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The Epigraphic Evidence for the History of Religion in the Kingdom of Judah

Abigail Zammit

A dissertation presented to the
University of Oxford
for the degree of Master of Studies in Jewish Studies

May 2012

In loving memory of my grandfathers

Carmelo and Albert

who taught me to never give up

DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I, the undersigned, declare that this dissertation is my original work, gathered and utilized especially to fulfil the purposes and objectives of this study, and has not been previously submitted to any other university for a higher degree. I also declare that the publications cited in this work have been personally consulted.

Abigail Zammit

18 May 2012

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Contents

	Pages
Acknowledgements	1
Contents.....	2
List of Figures	4
 Chapter 1 – Introduction.....	 5
1.1 The aim of this study.....	5
1.2 The structure of this study.....	5
1.3 The discovery at Khirbet el-Qôm	7
1.4 The discovery at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud.....	8
 Chapter 2 – The Epigraphic Evidence.....	 10
2.1 Inscription no. 3 from Khirbet el-Qôm (Tomb 2).....	10
2.1.1 The inscription.....	11
2.1.2 My own reading of the inscription	17
2.1.3 The hand carving.....	19
2.2 Prayers and requests of blessing at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud.....	20
2.3 Concluding remarks.....	25
 Chapter 3 – Religion in the Kingdom of Judah.....	 27
3.1 Yahweh and Asherah in the Hebrew Bible.....	27
3.2 Yahweh and Asherah in inscriptions: «his Asherah» or «his asherah»?.....	29
3.3 Yahweh of Samaria and Yahweh of (the) Teman.....	34
3.4 Kuntillet ‘Ajrud: caravanserai or religious centre?.....	37
3.5 Blessing and divine protection at Khirbet el-Qôm.....	39
3.6 Concluding remarks.....	42
 Chapter 4 – Conclusion.....	 44
4.1 Yahweh and Asherah in the Monarchic Period.....	44

4.2 Concluding observations: syncretistic worship, the epigraphic evidence, and future studies.....	46
Appendix.....	49
Bibliography.....	58
Figures.....	63

List of Figures

1. Map of Ancient Israel showing the location of Khirbet el-Qôm and Kuntillet 'Ajrud (Dever 1997: 31).
2. Plan and section of Tomb 2 at Khirbet el-Qôm, showing the original location of inscription no.3 (Dever 1969-70, fig. 5).
3. Photograph of inscription no.3 from Khirbet el-Qôm (0.4×0.51m) (Tomb 2) (Zevit 1984, fig. 6).
4. Autograph of inscription no.3 from Khirbet el-Qôm (Dever 1969-70, fig. 10) (not to scale).
5. Autographs of inscription no.3 from Khirbet el-Qôm (top – Lemaire 1977: 598 in Zevit 1984, fig. 2; centre – Mittmann 1981, fig. 1; bottom – Hadley 1987a: 52) (all not to scale).
6. Drawings of the upper (top) and lower (bottom) parts of inscription no.3 from Khirbet el-Qôm (Zevit 1984, figs 4 and 5 in Renz 1995, plate XX.1) (not to scale).
7. Plan of the west building at Kuntillet 'Ajrud (top); and aerial photograph of the west building looking west (bottom) (Meshel 1978).
8. (left) The fragmentary Pithos A from Kuntillet 'Ajrud, showing the faded drawings of the Bes-like figures and seated lyre-player, and the inscription with the blessing formula invoking «Yahweh of *šmrn*» and «his asherah» (not to scale); (right) illustration of drawings and inscription on Pithos A (not to scale) (images after Meshel 1978, plate 12).
9. Detail of the drawing of inscription A1 (Pithos A) from Kuntillet 'Ajrud (not to scale) (Renz 1995, plate III.1a).
10. (top) Photograph of the fragmentary Pithos B from Kuntillet 'Ajrud, showing several painted inscriptions, including blessing formulae and abecedaries (not to scale) (Meshel 1978, plate 11); (bottom) drawing of the inscriptions on Pithos B from Kuntillet 'Ajrud (not to scale) (Lemaire 1977 in Renz 1995, plate IV.1).
11. Drawings of the significant elements of line 3 of inscription B1 (Pithos B) (left), and of line 3 with the letters of the abecedy removed (right) (not to scale) (Chase 1982, figs 1 and 2).

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 The aim of this study

This research attempts to assess the epigraphic evidence from the Kingdom of Judah that throws light on the religious coupling and worship of Yahweh and Asherah. The discussion will therefore focus on the respective inscriptions recovered at the two sites of Khirbet el-Qôm and Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, in Judah (Fig. 1), which mention Yahweh and Asherah. The reason for this choice is because the texts in question generated much debate and interpretations, especially with regards to the recurring blessing formula «by Yahweh....and by his Asherah». This research will limit itself to a selective critical analysis and discussion of the respective inscriptions, and will go over the controversial grammatical issues and the different scholarly interpretations.

1.2 The structure of this study

Apart from introductory notes, this chapter also provides general background information on the respective discoveries of the Khirbet el-Qôm and Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscriptions.

Chapter 2 discusses the individual inscriptions, providing a cursory selective overview of scholarly readings, including my own tentative reading of Khirbet el-Qôm inscription no. 3, as well as a comment on the hand carving accompanying the latter text. The chapter also

includes a discussion of the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscriptions, specifically three blessing formulae on two fragmentary pithoi that were recovered at the site.

Chapter 3 starts with a brief mention of the biblical references to the coupling, if any, of Yahweh and Asherah in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. It is important to note that, although the present study focuses on two particular sites located in Judah, it remains essential to consider both the southern kingdom of Judah as well as the northern kingdom of Israel for a holistic approach and discussion on the religion of pre-exilic Palestine. The rest of the chapter includes a critical discussion of the grammatical issues presented in the individual inscriptions, especially with the reading *'šrth* that has raised conflicting debates among scholars.

Chapter 4 concludes with a brief comment on the cult of Yahweh and Asherah in Monarchic Palestine, followed by a summary of the points discussed in this study, with reference to the role of Asherah in the inscriptions and in Yahweh's cult in general. The chapter concludes with comments on a way forward for future epigraphic studies on the inscriptions from Khirbet el-Qôm and Kuntillet 'Ajrud.

This research also includes an Appendix of selected scholarly readings that are referred to in chapters 2 and 3. The layout of the Appendix closely follows Binger's concise presentation of data in her Appendix 2 of textual translations regarding Asherah,¹ which enables, as she states in her own words, "an immediate impression of the improbabilities involved in a large

¹ See Binger 1997: 164-175.

number of readings”.² This is the reason why I chose to adapt Binger’s pattern; to get a coordinated idea of the different transcriptions and translations.

1.3 The discovery at Khirbet el-Qôm

In 1967, William G. Dever conducted a rescue-excavation in two robbed cave-tombs just outside the small village of Khirbet el-Qôm, located 11km east-southeast of Lachish.³ In the second tomb he noticed a hollow hewn out in a pillar between two burial chambers (Fig. 2). He later recovered the stolen piece of stone from a nearby village. The stone bore an incised inscription in Palaeo-Hebrew characters, which Dever labelled as inscription no. 3 and later published with accompanying photographs and autograph (Figs 3 and 4). The inscription was subsequently republished by Lemaire⁴ and Mittmann,⁵ both of whom supplied autographs of the text but relied solely on Dever’s published photograph (Fig 5). Several other scholars were to publish their individual reading of the text (see chapter 2 and the Appendix), but it is thanks to Judith Hadley’s first-hand study of the Khirbet el-Qôm text,⁶ which was later updated in the publication of her PhD dissertation,⁷ that we have a more insightful analysis of the text (Fig. 5), not to mention Zevit’s detailed autographs of the inscription (Fig. 6)⁸. The main debate has been centred on the difficult reading of the text, as explained in chapters 2 and 3 and listed in the Appendix.

² Binger 1997: 164.

³ Dever 1969-70.

⁴ Lemaire 1977.

⁵ Mittmann 1981.

⁶ Hadley 1987a.

⁷ Hadley 2000: 84-105.

⁸ Zevit 1984.

1.4 The discovery at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud

The site of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud (‘the solitary hill of the water wells’) is located about 50km south of the large oasis of Kadesh Barnea, near the intersection of an ancient roadway traversing the desert from the Mediterranean to the Gulf of Aqaba.⁹ The site was studied in the 19th century by Edward Henry Palmer, who recognized the importance of the site’s location in relation to the desert highway, after collecting inscribed ceramic sherds dating to the Iron II period (the time of the Divided Monarchy). In the 1960s and 70s, Ze’ev Meshel conducted site surveys, and under his direction, the University of Tel Aviv excavated the site in 1975-76.¹⁰

The site itself lies on a narrow east-west plateau, and controls the access to a few wells in the vicinity. Excavations uncovered two buildings: one lies in ruins, while the other, oriented east-west, is preserved to a height of 1.5m, and takes up most of the western end of the plateau (Fig. 7). The entrance, from the east, leads to a small entry way northwards, and then westwards into a long narrow room with a north-south orientation. The room has been called the ‘bench room’ as it is lined with plaster benches, and the room’s northern and southern ends have tower-like structures. Beyond the ‘bench room’ to the west is a large open courtyard, which was found empty except for the remains of ovens and steps in both the south-west and south-east corners. Along the courtyard’s southern and western sides are two narrow rooms which contained pithoi and storage jars embedded in the floor. The building has other tower-like structures in the north-west and south-west corners, the rooms of which contained small ceramic vessels, limestone slabs and stone vessels.¹¹ The finds of Kuntillet

⁹ Meshel and Meyers 1976: 6.

¹⁰ Meshel and Meyers 1976: 6-7; Meshel 1978, ‘The Site’.

¹¹ Hadley 2000: 106-107.

‘Ajrud have so far been published in preliminary form, and several scholars, including Meshel himself, deem the structure a sanctuary, yet we will return to the matter in later chapters.

