gods ..." *ʾlhyʾ tbyʾ*.[52]

The hypothetical **ʾlhtʾ* "goddess" would not be unexpected in Palmyrene; such a feminine counterpart to masculine *ʾlhʾ* "god" occurs, e.g., in approximately contemporary Nabataean Aramaic.[53] On the basis of present evidence we could set up a paradigm of this sort for Palmyrene:

m.sg.	'god'	*ʾlhʾ*
f. sg.	'goddess'	*ʾštrʾ* / **ʾlhtʾ*
pl.	'gods'	*ʾlhyn* (abs.); *ʾlhyʾ* (emphatic)

Though the attestation within this Aramaic dialect of the sense 'goddess' for a term that is also in use as a divine name, 'Ishtar,' is clear, the phenomenon is scarcely singular or remarkable in itself; as noted, this semantic development is well-attested within Akkadian. It is not improbable to suppose that Akkadian has influenced Palmyrene usage in this instance, even though we must think of an inner-Aramaic development which had recourse to an originally foreign term to fill a slot in the paradigm, or replace a native word which had stood in that slot.[54]

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[47] On *ʾstrʾ*, either Istar (variant of Ishtar, name of deity) or 'goddess' (common noun) see *ʾs[t]rʾ* *CIS* 3985:1 = *PAT* 0331 (see also Cantineau's remarks to this text, *Inv* 6 1); the context is very broken, but the ending *aleph* (-ʾ) suggests perhaps a common noun.

[48] There is also a single occurrence of a divine name *ʾštrbd*, *RTP* 198 = *PAT* 2198; see note of A. Caquot, *RTP*, p. 181 and J. Hoftijzer, *Religio Aramaica: Godsdienstige Verschijnselen in Aramese Teksten*, MEOL, XVI (Leiden: Ex Oriente Lux, 1968) 45.

[49] For this phenomenon, see Jean Cantineau, *Grammaire du palmyrénien épigraphique* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1935) 41-43.

[50] J. Cantineau, "Textes palmyréniens provenant de la fouille du temple de Bêl," *Syr* 12 (1931) p. 134 (no. 13):3 = *PAT* 2751.

[51] *CIS* 3972:3 = *PAT* 0318.

[52] *CIS* 3955:7 = *PAT* 0301.

[53] See e.g. M. Savignac, "Chronique: 'Notes de voyage – Le sanctuaire d'Allat a Iram'," *RB* 6 (1932) 405-22; inscription p. 411 line 1: *dʾ ʾlt ʾlhtʾ d[y] bṣrʾ* ... "This is Allat, goddess w[ho] is in Bosra" or "goddess of Bosra."

[54] See S. Kaufman, *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic*, Assyriological Studies 19 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1974) 60, where Akkadian influence is said to be likely, though not certain. Kaufman also cites, in brief, evidence for forms of *istra* 'goddess' in Mandaic and Syriac. That the Palmyrene development is due to Akadian influence is rendered especially probable by the

Nevertheless, the Palmyrene Aramaic evidence does make its own contribution. It provides evidence that a development from what was originally a divine name to a common noun 'goddess' took place also in Northwest Semitic as well as in Akkadian. Hebrew dictionaries need not confine themselves to listing, under ʿaštōret, only Akkadian ilāni u ištarāt.[55]

To turn to individual passages, the starting point will be 1 Samuel 7:2-4; from which discussion passes to Judges 3:7, drawing on the related verses Judges 2:11-13 and 10:6.

In 1 Sam 7, the prophet Samuel addresses the people, telling them: "If with your whole heart you would return to YHWH" hāsîrû ʾet ʾᵉlōhê han-nēkār mittôkᵉkem wᵉhā-ʿaštārôt "remove the foreign gods from your midst, and hā-ʿaštārôt" that is "the goddesses," or: "the foreign goddesses." This is repeated, in an interestingly different form, when the people carry out the command of the prophet (v. 4). "So the Israelites removed" ʾet-hab-bᵉʿālîm wᵉʾet-hā-ʿaštārôt "the gods and goddesses." These provisional translations are meant to summarize the point of view to be argued in the succeeding discussion.

Such translations as given here are not commonly accepted. A sample may suffice. Vulgate: auferte deos alienos de medio vestri Baalim et Astaroth (this involves a conflation of variants as well). NRSV (= New Revised Standard Version): "... put away the foreign gods and the Astartes from among you." NJV (New Jewish Version): "... put away the alien gods and the Ashtaroth from your midst." Also Today's English Version (TEV) and the New International Version (NIV) follow traditional lines. Parola di Dio (a recent Italian version) has: "gli idoli della dea Astarte e tutte le altre divinità" (reversing the order).