The part of the structure that interests us is the bench room, which contained wall paintings and inscriptions, as well as two large storage jars (Pithos A and Pithos B) bearing paintings and inscriptions, which have been the subject of great scholarly discussion. The inscriptions on the pithoi will be referred to in this study as A1, B1 and B2 for easy reference, and they will be discussed in detail in chapters 2 and 3. Selected readings of the individual inscriptions are also listed in the provided Appendix.

CHAPTER 2 – THE EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

2.1 Inscription no. 3 from Khirbet el-Qôm (Tomb 2)

The stone that was chiselled out of a pillar in Tomb 2 at Khirbet el-Qôm bears a Palaeo-Hebrew inscription, which Dever and Lemaire have dated palaeographically to ca. 750 BCE,¹ even though Dever points out that the cursive influence of late 8th/7th centuries is present in some of the letters.² The inscription consists of four main lines of text in the upper part of the stone, which are accompanied by a deeply incised shape of a small human hand, and two fragmentary lines in the lower part of the stone (Figs 3-6).

Much ink has been spilt over this inscription during the last decades, since the text itself is not devoid of problems. Both the stone and the inscription itself are in bad shape; apart from natural cracks and striations, the surface of the stone bears tool marks, as apparently the stonemason smoothed and prepared the surface of the original pillar in an unskilled manner.³ Letters display different degrees of pressure, resulting in some being strongly impressed in the rock, while others are poorly formed and hardly incised at all, thus being barely distinguishable from the rock's natural striations.⁴ In addition, several of the letters,

¹ Dever 1969-70: 165; Lemaire 1977: 603 [as referred to in Zevit 1984: 39].

² See Dever 1969-70: 165 and references therein.

³ Zevit 1984: 39; Hadley 1987a: 50. The unskilful preparation of the rock surface, and of the entire original pillar for that matter, could have been the result of the actual digging of the tomb into separate chambers.

⁴ Hadley 1987a: 50.

especially those in line 3, look as if an unskilled hand attempted to overwrite them to make the text more legible,⁵ thereby leaving most of the letters with the so-called ‘ghost images’. This factor created problems in deciphering the inscription, so much so that scholars have come up with several different suggestions and readings.

2.1.1 The inscription

Some scholars agree on word dividers being present in lines 1, 2 and 3 of the inscription, which are usually transcribed as dots in their readings (see Appendix), while others do not find any.⁶

Line 1

As seen in the Appendix, scholars agree on the name Uriyahu (‘Yahweh is my light’) in line 1, which is a late Judean name occurring in Jer. 26.20.⁷ On the other hand, scholars differ in reading the second word as either *h’sr* – «the rich» (or wealthy or prosperous) (Lemaire, Miller, Hadley, Margalit and Leuenberger) or «the honourable» (Keel and Uehlinger), or *h’sr* – «the governor» (Naveh and Angerstorfer). For the description «rich» Hadley argues that it fits the context; “Uriyahu could afford to have an inscription made for him”.⁸ Mittmann reads the description as *h’sr* – «the singer», while Shea and Binger read it as a pronoun (i.e. *h’sr* – ‘the one’) who wrote the inscription) (see Appendix). Dever had originally emended the

⁵ Binger 1997: 95.

⁶ Naveh 1979: 28; Garbini 1981 [as referred to in Binger 1997: 164]; Mittmann 1981, fig.1; Zevit 1984: 43; Binger 1997: 167. Zevit (1984: 40) argues about the absence of any true word dividers, stating that indeed “lines of some sort [are] found where word dividers were read”, but they are also found elsewhere between individual letters. Hadley (1987a: 51-52) finds his argument unconvincing, as she regards the alleged word dividers of especially lines 1 and 2 possible, whilst other lines are mere scratches in the rock face. She later adds that the alleged word divider after *brk* in line 2 is “not certain” (Hadley 2000: 87).

⁷ See Dever 1969-70: 159 and references therein.

⁸ Hadley 1984a: 53.

second and fourth letter to read *hqšb*, on account of hypothesised scribal mistakes, and thereby he adapted the text to fit the context of typical tomb formulae.⁹ Hadley argues that Dever's emendation of the text does not seem plausible, and she correctly states that it is best to make sense of what is written in the inscription.¹⁰

The word *ktbh* is somewhat problematic. The use of the word *ktb* as a noun in the sense of a written document is not attested in pre-exilic times; it is known only from late biblical Hebrew, and it occurs also in biblical Aramaic (specifically in the sense of an inscription on a wall).¹¹ Lemaire's suggestion of a suffixed Piel verb¹² "remains a distinct possibility",¹³ but the Piel form occurs only in Is. 10.1, and not in the causative sense, as in the inscription, but in the frequentative sense.¹⁴ Hadley argues that the word *ktbh* could be at best a suffixed Qal, which would not necessarily mean that Uriyahu carved the inscription himself, but that he «wrote it», while the inscription could have been carved by Oniyahu/Abiyahu.¹⁵

Line 2

Basically all scholars agree on the reading of line 2 as *brk 'ryhw lyhwh*, except for Zevit, who reads a faintly marked *taw* after the word *brk*, thereby reading *brkt*, making Abiyahu (his

⁹ Dever (1969-70: 160) assumes "that the scribe has forgotten the curved tail [of *beth*, his reading of the fourth letter], since *reš* makes no sense", and he thereby reads *hqšb* – Hiphil imperative singular of *qšb* ('to pay attention to').

¹⁰ Hadley 1984a: 53. However, Dever later completely dismisses his interpretation of the text (Dever 1984: 22), qualifying Uriyahu as either «the Prince» (Dever 1997: 45) or as «the governor/rich» (Dever 2005); see also Appendix.

¹¹ See Dever 1969-70: 159 and references therein; Zevit (1984: 43) and Hadley (1987a: 53) argue that the noun *miktāb* was used in pre-exilic Hebrew in the sense of a written document.

¹² Lemaire 1977: 599-600 [as referred to in Zevit 1984: 44].

¹³ Zevit 1984: 44.

¹⁴ Hadley 1987a: 53.

¹⁵ Hadley 1987a: 53.

reading in line 4) bless Uriyahu «to Yahweh».¹⁶ Hadley rightly calls to attention that Zevit's reading recalls the formula at Kuntillet 'Ajrud (discussed below), and that the Khirbet el-Qôm text nevertheless lacks the direct object marker 't (present in the formula at Kuntillet 'Ajrud), thus rejecting Zevit's reading of *brkt*.¹⁷ Zevit sustains his claim by referring to biblical instances (poetry, liturgy, and prose) lacking the object marker,¹⁸ yet Hadley points out that the passages referred to are all commands; none is an utterance of blessing or in any way involves a direct action on the speaker's part.¹⁹ Furthermore, the marks of the *taw* after *brk* could have easily been formed by scratches and striations, as Zevit himself describes it as 'finely inscribed'.²⁰ In conclusion, the reading *brk 'ryhw lyhwh* is here preferred to Zevit's *brkt 'ryhw lyhwh*.

Line 3

Line 3 is the most problematic to read, owing to the several faintly inscribed 'ghost images' of letters, which have been meticulously deciphered and reproduced by Zevit in his autograph and transliteration of the text (Fig. 6). Not only do the duplicate writings make line 3 difficult to decipher, but it is also open to many interpretations.²¹

Dever had initially read line 3 as *wm'rr. ydl 'šr thhwš'lh*,²² but he later rejected it, and followed Lemaire and Naveh's reading.²³ Garbini's reading of line 3 closely followed Dever's original reading – *wm'rr yd k l'šrt hhwš' lh* – which implies a curse on the hand of

¹⁶ Zevit 1984: 43, 44.

¹⁷ Hadley 1987a: 54.

¹⁸ See references in Zevit 1984: 44.

¹⁹ See Hadley 1987a: 54.

²⁰ Zevit 1984: 44.

²¹ Hadley 2000: 90.

²² Dever 1969-70: 161.

²³ Dever 1984: 22.

whoever ‘curses’ Uriyahu’s salvation.²⁴ Mittmann read the line as *wmmšr ydh l’l šrth hwš’ lh*,²⁵ but Dever deems it syntactically awkward,²⁶ while Hadley finds Mittmann’s reading *l’l šrth* («God of his service») strange.²⁷ Binger reads line 3 as *h’wryh l’šrt[h] hwš’ lh*, with the translation: «his light, by Asherah, she who holds her hand over him»,²⁸ thereby designating the word *’šrt[h]* as the goddess Asherah herself (who gives protection) without any connection to Yahweh whatsoever. Moreover, Binger’s reading makes *lyhwh* in line 2 the antecedent of *h’wryh* in line 3, thus reading «by Yahweh, his light» (possibly implying ‘by Yahweh, Uriyahu’s light’), and therefore resonating the very meaning of Uriyahu’s name.

Lemaire, Miller, Zevit and Hadley read line 3 as *wmšryh l’šrth hwš’ lh* (with minor variations, as listed in the Appendix), which practically indicates that Yahweh saved Uriyahu from his enemies by his asherah. Naveh reads the first word of line 3 as *nšry*, but does not provide an autograph to support his interpretation.²⁹ Hadley argues that the change-over in Naveh’s reading – «Blessed be Uriyahu by Yahweh *my* guardian...» (her italics) – is awkward, and it further creates the problematic lack of an object for *hwš’ lh*, not to mention that to read *nšry*, one has to ignore the suffixed *he*.³⁰ Hadley thus deems the reading *wmšryh l’šrth hwš’ lh* as

²⁴ Garbini 1981 [as referred to in Binger 1997: 164]; see also Appendix.

²⁵ Mittmann 1981: 139.

²⁶ Dever 1984: 32, note 6.

²⁷ Hadley 1987a: 55.

²⁸ Binger 1997: 167; see also Appendix.

²⁹ Naveh 1979: 28.

³⁰ Hadley 1987a: 55.

the most plausible, with the suffixed *he* in *wṁṣryh* («and from his enemies») having to be the third person masculine singular suffix on a plural noun.³¹

It has also been argued that the duplicate letters were possibly made as some sort of emphasis. Shea brings to our attention that the ghost letters occur only in line 3, and argues that it was the work of an unskilled hand.³² In his own interpretation of the text and especially of line 3, Uriyahu owned an Egyptian servant, with the Yahwistic theophoric name Oniyahu, who was probably illiterate (in Hebrew, at least). Shea questions why the duplicate images cluster in line 3, where the Egyptian (servant) is mentioned (his reading in line 3), and concludes that the clearer writing was Uriyahu's own work, while the Egyptian servant Oniyahu unskilfully retraced the line that mentions him (i.e. line 3) for emphasis, as if to add his share of writing to the inscription, as Shea puts it.³³ If this were the case, I wonder why the alleged Egyptian servant did not retrace his own alleged name in line 4 as well, since line 4 lacks any duplicate letters whatsoever (see also section 2.1.2 below for further discussion).

With regards to the controversial *l'šrth* in line 3, only Lemaire proposed an emended reading of the text by repositioning the phrase «by his asherah» before «and from his enemies», stating that the scribe made mistakes while working in dark conditions inside the tomb; he supposedly forgot to engrave *l'šrth* at the beginning of the line, and thus added it after *wṁṣryh*.³⁴ More recently, however, Lemaire published an unemended reading of line 3 as

³¹ See Hadley 1987a: 55 and references therein.

³² Shea 1990: 114.

³³ Shea 1990: 115-116.

³⁴ Lemaire 1977: 44 [as referred to in Hadley 1987a: 55-56]; see Appendix.

follows: «and from his enemies, by his asherah, he saved him».³⁵ Zevit is also of the opinion that moving *l'šrth* to the beginning of line 3 would make the preceding *lyhwh* in line 2 its antecedent, but then again he is against emending the text.³⁶ As Hadley keeps stating, it is best to work with and make sense of the text as it is written.³⁷ Zevit considers the *lamed* of *l'šrth* to be vocative, and *'šrth* to be a double feminization of the noun *'šrt*, with the *he* being the *mater lectionis* for the final *a* vowel, therefore «Oh Asheratah».³⁸ He argues that double feminization appears in place names in Num. 33.33, Josh. 19.43, and Mic. 5.1,³⁹ but this theory has not been established,⁴⁰ and in any case, there is a lack of evidence for double feminization on a personal name as distinct from a place name, as place names probably display the locative *he*.⁴¹ Moreover, the vocative *lamed* is well attested in Ugaritic, but not in Hebrew.⁴²

Emerton holds the opinion that *'šrth* is *'ašera* with the third person masculine singular pronominal suffix, and thereby the phrase *lyhwh ... wl'šrth* means «by Yahweh ... and by his *'ašera*». Chapter 3 will discuss the highly debated meaning of the word *'ašera*, which has been used in two related senses in the Old Testament – referring to either the name of the goddess Asherah or a wooden symbol of the goddess – and thereby creating the philological issue on whether to translate the phrase as «his Asherah» or «his asherah».

³⁵ Lemaire 2006: 231; see Appendix.

³⁶ Zevit 1984: 45.

³⁷ Hadley 1987a: 56.

³⁸ Zevit 1984: 45-46.

³⁹ Zevit 1984: 45.

⁴⁰ See further arguments in Emerton 1999: 316 and references therein.

⁴¹ See Hadley 1987a: 59 and references therein.

⁴² Hadley 1987a: 58.

Line 4

Most scholars read the name in line 4 as Oniyahu/Onyahu. Naveh and Angerstorfer repeat the name Uriyahu, while Zevit reads Abiyahu, and Binger reads «by his *ipy*» (see their readings in the Appendix).

Lines 5 and 6

The majority of scholars also discern two additional yet fragmentary lines at the bottom part of the chiselled out stone. These lines are problematic, as they could have been a continuation to the main text, or else a second inscription (Figs 5 and 6). Line 5 contains another alleged reference to *l'srth*, while line 6 may contain a further mention to *l'srth*, even though only a few letters – the initial *aleph* and the final *resh*, *taw* and *he* – can be identified (see the different readings of lines 5 and 6 in the Appendix).

2.1.2 My own reading of the inscription

The following is my tentative transliteration and translation of the Khirbet el-Qôm text after working with different photographs and autographs published by Dever, Zevit and other scholars (Figs 3-6).⁴³ Note that I have refrained from placing dots as word dividers, and the letters in brackets represent what I think are the ‘ghost letters’ in line 3.

1. *'ryhw h'sr ktbh*
2. *brk 'ryhw lyhwh*
3. *wm(m)sr(r)yh(h) l'srth(h) wš'lh*
4. *[hand] l'nyhw*
5. *wl'srth*
6. *l' rth*

⁴³ Zevit (1984: 39-40) conducted an extensive first hand study of the inscription at the Israel Museum, with a series of colour slides and black and white photographs taken in different lighting conditions, to produce detailed autographs of the text (including the series of ghost letters); see Fig. 6.

1. Uriyahu the rich wrote it
2. Blessed is/be Uriyahu by Yahweh
3. and from his enemies, by his asherah, and the hollow of his hand
4. [hand] by Oniyahu
5. and by his asherah
6. by his a[she]rah

As shown above, I tend to agree with the majority of scholars regarding the readings of lines 1 and 2, qualifying Uriyahu as a wealthy individual (*h šr*) in line 1. The beginning of line 3 poses several problems, as the stone bears a cluster of natural cracks, as well as poor workmanship on the stone's surface, and what seem to be jumbled letters. In my interpretation of the text, I have chosen to follow Zevit and ignore the series of 'ghost letters' suspended between lines 2 and 3, and attempt to read line 3 in a straight line.⁴⁴ Removing the letters in brackets of line 3, i.e. what I think are the 'ghost letters', it would leave us with the reading *wmšryh l'šrth wš'lh*. I realised that if one were to consider the second *he* that follows *l'šrth* as simply a duplicate (or 'ghost image') of the final *he* of *l'šrth*, one would read the final word of line 3 as *wš'lh*, i.e. a compound word consisting of a disjunctive *waw* and the noun *š'l* with the third person masculine singular suffix. The word *š'l* ('hollow of the hand'/'hollow hand', 'handful') is found in Is. 40.12 in the sense of "measuring the waters in the hollow of his hand", as well as in 1 Kgs 20.10 and Ez. 13.19 in the plural, in the sense of "handfuls".⁴⁵ Following the text in Is. 40.12, the reading «the hollow of his hand» for line 3 would fit the context of the inscription, especially with the sunken hand in relief just below line 3, with the blessing formula of the inscription itself, and with the implication of benediction or apotropaic intervention by the deity Yahweh.

⁴⁴ Zevit 1984: 43.

⁴⁵ See discussions and further references in Brown, Driver and Briggs 1979: 1043; and in Koehler and Baumgartner 2001: 1611.

Even so, my reading still poses syntactical problems, as for example the lack of an object for *wš'lh*, but one must not forget that this stone was illicitly chiselled out of the pillar between the two chambers in Tomb 2 at Khirbet el-Qôm, a photograph of which was provided by Dever.⁴⁶ The end of line 3 meets exactly at the roughly cut edge of the stone, which makes one wonder whether other letters were left out upon removal of the stone. The same can be said of the rest of the text, especially with regards to the beginning of lines 1 and 2, and the debated lines 5 and 6 at the bottom of the stone. Unfortunately, there are no close-up photographs of the hollowed out pillar in Tomb 2 in Dever's 1969-70 report. I conclude by saying that the state of the rock surface and the cluster of 'ghost letters' make more than one interpretation of this line plausible, within sound philological parameters.⁴⁷

2.1.3 The hand carving

As mentioned above, the Khirbet el-Qôm stone also bears what appears to be the engraving of a small human hand below the main part of the inscription. Hadley takes it as representing the right hand with the palm facing outwards from the surface of the rock,⁴⁸ but I tend to agree with Shea, since it seems that "the finger on the far right looks more like the thumb, in

⁴⁶ Dever 1969-70, plate IV:A.

⁴⁷ Subsequently to my establishing this reading and writing the first draft of my thesis I discovered that a similar proposal had already been advanced by Shea (1990: 110, 112-113), and was later discussed by Binger (1997: 99-100). Shea (1990: 112-113) also considers the root *š'l* ('hollow of the hand', 'handful') instead of *yš'* ('to save, deliver') at the end of line 3, arguing in favour of a kind of label for the hand carving that follows. Then again, he claims that the hand carving was the work of the alleged Egyptian (servant) owned by Uriyahu (Shea's interpretation of the text). Binger (1997: 97-100) argues about possible verbal forms of the root *š'l* (Qal, Piel, Pual, or Hophal), which could basically mean 'to hold someone/something in one's hand', i.e. protection. She further claims that whichever verbal form one chooses, "it must be a qualification of '*šrt*', the entity who protects Uriyahu and is represented by the hand carving (Binger 1997: 100). Note that Binger's arguments have no connection to my discussion in section 3.5, where I also argue in terms of the possible apotropaic function of both the inscription and the hand motif, yet from a different perspective altogether.

⁴⁸ Hadley 1987a: 61; 2000: 102.

which case, it would be the left hand facing outwards.”⁴⁹ Otherwise, if it is not the palmar view of the left hand as Shea is stating, then it could be the dorsal view of the right hand, depending on what the engraver had in mind. Margalit deems it an “open, downward pointing, hand-palm”.⁵⁰ Moreover, it seems that scholars have failed to notice that apparently the engraver had initially carved a hand with four digits only by mistake, and only added what looks like a rushed, careless engraving of the small finger upon realization of his error. Hadley argues that the engraved hand may be apotropaic in nature or else it may indicate a “prayerful supplication to a deity”, as on the many stelae in the ancient Near East.⁵¹ Margalit deems the engraved hand to mean divine “beneficence, generosity”, recalling Deut. 15.7-8, and Ps. 145.16,⁵² in the sense of being open-handed.