A spot check suggests that even recent commentaries are disappointing in this regard. Thus, to cite a recent full German work, the commentary of Stoebe: "... dann entfernt aus eurer Mitte die fremden Götzen ..." The goddesses are banished altogether, as a later addition to the text.[56] In the extensive and recent Anchor Bible commentary on Samuel, McCarter, like Stoebe, is soon diverted into text-critical matters at this point. Basing his version on a Septuagint variant reading τὰ ἄλση 'the groves,' he ends up with "... you must remove the foreign gods from among you, as well as the Asherim."[57]

Here, instead, is a point where Palmyrene evidence, together with Akkadian evidence long available and recognized in some fashion (as in BDB, see note 10 above), helps us recognize a biblical Hebrew idiom: 'foreign gods and goddesses.' The construction of the phrase is of a common type, a construct chain with a

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phonetic phenomena in Palmyrene, where an inner-Aramaic development from *ʿttrt would have resulted in *ʿtrt (compare the commonly attested deity name ʿtrʿth) or, with Canaanite influence, the attested form ʾštrt. See also J. Teixidor, The Pantheon of Palmyra, Études preliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain (Leiden: Brill, 1979) 60-61.

[55] Akkadian evidence is cited already in the Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon (BDB). For Biblical Hebrew this lexicon notes that the name of a specific deity, but in plural ʿaštārôt also "of various local goddesses"; in these cases it is usually paralleled by baʿal in singular or plural.

[56] H.-J. Stoebe, Das Erste Buch Samuelis, KAT VIII 1 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1973) 167-68.

[57] P.K. McCarter, Jr., I Samuel, AB (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1980) 140-41.

compound first element, spit (*ᵉlôhê han-nēkār … wᵉhāᶜaštārôt.*), so that the *rectum* (*han-nēkār*) modifies both, but follows the first noun, while the second has the definite article. This could be reduced, without violence to Hebrew grammar, by omitting the modifier and the article; the resulting **ᵉlôhîm wᵉᶜaštārôt* being the semantic equivalent of Akkadian *ilāni u ištarāt*.

Before turning to another passage, we may glean more from this context. In describing the fulfillment of this command, we have in the following verse (40) the alternate expression: "So Israel put away the foreign gods and goddesses" (*hab-bᵉᶜālîm wᵉhāᶜaštārôt*). The pair *bᵉᶜālîm … ᶜaštārôt* occurs several times in biblical Hebrew texts, but once again translators and commentators do not go far enough. *bᵉᶜālîm* here, and probably in other cases, means 'foreign gods'; it is the equivalent of *ᵉlôhê han-nēkār* in the earlier verse. If it is not idle to speculate as to why the pairing *hab-bᵉᶜālîm – hāᶜaštārôt* is more common than *ᵉlôhê han-nēkār …* *wᵉhāᶜaštārôt* of v. 3, one might propose that since *ᵉlôhîm* by itself may have the sense 'god (of Israel, God,' there was a pressure within this semantic field for insertion of an alternate term in the masculine slot of the paradigm comprising terms for 'foreign god':

m.sg.	'god"	*baᶜal* (e.g. Judges 2:13)
f.sg.	*'goddess'	*ᶜštrt
m. & common pl.	'gods'	*bᵉᶜālîm* (e.g. 1 Kg 18:18; Hos 2:19)[58]
f. pl.	'goddesses'	*ᶜaštārôt*

Of course, another explicit term covering this whole range was *ᵉlôhê X*, with X = name of a city, a foreign people, *han-nēkār*, etc.

From this same passage, 1 Sam 7, we may also note the reading of the Septuagint at verse 3, where instead of *hāᶜaštārôt* the Greek τὰ ἄλση implies a Vorlage *hᵓšrym* "the *asherah*'s" Without following McCarter in preferring this as a reading, we may nevertheless note, in anticipation of evidence to follow, that there is in the Bible a certain amount of interchange between the (originally) divine names Asherah and Astarte, and perhaps also in use of either in the sense 'goddess.'

The next passage is Judges 3:7, with its parallels in Judges. The Israelites "…worshipped *hab-bᵉᶜālîm* and *hā-ᵓšerôt* the foreign gods and goddesses."[59] To supplement this, from Judges, note that at 2:11 we are told "they worshipped *ᵓet hab-bᵉᶜālîm* foreign gods," and still more revealingly, in Judges 10:6 "… they worshipped *ᵓet hab-bᵉᶜālîm wᵉᵓet hāᶜaštārôt* 'foreign gods and goddesses.' This general heading is then continued by a more specific listing:[60] "the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines." References elsewhere to the specific goddess Ashtoreth as "deity of the Sidonians" (1 Kg 11:5, 33; 2 Kg 23:13) support the notion that here in Judges

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58 "I will remove the names of the foreign gods from her mouth; and their names will no longer be mentioned."