2.2 Prayers and requests of blessing at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud

As mentioned in chapter 1, two pithoi (A and B) were recovered in the ‘bench room’ of the main building at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, next to the passage leading from the main gate to the courtyard. Meshel has dated the pottery, the script and the personal names with the theophoric element *yw* to the period between the mid-9th and mid-8th centuries BCE.⁵³ Any iconographic discussion of the paintings on Pithoi A and B will be left out of this study, as much discussion and debate has been published on the different interpretations of the paintings elsewhere.⁵⁴ The inscriptions on the two pithoi were written in Palaeo-Hebrew script and painted in red ink (just like the drawings). Both the inscriptions and the drawings

⁴⁹ Shea 1990: 112.

⁵⁰ Margalit 1989: 373.

⁵¹ Hadley 1987a: 62.

⁵² Margalit 1989: 373.

⁵³ Meshel 1978, ‘The Inscriptions’.

⁵⁴ See Dever 1984: 22-31; Hadley 1987b: 188-207; Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 210-225.

are faded and difficult to trace, but Meshel reports that the texts and the drawing outlines were recognized through a special photographic technique (Figs 8-11).⁵⁵

Pithos A

The shoulder of Pithos A bears a two-line Palaeo-Hebrew inscription (A1), moving from above the right painted Bes-like figure toward the chariot horse (Figs 8 and 9). The inscription is generally read as follows:

'*mr*. '...*h*. .. *k*. '*mr*. *lyhl*[*l'l*] *wlyw*'*šh*. *w*... *brkt*. '*tkm*. *lyhwh*. *šmrn*. *wl*'*šrth*.
X says: say to Yehal[lel'el] and to Yo'asah and [to Z]: I bless you
by Yahweh of Samaria and by his asherah.⁵⁶

Since the inscription is fragmentary, there is a debated lacuna at the beginning of the text. Between '*mr* and '*mr* Meshel restored the words '[šyw] *h*[*ml*]/*k*, years after his original publication of the texts.⁵⁷ He considers 'šyw a valid transposition of Joash, thereby precariously dating the inscriptions and the site to the reign of Joash.⁵⁸ Other possible different constructions may fit here, so the lacuna is best left as a tantalizing gap.⁵⁹

The rest of the text bears no dispute, except for its translation. Meshel had originally translated the text as «[I bless you] by Yahweh our guardian and by his asherah», but he later translated *šmrn* as «Samaria».⁶⁰ In his original Hebrew publication, he had translated *brkt* as the first masculine Piel perfect «I blessed», less the *mater lectionis*. In his English version,

⁵⁵ Meshel 1978, 'The Inscriptions'.

⁵⁶ Transliteration and translation after Hadley 1987b: 182; 2000: 121; see also Appendix. I believe that the verb *brkt* should rather be translated as «I have blessed».

⁵⁷ Weinfeld 1980: 248 [as referred to in Hadley 2000: 121].

⁵⁸ Hadley 1987b: 182.

⁵⁹ See Hadley 1987b: 183.

⁶⁰ Weinfeld 1980: 248 [as referred to in Hadley 2000: 122].

however, he translated *brkt* as «May you be blessed»,⁶¹ which is inconsistent and grammatically incorrect.⁶² Emerton also opted for a translation of *yhwš šmrn* as «Yahweh of Samaria»,⁶³ which is confirmed by the inscriptions on Pithos B mentioning *yhwš tmn* and *yhwš htmn* respectively (as discussed below). As to why there would be a reference or invocation to Yahweh of Samaria in such a southern Judean site is a discussion left for chapter 3.

Pithos B

On the shoulder and on the main rounded body of Pithos B (Fig. 10) is a longer and more detailed inscription (in eleven lines) (B1) in a narrow column marked by a vertical line. The text seems to be a request for a blessing and protection «by Yahweh of Teman and by his asherah»:

*'mr 'mryw 'mr l.'dny hšlm. 't brktk. lyhwš tmn wl'šrth. ybrk.
wyšmrk wyhy 'm. 'd[n]y...k*
«Amaryaw says: say to my lord: Is it well with you? I bless you by
Yahweh of Teman and by his asherah. May he bless you and keep
you and be with my lord ... »⁶⁴

Chase reads *hšlm. 't* between *l.'dny* and *brktk*, which was deciphered after looking underneath an abecedary written over the inscription at this point (Fig. 11). The restored text leaves us with a well known greeting formula common in Phoenician inscriptions, as shown in the table further below, where the addressee enquires about the well-being of the one addressed (*hšlm*

⁶¹ Meshel 1978, 'The Inscriptions'.

⁶² Hadley 1987b: 183.

⁶³ Emerton 1982: 3.

⁶⁴ Transliteration and translation after Hadley 1987b: 185; 2000: 125 (with the reading «Amaryau»); see also Appendix. Again, I believe that the verb *brktk* should rather be translated as «I have blessed you». See also other selected readings in the Appendix.

't). The interrogative *he* followed by *šlm* does occur in biblical Hebrew, albeit not in a letter formula.⁶⁵

There is another inscription on the shoulder of the same pithos (B2), which slightly overlaps the first two lines of the preceding inscription (B1) (see Keel and Uehlinger's reading in the Appendix). Inscription B2 includes the phrase *lyhwh htmn wl'šrth*, and seems to have indicated the contents of a blessing.⁶⁶ The curious prefixed *he* with the word *tmn* has been argued to be a possible dittograph of the closing *he* of *yhwh*, or simply the article before the name of a region (as in 'the Negev'),⁶⁷ in which case the translation should perhaps be «by Yahweh of the Teman and by his asherah». In addition, Hadley claims that the reading of the *mem* is uncertain, so the text requires closer scrutiny, since it would require a total re-examination of the entire text if the word indeed does not read *tmn*.⁶⁸ Following inscription B2 is yet another inscription of a religious nature, which however mentions Yahweh only, and thus will not be discussed here.⁶⁹ As mentioned above, Pithos B also bears a total of three abecedaries in the area of the above inscriptions (Figs 10 and 11).⁷⁰

Naveh points out how the formulae in the three Kuntilet 'Ajrud inscriptions follow the rules of letter writing well known in Akkadian and Ugaritic: "Speak to X: so said Y", which was also used in the 6th-century Phoenician letter written on papyrus at Saqqarah (KAI 50), as well

⁶⁵ Chase 1982: 66.

⁶⁶ Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 226. See also the table below, and Appendix.

⁶⁷ See further references in Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 227, note 7; and in Hadley 2000: 130.

⁶⁸ Hadley 2000: 130.

⁶⁹ On this third inscription on Pithos B see Hadley 1987b: 187-188; Hadley 2000: 129-130, and references therein.

⁷⁰ Meshel 1978, 'The Inscriptions'; Hadley 2000: 130.

as in a Phoenician text inscribed on a 4th-century pithos found at Sarepta.⁷¹ The opening and the greeting formula seem to indicate dedications when the donor wished to give his donation for the sake of friends or relatives.⁷² Keel and Uehlinger list the different parts of letter writing that can be observed in the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscriptions,⁷³ which have been reproduced in the table below. Note that the transliterations listed in the table follow Keel and Uehlinger’s, except for a few minor changes (indicated by an *) which conform to Hadley’s readings that were used earlier on in this chapter. Note also that the following table displays my own labels for the three Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscriptions under study (i.e. A1, B1 and B2), which are not to be confused with those used by Keel and Uehlinger.⁷⁴

	A1	B1	B2
a. Introduction of letter with indication of writer	<i>'mr</i> <i>'...h...k*</i>	<i>'mr*</i> <i>'mryw</i>	
b. Introduction of content with indication of addressee	<i>'mr l</i> <i>yhl[l'l]</i> <i>wlyw'sh.</i> <i>w...</i>	<i>'mr l</i> <i>'dny</i>	
c. Question regarding welfare		<i>hšlm. 't</i>	
d. Blessing or greeting formula	<i>brkt. 'tkm.</i>	<i>brktk.</i>	<i>[brkt=...]</i>
The blessing deity	<i>lyhwh.šmrn.</i>	<i>lyhwh tmn</i>	<i>lyhwh htmn</i>
Assisting deity	<i>wl'srth.</i>	<i>wl'srth.</i>	<i>wl'srth</i>
e. Desire for continued blessing		<i>ybrk.wyšmrk</i> <i>wyhy 'm. 'd[n]y...k*</i>	<i>(...wntn lh</i> <i>yhw klbbh)</i>

Other inscriptions were discovered at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, ranging from single letters to Palaeo-Hebrew inscriptions incised on pottery and/or storage jars (which mention personal names

⁷¹ See Naveh 1979: 29 and references therein; see also further references in Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 227-228.

⁷² Naveh 1979: 29.

⁷³ Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 227.

⁷⁴ Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 225-227.

with the theophoric element *yw*, as well as one blessing formula mentioning Yahweh).⁷⁵ Other inscriptions of a religious nature (mentioning either Yahweh, or El, or Baal) were discovered written in Phoenician script, in either red or black ink, on the plastered walls of the ‘bench room’ and the western store-room in the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud building.⁷⁶ Then again, all these inscriptions will not be discussed here, as they fall outside the scope of this study. Only one particular inscription on fragmentary plaster stands out. Hadley comments on Meshel’s and Ahituv’s reconstructions and readings of this particular text, which includes a phrase saying «Yahweh of Teman and his asherah» (Meshel reads this phrase twice in the text).⁷⁷ This phrase was read on an alleged separate plaster fragment that does not necessarily go with the rest of the inscription, and Hadley advises that it should probably be avoided.⁷⁸ Dijkstra comments that one may still discern that the text was part of a blessing with expressions similar to Num. 10.32; Judg. 17.13; 1 Sam, 25.31; and Ps. 103.5.⁷⁹

2.3 Concluding remarks

The evidence discussed above basically makes up all the epigraphic material known so far that introduced a new chapter to the studies on the history of the religion of Judah, specifically 8th-century Judah. This is because the above inscriptions testify to the apparent syncretistic worship or cult of Yahweh and Asherah that is frequently mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. The above inscriptions created great philological debate: one regarding the controversial *l’šrth*, whether to read this compound word as a reference to the goddess

⁷⁵ Meshel and Meyers 1976: 9-10; Meshel 1978, ‘The Inscriptions’.

⁷⁶ Meshel 1978, ‘The Inscriptions’. Such a feature (i.e. ink applied on plastered walls) is relatively new in archaeology (Dijkstra 2001a: 23-26).

⁷⁷ See Hadley 2000: 134-135 and references therein. See also Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 243-244.

⁷⁸ Hadley 2000: 134.

⁷⁹ Dijkstra 2001a: 24.

Asherah or to the wooden symbol that the Deutoronomic History associates with her; and another revolving around the construct state of the phrases *lyhwh šmrn* and *lyhwh (h)tmn*. These grammatical debates will be discussed at length in chapter 3 in view of the biblical references to a/Asherah, and the different viewpoints posed by scholars on the epigraphic material.

CHAPTER 3 – RELIGION IN THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH

3.1 Yahweh and Asherah in the Hebrew Bible

The inscriptions discussed in chapter 2 make up the only epigraphic evidence yet known that consists of blessing formulae invoking Yahweh and «his asherah» (*'šrth*). The very meaning of 'asherah' has been an ongoing debate during the past decades, especially with regards to the recurrence of this word in biblical texts, which made scholars in general pose the classic question, 'Did Yahweh have a consort?' Scholars generally agree that the goddess Asherah in the Old Testament [hereafter OT] is equated with the Ugaritic goddess Athirat (*'trt*).¹

The OT mentions the word *'šrh* about forty times, mostly in the singular and sometimes in the plural,² which is generally understood to mean a cult image known as the asherah, a wooden object of some sort (possibly a 'sacred tree'), or else religious items collectively known as the asherim. Whatever its form, the asherah represented the goddess Asherah, or was erected on her behalf. The wooden symbol appears as something to be 'made', 'set up', or 'planted' (1 Kgs 16.32-33; 2 Kgs 17.10; Deut. 16.21), or to be 'torn out', 'cut' or 'chopped down' (2 Kgs

¹ Day (2000: 47-48) summarizes the shared traits of the two goddesses that scholars tend to agree on: the phonetic equivalence of the names Athirat and Asherah; the role of Athirat as consort to El (the male deity whose characteristic elements were appropriated by Yahweh, possibly including the wife); the role of Athirat as *mater familias* of the Canaanite pantheon; and Athirat's similar symbolic representation of a stylized tree; see also Margalit 1990: 271-274 on the name *'trt*; and the broad discussions on Asherah/Athirat in Binger 1997: 42-93; and Korpel 2001, especially pgs. 129-142.

² For a list of the biblical references to Asherah see Day 2000: 42, note 1, 46; see also Day 1986: 397-408; Margalit 1990: 286-288; Smith 2002: 108-118.

18.3-4), and used for a burnt offering (Judg. 6.25-26). The asherah seems to have been acceptable in both the northern and southern kingdoms; thereby it was likely a general feature of Israelite religion.³ The queen mother Maacah made a detestable image for the worship of Asherah, which her son Asa tore down and burned (1 Kgs 15.13). Manasseh rebuilt pagan altars which his father Hezekiah had destroyed during religious reforming measures, and he made an image of the goddess Asherah, mimicking the actions of Ahab, king of Israel (2 Kgs 21.3).

Such biblical references to Asherah or her cult symbol were polemics – written in narratives, legal prohibitions, and prophetic critiques – by those who actively opposed the worship of Asherah or the apparent devotion to her cult objects,⁴ and thereby likely to have left out further information, particularly any texts sympathetic to or tolerant of Asherah. The Deuteronomic History (Joshua – 2 Kings) has for the most part regarded Asherah as foreign (Canaanite) pollution that the leaders of Israel had to eradicate to keep the purity of Yahweh worship.⁵ Otherwise, it might be inferred that the rest of Israelite society, in general at least, either accepted the asherah or did not oppose it.⁶ The allusions to Asherah left in the OT are negative, and thus the archaeological evidence discussed in this study provides a further glimpse into the nature of Asherah worship in ancient Israel, specifically Judah.

³ Smith 2002: 108-109 and references therein.

⁴ Smith 2002: 108.

⁵ Penchansky 2005: 77.

⁶ Smith 2002: 109.

3.2 Yahweh and Asherah in inscriptions: «his Asherah» or «his asherah»?

The archaeological discoveries at the two sites under study have apparently identified Asherah as the consort of Yahweh there. It is not surprising that Yahweh would have had a consort in a popular and syncretistic religion. Then again, the greatest debate that has baffled scholars has been, as Emerton puts it, the difficulty in understanding *'šrth* as the equivalent of «his (wife) Asherah».⁷

The form *'šrth* might be interpreted as the name of Asherah in a genitive relationship or a construct state to a pronominal suffix. However, the reading «his Asherah» with a reference to the goddess is grammatically incorrect, since personal names do not take pronominal suffixes in biblical Hebrew, unlike some cognate languages.⁸ Then again this logic is not fool proof; although divine names do not appear in Hebrew with a pronominal suffix ('his'/'its' and so on), many have similar syntactic constructions, in a genitive relationship or in the construct state with a noun or pronominal suffix,⁹ as we shall see further below regarding the syntax of the phrases *yhwh šmrn* and *yhwh (h)tmn*. Moreover, biblical forms displaying the article (*habba'al* and *ha'ašerah*) may conform to their use as generic references to deities (as in Judg. 2.13; 3.7; 10.16; 1 Sam. 7.4; 12.10; Jer. 2.23; 9.14),¹⁰ especially if the Deuteronomic History's sole aim was to put Asherah or her symbol in a bad light.

Emerton claims that understanding «his Asherah» as the equivalent of «his (wife) Asherah» is difficult, first and foremost owing to the above-mentioned fact that the use of a pronominal

⁷ Emerton 1982: 14.

⁸ Day 1986: 392. Ugaritic provides a few examples (see Smith 2002: 119 and references therein).

⁹ Smith 2002: 119.

¹⁰ Smith 2002: 119-120.

suffix with a personal name is not in accordance with Hebrew idiom, thus making it unwise to interpret these inscriptions in any way other than in accordance with Biblical Hebrew.¹¹ He does point out however that, if the writers had intended to mean Yahweh and his consort Asherah, then they would have written the well attested Hebrew phrase *lyhwh...wl'šrth 'šth* or the like.¹²

Many scholars have now agreed that the pronominal suffix on *'šrth* indicates that the form is a common noun and not the personal name of the goddess Asherah, and thus *l'šrth* refers to the cultic symbol, which the OT has suggested to be a wooden object symbolizing the goddess. In this case, one would read the above-mentioned inscriptions as prayers or requests for blessing that invoke the asherah (wooden object), since it symbolized the goddess, and moreover reflected the close relationship of Asherah to Yahweh, presumably as his consort. Day suggests that this coupling of the goddess's cult object to the deity Yahweh could reflect a symbolic union or relationship that is not at all surprising, since in Deut. 16.21-22, there is the scathing condemnation of the wooden object placed as an asherah beside the altar of Yahweh, which "most naturally suggests that she was regarded in syncretistic circles as Yahweh's consort".¹³ Day goes on to remark that it is understandable that one sees this coupling in certain circles of religious worship, since Asherah was originally El's consort, and it is widely known that El and Yahweh were equated in Ancient Israel.¹⁴

¹¹ Emerton 1982: 14-15.

¹² Emerton 1982: 15; 1999: 325.

¹³ Day 1986: 392.

¹⁴ Day 1986: 393.

In addition, Emerton comments on the use of the verb *brk* followed by *lamed* in the epigraphic evidence, stating that in the Hebrew Bible it is only attested with proper nouns or with references to persons,¹⁵ with the *lamed* of reference notifying the agent, when construed with passive verbs.¹⁶ In the inscriptions, however, the *lamed* is used with an active verb, which Emerton defends by saying that not all idioms used in ancient Israel are attested in the OT.¹⁷ He goes on to say that the authors of the inscriptions utter the blessing, which is somehow mediated through Yahweh and *'šrth*.¹⁸ In addition, Aitken comments that, for the purpose of semantics, it does not matter whether one or two deities are named, since the construction (of the blessing formula) remains the same.¹⁹

It was also mentioned in chapter 2 that in the Khirbet el-Qôm text, Zevit views the *he* ending as a second indicator of feminine gender – the *mater lectionis* for the final vowel *ā* marking the double feminization *'ašerata* – in relation to place names mentioned in poetic, liturgical texts.²⁰ Emerton objects to this theory in view of a lack of double-feminization examples in the Hebrew Bible, stating that the ending *ā* on place names in the OT was usually regarded as an example of the *he locale*, and nowadays it is normally related to the Ugaritic direction ending.²¹

Some scholars have also argued that the coupling of Yahweh and Asherah is reflected in the enigmatic cultic scene on Pithos A from 'Ajrud, just below the blessing formula that invokes

¹⁵ Emerton 1999: 332.

¹⁶ Brown, Driver and Briggs 1979: 514.

¹⁷ Emerton 1999: 332.

¹⁸ Emerton 1999: 333.

¹⁹ Aitken 2007: 116.

²⁰ See Zevit 1984: 45-46 and references therein.

²¹ Emerton 1999: 316; see also Hadley 1987a: 59.

Yahweh of *šmrn* and his asherah, stating that the inscription is related directly to the two standing Bes-like figures.²² A discussion of the controversial drawings does not concern us here, and moreover, there is no certainty that inscription and drawing complement each other, not to mention that attempts at interpreting the drawings have been highly speculative.

Whoever or whatever is meant by the phrase «*l'šrth*», asherah is described as Yahweh's asherah, and the structure of the blessing alludes to some sort of personality that was invoked alongside Yahweh,²³ and probably in the shape of the wooden object that was chided so much in the Deuteronomic History. Mastin makes an interesting remark on the oddity of the cult symbol of a goddess having to be spoken of as if it belonged to Yahweh.²⁴ I think McCarter makes a plausible argument on hypostasis, "in which abstract aspects of a god are attributed concrete substance and worshipped as partly or entirely independent deities".²⁵ This was common in the Levantine religions, where female deities would have arisen as hypostatic forms of leading male deities: for example, the Ugaritic Athirat had the epithet *šm b'l* («Name-of-Ba'al»), the same epithet that would be used of the Sidonian Astarte, while the goddess Tinnit, who was worshipped extensively in the Phoenician colony of Carthage as well as in the Punic central and western Mediterranean islands, was given the epithet *pn b'l* (the Face/Presence of the chief Punic god Ba'al Ḥammon). Hence, McCarter comments, the male deity would serve as the community's chief god, whose favour and sustenance are

²² Day 1986: 393 and references therein.