59 Note the variant of several Hebrew manuscripts, also implied in Syriac and Vulgate: *hāᶜaštārôt*.

60 Not unlike the group of nations indicted by god in Amos 1:3-2:3.

10:6 the plural forms are general terms, a heading that precedes more specific designations.

If the point just made is cogent, then again the translations and commentators come short of exactness in giving the sense;[61] various translations give us *Baalim et Astaroth* and *Baalim et Astaroth* (Vulgate); gli idoli di Baal e di Asera, gli idoli di Baal e di Astarte (*Parola di Dio*); "… the Baals and the Asherahs, the Baals and the Astartes" (*NRSV*); '…the Baalim and the Asheroth," "the Baalim," "Baal and the Ashtaroth" (*NJV*).

Bits of evidence have already been cited that point to a possible development from a divine name *ʾăšērāh* to a common noun 'goddess.' In this connection 2 Chron 24:18 is of interest; "… they worshipped *hā-ʾăšērîm* and *hā-ʿăṣabbîm* "the goddesses and the foreign abominations (a contemptuous term substituting for the more neutral *ʾělōhê han-nēkār* 'foreign gods.'

Note also, as part of the general background, that in Hebrew as in some other languages, names of a whole variety of deities develop into common nouns, commonly designating commodities or activities with which the deity was believed to be associated. *ʿaštārôt* is also a common noun, something like 'sheep-breeding', and quite a few others can be named, in Hebrew, in Akkadian, and in other languages.[62] It is not out of the question, then, that a semantic development that took place for *ʿaštārôt* or *ʿaštōret* could have been repeated with *ʾăšērāh*, as indeed is attested for the masculine *baʿal*.[63]

Many scholars have wanted to explain the uses of *bĕʿālîm* and *ʿaštārôt* and similar cases from the religious situation, seeing in the background of these names something especially Canaanite. As an alternate to these various views, this phenomenon may be seen as a linguistic process, one that need not have had, at least initially, any profound connection with Israel's religion.

Abstract:

A. Genesis 2-3 "The god Yahweh and the Naked Couple"
The uncommon dual title *yhwh ʾlhym* is much used in Gen 2-3 and is found a few times elsewhere in the OT. Such a pattern: DN + '(the) god' is found frequently in Palmyrene Aramaic inscriptions and in other bodies of inscriptions; precisely *yhw ʾlh* "the god Yahu" is found in Elephantine Aramaic. The dual title in biblical Hebrew is not a grammatical difficulty, or, necessarily always

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61 I have consulted, as recent and extensive, R. Boling, *Judges*, AB (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975) 74, 80 191.

62 W.F. Albright collects a good number in his *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1946) 162-63, 220 note 115.

63 I am indebted to Prof. Baruch Halpern for sending me several relevant articles of his own, especially his "The Baal (and the Asherah) in Seventh-Century Judah: YHWH's Retainers Retired," in *Konsequente Traditionsgeschichte: Festschrift für Klaus Baltzer*, edd. R. Barthelmus, T. Krüger, and H. Utzschneider, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 126 (Freiburg, Universitätsverlag, 1993) 115-52; Halpern carries out a close grammatical analysis of some divine names treated here, and his work should be consulted as a supplement to the discussion offered here. Consult also his "'Brisker Pipes than Poetry': The Development of Israelite Monotheism," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*, edd. J. Neusner and B. Levine (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 77-115.

due to redactional combination. In Gen 2-3 „YHWH, the god" or „the god YHWH" encourages a thoroughly polytheistic reading of the story, with recognition also of the contrast between the naked human couple and the deity who wears clothes.

B. Abraham's Purchase of Tomb Property

Among the Palmyrene Aramaic inscriptions are many which deal with the founding of communal, family tombs, or with subsequent sale of the tomb or parts of it. Against this background, the protracted negotiations of Gen 14 are clarified, each step leading to Abraham's goal of securing by purchase (not gift) a special kind of property, an *ʾḥzt qbr*, 'tomb property.'

C. 'Goddess' in Biblical Hebrew

In many cases, what were originally proper names of deities *bᵉʿālîm* and *ʿaštārôt* have come to mean in biblical Hebrew '(foreign) gods and goddesses,' by a linguistic process paralleled in Akkadian, and, for West-Semitic, in Palmyrene Aramaic. Though long recognized, in partial fashion, within Hebrew lexicography, recent translations and commentaries lag in this respect. In addition, the phenomenon may be recognized in cases previously unrecognized, notably in some uses of *ᵃšērāh* or *ᵃšērôt* as 'goddess, goddesses.'

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