²³ McCarter 1997: 76.

²⁴ Mastin 2004: 338.

²⁵ McCarter 1997: 76.

essential to its welfare, whilst the female deity, apart from being the male deity's consort, would arise as a hypostatic form of either his Face or his Name, or even his cultic Presence.²⁶

Yahweh's asherah mentioned at Khirbet el-Qôm and Kuntillet 'Ajrud can be viewed as the above Name- or Face-of-Ba'al goddesses or as the Anath-Yahu of Elephantine Judaism.²⁷ If the term *'šrh* stands for the wooden image or the 'sacred tree',²⁸ whichever cultic symbol stands for the goddess Asherah, we can picture the asherah object placed in the shrine or serving a part of the shrine of Yahweh (for example, Deut. 16.21, and 2 Kgs 23.4, 6, 15 clearly indicate that *asherahs* were found close to Yahweh's altar). Keel and Uehlinger, who are among the primary advocates of the asherah being in the form of the 'sacred (or stylized) tree', claim that the Iron Age IIB asherah was "a *mediating entity* associated with Yahweh, rather than a personal, independent active, female deity" (their italics), that brings Yahweh's blessing and is conceived in the mind in the shape of a stylized tree.²⁹ They further argue that the blessing formulae at Kuntillet 'Ajrud feature Yahweh and his asherah occurring side by side, except for the concluding wish for blessing in inscriptions B1 and B2 [my labelling], which occur in the masculine singular; supposedly Yahweh alone is the power that effects or produces the blessing.³⁰

Similarly Hadley argues, in light of the Khirbet el-Qôm inscription, about the possibility of the absorption of Asherah worship into Yahweh's cult by the 8th century BCE: Yahweh

²⁶ McCarter 1997: 77.

²⁷ McCarter 1997: 79.

²⁸ Imagery relating to the 'sacred tree' appears in ancient Israelite iconography, such as on the cult stand of Ta'anach or the painted 'sacred tree' scene on Pithos A from Kuntillet 'Ajrud.

²⁹ Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 236-237.

³⁰ Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 237. In fact, other inscriptions at Kuntillet 'Ajrud invoke Yahweh alone, such as the 200kg votive stone bowl bearing a Palaeo-Hebrew inscription on its rim from one 'Obadyah to Yahweh (Meshel 1978, 'The Inscriptions', plate 10).

remains the blessing and salvation (if one reads the last word of line 3 as *hwš* ‘*lh*’), which was however carried out by his asherah – possibly supplicants prayed to Yahweh before the asherah in the shrine, or by means of asherah, or else the asherah was a possible “hypostasis of Yahweh’s benevolence and succour, and so represented the desired help”³¹ (see the discussion on the Khirbet el-Qôm blessing-text below).

The above hypothetical positions thus avoid the grammatical difficulties encountered in reading the phrase *l’šrth*, and many scholars have come to accept the phrase as referring to the cultic object. The Kuntillet ‘Ajrud blessing formulae most likely refer to Asherah’s symbol that apparently was sometimes so closely associated with Yahweh’s temple or altar, that one could probably call it ‘his a/Asherah’, thereby distinguishing Yahweh as the most important deity.³² Mastin adds that if the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qôm inscriptions indeed indicate absorption of Asherah worship into Yahweh’s cult, or whether the male deity acquired a cultic symbol that once belonged to her, then this would represent a stage in the growth of inclusive monotheism, whereby one god acquired the spheres of activity of other gods and absorption of their powers.³³

3.3 Yahweh of Samaria and Yahweh of (the) Teman

It has been maintained that personal names are not used in the construct state in Hebrew, and it is also generally recognised that some place names (a town or a region) appear, at least *prima facie*, in the construct state in particular circumstances, to distinguish them from other

³¹ Hadley 2000: 99. See also Penchansky 2005: 79 and references therein.

³² Emerton 1982: 15.

³³ Mastin 2004: 340.

places with the same name.³⁴ The latter argument, comments Emerton, could be one way of explaining *yhwh šb't*.³⁵ Although the latter is a personal name and not a place name, the construct state could suggest that Yahweh was shared by more than one deity, or better, that there were different manifestations of him.³⁶ Even so, the discussion prior to the discoveries of Kuntillet 'Ajrud did not reach a decisive conclusion. Scholars recognised circumstances in cognate languages where apparently personal names are sometimes used in the construct state.³⁷ Emerton however points out that if one were to stick to Hebrew usage, then the required Hebrew evidence is supplied by the inscriptions of Kuntillet 'Ajrud, in which it is possible to regard *yhwh* as being in the construct state, or else to postulate an ellipse of *ʾohē* between *yhwh* and *šmrn* or *tmn*; in either case, the phrase would mean «Yahweh of Samaria» or «Yahweh of Teman».³⁸ The evidence of Kuntillet 'Ajrud, says Emerton, would thus help in understanding *yhwh šb't* (though it does not necessarily prove that this phrase must mean «Yahweh of *šb't*»); nonetheless, the epigraphic evidence suggests that “the possibility can no longer be excluded on the ground of syntax”.³⁹

Furthermore, the construction of the formula *yhwh (h)tmn* «Yahweh of (the) Teman» warrants the interpretation of *yhwh šmrn* as «Yahweh of Samaria» rather than translating it into «our guardian»,⁴⁰ as Meshel had originally read it.⁴¹ The above phrases imply that Yahweh was

³⁴ See Emerton 1982: 4 and references therein.

³⁵ Emerton 1982: 4-5.

³⁶ Emerton 1982: 5.

³⁷ See arguments listed in Emerton 1982: 4-8.

³⁸ Emerton 1982: 8-9.

³⁹ Emerton 1982: 9.

⁴⁰ Smith 2002: 119 and references therein. See also Gunneweg, Perlman and Meshel (1985: 280-283) on a number of vessels of 'Samaria Ware' recovered at Kuntillet 'Ajrud, so called because of their distribution patterns that indicate an origin in the hilly country of northern Israel.

worshipped at either the city or the region of Samaria, so that the corresponding inscription was perhaps done by a traveller from Samaria. Teman could have equally been a region rather than a town or city; the name implies a southern region of Edom,⁴² but the idea of the worship of Yahweh at Teman is doubtful. Emerton brings up the verse in Hab. 3.3 that states, “God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran”, and in fact argues that the ‘Ajrud text is unlikely to refer to a cult of Yahweh in Teman; on the contrary it simply resonated with the above biblical verse, i.e. that Yahweh came from the southern region, which belongs in a special way to him.⁴³ He further adds that, if Kuntillet ‘Ajrud was a stopping station, the idea of Yahweh’s relation to Teman would be relevant to a traveller requesting a blessing and divine protection on the journey⁴⁴ (see section 3.4). The OT, for example, mentions many Ba‘als, especially in polemical contexts, yet one cannot rule out the idea that the term *ba‘al* could have been used predominantly of one pre-eminent deity in certain contexts, referring to local variations in the cult but essentially referring to the same god.⁴⁵ One would imagine a similar case with Yahweh; this deity was probably associated with several sanctuaries or places of worship.

Unfortunately the inscriptions at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud do not offer us straightforward solutions, but the phrases «Yahweh of Samaria» and «Yahweh of Teman» still indicate that, in the former, someone from Samaria made a request in writing for a blessing by Yahweh, who was worshipped in his region, while the latter phrase reflects the traditional association of Yahweh

⁴¹ Meshel 1978. Following Meshel’s publication, Gilula (1978-79) preferred the reading *šomtron* (Samaria), and Meshel later accepted this reading (Weinfeld 1980: 284 [as referred to in Emerton 1982: 3]). Emerton (1982: 3) also agrees with the reading «Yahweh of Samaria».

⁴² Emerton 1982: 9 and references therein.

⁴³ Emerton 1982: 9-10. Compare also the phrases “the One of Sinai” and “the Lord of Sinai” in Deut. 33.2; Judg. 5.4-5; and Ps. 68.9.

⁴⁴ Emerton 1982: 10; see argument below.

⁴⁵ Emerton 1982: 11-12 and references therein.

with the southern region of Palestine, and it is possible that someone on a journey in the region of southern Judah requested blessing from Yahweh, who originated from Teman (and who did not necessarily differ from «Yahweh of Samaria»).

⁴⁶

3.4 Kuntillet ‘Ajrud: caravanserai or religious centre?

Meshel’s excavations of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud have dated the site to the period of ca. 850-750 BCE. As mentioned in chapter 2, other texts were written on Pithos B apart from the blessing formulae invoking «Yahweh...and his asherah». In addition, inscriptions in Phoenician script were painted on the wall plaster of the ‘bench room’ and west store room, which also invoke Yahweh for a blessing, and have suggested to Meshel that the west building at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud was a kind of pilgrimage spot, or perhaps a shrine to Yahweh on the ancient trade routes that led to Elat and southern Sinai.

⁴⁷

Most of the ceramic vessels recovered there were made in Judah, in the southern coastal region, and in the northern kingdom of Israel.⁴⁸ Meshel had indeed argued that Kuntillet ‘Ajrud had connections not only with Judah but also with Israel, and further assumed that the site was a religious centre inhabited by a group of priests who gave blessings to travellers stopping at the site while on their way towards the south.⁴⁹ Hadley however regards the site as a caravanserai, or way station, rather than a shrine or a religious centre *per se*, without eliminating the actual presence of a shrine within the structure.⁵⁰ This hypothesised shrine could have been located inside the building’s gateway, the ‘bench room’ itself, since Meshel

⁴⁶ Emerton 1982: 12-13.

⁴⁷ Meshel 1978, ‘The Nature of the Site and its Date’.

⁴⁸ For an analysis of the recovered pottery see Gunneweg, Perlman and Meshel 1985.

⁴⁹ Gunneweg, Perlman and Meshel 1985: 270.

⁵⁰ Hadley 1987b: 184.

reports that most of the special finds were recovered there, where the benches blocked the original openings of corner compartments or *favissae* (that served as depositories for the objects removed from the benches).⁵¹ Dever argues that the benches were not seats but typical platforms for offerings.⁵² Then again, no typical cult vessels or metal objects were found at 'Ajrud, and the plan of the west building is certainly not that of a temple.⁵³

Hadley argues that the presence of Phoenician inscriptions strengthens the argument that 'Ajrud was a way station where a diversity of peoples met,⁵⁴ though Dijkstra holds that the site had connections with the north of Palestine rather than with Phoenicia itself, since the Phoenician script was also used in the Northern Kingdom.⁵⁵ In addition, hardly any Phoenician pottery was found, so there is not much solid evidence for Phoenicians frequently travelling to this site. The theophoric element *yw* – appearing in names such as 'Amaryaw ('*mryw* 'Yahweh has spoken'), Yo'aśah (*yw'sh* 'Yahweh has made'), and other names featuring at Kuntilet 'Ajrud – is a north Palestinian spelling, while the south Palestinian spelling *yhw* is absent at the site which, along with the presence of small north Palestinian vessels, suggested to Mastin that the way station was visited by travellers from north Palestine.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the large and heavy pithoi and storage vessels were produced or acquired in the south and so were transported as short a distance as possible, which possibly reflects that those who built the way station and used it on their journeys were from north

⁵¹ Meshel 1978, 'The Nature of the Site and its Date'.

⁵² Dever 1997: 44.

⁵³ Meshel 1978, 'The Nature of the Site and its Date'.

⁵⁴ Hadley 1987b: 184.

⁵⁵ Dijkstra 2001a: 22.

⁵⁶ Mastin 2004: 330. Hadley (1987b: 184-185 and references therein) remarks about her reconstructed name *yhl/[l']* in the lacuna at the beginning of inscription A1, where only *yhl* is preserved from the name. She states that Yehalle'el seems a plausible reconstruction; it is attested as a late Judaeen name, which interestingly enough appears in an inscription invoking Yahweh of Samaria. If her reading is correct, this would make it the only recognized southern name at the site.

Palestine, and made use of large vessels produced in the southern region to store supplies at the station.⁵⁷ Dijkstra states that it is difficult to answer the question as to why a road station was built far out in the south, in Sinai, but offers the possibility that the way station perhaps served the pilgrimages of Israelites on their way to Mt Sinai.⁵⁸ A further link to northern Palestine is the invocation to Yahweh of Samaria in inscription A1, as discussed above.

3.5 Blessing and divine protection at Khirbet el-Qôm

While the other two inscriptions in Tomb 1 of the Khirbet el-Qôm burial-system refer to the owner of the tomb-chamber there,⁵⁹ the inscription under study (no. 3) that originated from Tomb 2 stands out as a blessing artefact combining text and picture (i.e. the hand carving). After my tentative reading of the inscription in chapter 2, I can only hypothesise that Uriyahu⁶⁰ was the wealthy owner of any of the burial chambers inside Tomb 2. Uriyahu probably had this text carved or prepared for him (line 1) (before his death), and the text is written in such a way as to bless the deceased and to protect him in the afterlife: thus the formula of this inscription is both benedictory and apotropaic in nature.

Leuenberger rightly points out that at Khirbet el-Qôm Yahweh is exclusively the “*causer of the blessing*”⁶¹ (his italics), unlike the ‘Ajrud blessing formulae, where people bless other people by invoking Yahweh of *šmrn* or Yahweh of (*h*)*tmn*, and his asherah. The receiver of

⁵⁷ Mastin 2004: 330.

⁵⁸ Dijkstra (2001a: 22) also considers the short period of occupation of the site, and speculates that the road station may have functioned during Jehu’s dynasty, when relations between Judah and Israel were strained and the Israelites were not welcome on the usual road to the south through the Negev desert.

⁵⁹ See Dever 1969-70: 15-158; for a recent reading see Lemaire 2006: 231.

⁶⁰ The names Uriyahu (‘Yahweh is my light’) (lines 1 and 2) and Oniyahu (‘Yahweh is my ship/strength’) (line 4) contain the theophoric element *yhw*, found exclusively in the south, which fits the context of Khirbet el-Qôm’s location in southern Palestine.

⁶¹ Leuenberger 2009: 73.

the Khirbet el-Qôm blessing is Uriyahu, and thus the (Qal) passive participle eliminates the human subject as the causer of the blessing.⁶² This factor further excludes the idea that the hand carving represents Uriyahu's hand, or the hand of a human subject, for that matter. I will now discuss this issue in view of my tentative reading in chapter 2.

As stated above, this blessing-inscription stands out in its combination of text and picture. The oversized and deeply engraved hand is the only motif present on the artefact, and it obviously dominates the overall composition, while the inscription seems to have been arranged around it, thereby appearing marginal and somewhat blurred,⁶³ especially if one were to picture the stone back in its original place in the pillar, where even the hand carving, the size of which is equivalent to that of a child's hand, would lose any dominance it had on the overall composition. Trying to discern which was executed first, whether it was the hand carving or the text, is as baffling as the-chicken-or-the-egg dilemma, especially considering the poor state of the chalkstone and the chaotic display of letters and their duplicates amidst the natural cracks. Nevertheless, the overall spatial composition seems to indicate that the text was arranged around the existing hand, as if the blessing-text was added to emphasise the symbolic potency of the hand and specified the content, i.e. blessing and protection.⁶⁴

Like many other scholars, Leuenberger reads the last word of line 3 as «he saved him», arguing that the overall blessing-text indicates Yahweh's everlasting protection over Uriyahu during his life and also in the afterlife.⁶⁵ If, on the other hand, one were to read the last word

⁶² Leuenberger 2009: 73.

⁶³ Leuenberger 2009: 75.

⁶⁴ Leuenberger 2009: 76.

⁶⁵ Leuenberger 2009: 73-76.

of line 3 as «the hollow of his hand» (see my reading in chapter 2 and in the Appendix), or as Shea's «hand-print»,⁶⁶ as if it were some sort of label or indication for what follows after line 3, i.e. the hand carving, then one can say that text and motif mutually correspond to and interpret each other. Nonetheless, Shea interprets the handprint as being the mark left by an Egyptian slave who was hypothetically owned by Uriyahu.⁶⁷ While this reading seems possible, Shea's argument appears to be awkward in some places: for starters, how could the alleged Egyptian slave, or any person for that matter, carve their hand-print upside down on a pillar? Secondly, the overall small size of the hand carving and the oversized, carelessly carved features seem to indicate that this hand motif was all that it was, a symbolic message, irrespective of natural life-size features or a human self-representation. This symbolic message probably is that of divine benediction and protection, which is emphasised by the phrase *brk 'ryhw lyhwh*, whereby Yahweh clearly is the causer of the blessing, and thus the motif may represent «the hollow of *his* (i.e. Yahweh's) hand» .

In chapter 2, I had also stated my thoughts on the hand-carving being either a palmar left hand or a dorsal right hand, contrary to what most scholars think. I admittedly state that my interpretation may still present problems, since it is usually an open right palm that is represented in ancient Near Eastern artefacts of a benedictory or apotropaic nature, as on the much later dedicatory and votive stelae in the Punic west. It is outside my expertise to go into the diverse cultural and religious notions of the uses of the hands for blessings and curses, which span several centuries. All I can comment about is that some cultures and/or religions do believe in the use of the left hand for cursing, while the right hand is used for blessing. If

⁶⁶ Shea 1990: 112-113; see also Appendix.

⁶⁷ Shea 1990: 113.

one should stick with the potent message of divine intervention in the Khirbet el-Qôm text, being blessing and/or protection, and therefore choose to see an open palm motif (i.e. the hollow of the hand), then according to my interpretation the stone bears an open *left* palm, possibly symbolising an apotropaic/protective force against those who disturb the deceased (i.e. Uriyahu). Since the beginning of line 3 is very problematic to read I chose to stick to the reading of most scholars (*wmsryh*), after examining what photographs and autographs of the text I had available. In the context of my tentative reading of the text in general that alludes to protection in the afterlife, I can speculate that the phrase «and from his enemies» could refer to Uriyahu being blessed (and protected) by the male deity Yahweh, and by his *a/Asherah*, an agent of blessing, from anyone who disturbs the tomb or Uriyahu's eternal sleep. Conclusively, the blessing-text of Khirbet el-Qôm seems to be a prayer/epitaph with a dual force: it requests a divine blessing, and at the same time invokes the male deity, and his *asherah*, the agent of blessing (or the medium or entity through which it happens⁶⁸), to ward off evil from disrupting the deceased (in his afterlife), with the hand motif symbolising Yahweh's protective hand reaching down. Whether it is the left or the right hand, my opinion remains open for modification in light of new evidence or further study.

3.6 Concluding remarks

In this chapter it was shown that it is wise to stick to the well-attested Hebrew idiom and read *l'srth* as «by his *asherah*», in the sense of the cultic symbol/object of the goddess *Asherah* that was also known as (the) *asherah*, as mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that the allusions to the *asherah* do not (directly or indirectly) refer to the goddess behind the image. In addition, the OT alludes to the cultic symbol of the goddess

⁶⁸ Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 239-240 and references therein.

being associated with Yahweh's cult and/or shrine, or placed beside his altar, which might also hint at the introduction of Asherah worship in Yahweh's cult, as well as the possible hypostatisation of the goddess.

In addition, the construct phrases *yhwh šmrn* and *yhwh (h)tmn* in the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscriptions might indicate that the name Yahweh was shared by different manifestations of him, with the former phrase suggesting the worship of Yahweh at Samaria, while the latter possibly indicates the significant southern origin of Yahweh at Teman, the deity that probably was no different from Yahweh of Samaria. The presence of such allusions also indicates that Yahweh worshippers both from northern Israel and the southern region stopped by the apparent way station of Kuntillet 'Ajrud.

It was also discussed that the blessing-text of Khirbet el-Qôm is a possible prayer to Yahweh to bless Uriyahu through the mediating entity asherah, and to protect him against evil, possibly during the afterlife or else from anyone who disrupts his eternal sleep. The blessing-text and the accompanying hand carving seem to mutually correspond to and interpret each other in terms of a potent message of divine benediction and protection.

In chapter 4 this study will conclude with a comment on the religious context of both 8th-century sites in relation to (contemporary) political and religious affairs of Monarchic Judah and the religious reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah.

CHAPTER 4 - CONCLUSION

4.1 Yahweh and Asherah in the Monarchic Period

The epigraphic evidence discussed in this study seems to be, as Mastin remarks, consistent with the small number of biblical references to the worship of Yahweh and Asherah in Palestine.¹ These inscriptions together with the forty biblical references to a/Asherah make one wonder about the relationship between Yahweh and Asherah, and the role of Asherah in the cult in general at the time of the Monarchy.

Dijkstra identifies three stages of development and decline of religious practice in ancient Israel in relation to Asherah worship,² summarised as follows. In the first stage, Asherah was originally El's (or possibly El-Yahweh's) consort and *mater familias* in the Canaanite pantheon, while in the second stage – the Monarchic Period (ca. 900-600 BCE) – we read of Yahweh and his a/Asherah, with the role of Asherah possibly being that of a 'Great Mother' and 'Nursing Goddess', as well as her cult symbol (the stylized tree). The last stage, though inaugurated by Hezekiah (727-698 BCE), gained momentum by the time of the Exile and the Second Temple Period: during this stage there was the reintroduction of El, the association of Asherah with Ba'al in the Bible, and the gradual identification of Asherah with Anath-

¹ Mastin 2004: 345.

² See Dijkstra 2001b: 114-115.

Astarte. The epigraphic evidence would therefore fall into Dijkstra's second stage, with the worship of Asherah alongside Yahweh, probably worshipped in the form of her cult symbol.

Indeed, in view of the philological discussion in chapters 2 and 3, it would seem that the references to Asherah in both the OT and the inscriptions, and the very meaning of *l'srth* in the epigraphic evidence point to a strong worship of the cult image of the goddess in the Monarchic period. During this time, King Asa (ca. 910-870 BCE) deposed his mother Maacah for having caused to make a detestable image of Asherah, which he tore down and burned, because it was either foreign or offensive, and he also expelled the *qdšm* ('the holy ones') from the towns of Judah, presumably the temple staff involved in the cult of Asherah (1 Kgs 15.11-15; 2 Kgs 23.7). Nonetheless, as Dijkstra points out, the cult itself was left unharmed.³ In the northern kingdom, Ahab (ca. 870-850 BCE), who married the Sidonian princess Jezebel, introduced the veneration of Ba'al in Samaria, and placed the asherah pole in the temple there (1 Kgs 16.31-33; 18.19). The asherah pole remained standing in Samaria after the destruction of the temple of Ba'al (2 Kgs 13.6). In Dijkstra's opinion, the idea that a sanctuary of Yahweh of Samaria existed (where the asherah was placed) is all the more strengthened by the fact that a scribe at the caravanserai of Kuntillet 'Ajrud was familiar with this cult in Samaria to write a blessing-formula (inscription A1) invoking Yahweh of Samaria and his asherah.⁴

³ Dijkstra 2001b: 115-116.

⁴ Dijkstra 2001b: 116-117.

4.2 Concluding observations: syncretistic worship, the epigraphic evidence, and future studies

Was Asherah the consort of Yahweh? Since the epigraphic evidence points to a cultic symbol of the goddess, it does not quite solve the issue. Nonetheless, the worship of Asherah as a goddess is probable, considering not only the biblical texts and the inscriptions, but also foreign references to the Canaanite pantheon (from Ugarit and Egypt, for example), the cult figurines, the iconographic representations of the goddess, and other archaeological discoveries throughout ancient Israel.

The biblical texts suggest that the worship of other deities was quite frequent, as in the condemnations of the prophets Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and the cult of Asherah itself met growing opposition during the Monarchic Period, especially in the southern kingdom of Judah, in the form of religious reforming actions by the kings Asa, Jehoshaphat (ca. 873-849 BCE), Hezekiah and Josiah (639-608 BCE).

McCarter comments on the pattern of Iron Age religion in the nation-states of Syria-Palestine as being monolatrous – confining worship to a single god – and henotheistic – viewing the world in terms of the will of a single god without necessarily denying the existence of others.⁵ The data from Khirbet el-Qôm and Kuntillet ‘Ajrud in fact indicate that Yahweh was considered the chief male deity, and at least some worshippers associated him with Asherah in both northern and southern Palestine. As mentioned above, the invocation of Yahweh of Samaria and his asherah at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud throws light on the official state cult in the northern kingdom. The cult of Yahweh and his asherah was also known in the south, at

⁵ McCarter 1997: 74.

Khirbet el-Qôm, and had as adherent a man of some standing (if we were to read the second word in line 1 as *h'šr*). This leaves open the question as to whether such a syncretistic cult, involving Yahweh and a goddess, was practised amongst the elite and the rest of the population alike. It is suggested that knowledge of the asherah cult symbol even reached the royal household, since the Queen mother Maacah put up such an idol.

Worthy of note is the dating of the epigraphic evidence which, in its widest range, would fall in the period from the mid-9th to the late 8th centuries BCE, i.e. during a time of religious reforms or opposition by Judaeen kings, indicating the very existence of the cult of Yahweh and (his) Asherah, as well as its knowledge and practice among the populace.

The goddess Asherah was likely worshipped in the form of the asherah object (or perhaps stylised tree). Yahweh had begun to absorb the worship of Asherah into his cult, as her symbol was symbolically associated with him (possibly through hypostasis), and physically placed in temples or beside altars. This symbol probably meant a potent icon or idol of the deity to or in front of which supplicants offered prayers, and additionally it may have served as a mediating entity of Yahweh's benediction, as suggested by the inscriptions. I tend to agree with Dever's argument that "there was a widespread perception in ancient Israel of the goddess' *reality*, which gave the symbolism its efficacy"⁶ (his italics). In my opinion, goddess and symbol were ultimately inseparable, and any prayers to the cult symbol (i.e. the asherah) meant prayers to the goddess herself (Asherah).

⁶ Dever 1997: 45.

I conclude this study with important caveats for present and future studies. One must take into consideration that the epigraphic evidence is sparse and, on palaeographic grounds, covers at least the 8th century BCE, so it basically gives a brief glimpse of the state of affairs in Judah during this particular century. Moreover, the inscriptions themselves have to be studied with caution and scrutiny, especially with regard to the poor state of the rock surface and the ‘ghost images’ of the Khirbet el-Qôm inscription, which make a reading of the text precarious and, as indeed shown, open to multiple interpretations. Lastly, there is also a need for a re-examination and complete publication of the entire corpus of the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscriptions, especially the fragmentary texts on wall plaster, to get a fuller picture of the inscriptions and their content, especially those of a religious nature.

APPENDIX

The Inscriptions

The following is a selective list of different transliterations and translations of Khirbet el-Qôm inscription no. 3, and the blessing formulae invoking «Yahweh...and his asherah» from Kuntillet 'Ajrud (A1, B1, B2) discussed in chapters 2 and 3. The pattern of this Appendix follows closely that adopted by Tilde Binger¹ to enable a more uniform impression of the different scholarly readings.

Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription no. 3

Dever (1969-70)²

1. *l'ryhw . hqšb . ktbh*
2. *brk . 'ryhw . lyhwh*
3. *wm 'rr . ydl 'šr thhwš 'lh*
4. *l'nyhw*

(Belonging to) 'Uriyahu. Be careful of his inscription!
Blessed be 'Uriyahu by Yahweh.
And cursed shall be the hand of whoever (defaces it)!
(Written by) 'Oniyahu.

(Lemaire 1977)³

1. *'ryhw.h 'šr.ktbh*
2. *brk.'ryhw.lyhwh*
3. *wmsryh.l'šrth.hwš 'lh*
4. *l'nyhw*
5. *wl'šrth*
6. *r h*

Urhayu *le riche l'a fait écrire*:
Béni soit Uryahu par Yhwh
et <par son ashérah>, de ses ennemis {par son ashérah}
il l'a sauvé.
Par Onyahu
Et par son ashérah

Garbini (1981)⁴

- <l> 'ryhw hqšr ktbh*
brk 'ryhw lyhwh
wm 'rr yd k l'šrt hhwš 'lh
l'nyhw

Ad Uria è stata aggiunta la sua iscrizione.
Benedett[o] sia Uria da Yahweh,
e maledetta sia la mano di tutte quelle (?) che
'malediranno' la sua salvezza
– Di Onia

(Naveh 1979)⁵

1. *'ryhw hšr ktbh.*
2. *brk 'ryhw lyhwh.*
3. *nšry wl'šrth. hwš 'lh*
4. *l'ryhw*

Uriyahu the governor wrote it.
May Uriyahu be blessed by Yahweh
my guardian and by his Asherah. Save him,
(save) Uriyahu.

¹ See Binger 1997: 164-175.

² Dever 1969-70: 158-159.

³ Lemaire 1977: 598 [as referred to and reproduced in Zevit 1984: 41].

⁴ As referred to and reproduced in Binger 1997: 164. The square brackets in line 2 indicate my correction of the Italian translation.

⁵ Naveh 1979: 28.

Mittmann (1981)⁶

1. 'ryhw hšr ktbh
2. brk 'ryhw lYhwh
3. wmmšr ydh l' l šrth hwš ' lh
4. l'nyhw

Uriahu, der Sänger, hat es geschrieben.
 ein Gesegneter Jahwes ist Uriahu
 und aus Bedrängnis heraus preist er den Gott seines
 Dienstes, der ihm hilft.

Angerstorfer (1982)⁷

1. 'wrhw . hšr . ktbh
2. brk. 'rjhw . ljhwh
3. nšrj . l' šrth . hwš ' lh
- 4-6 l'nyhw/wl' šrth/rh

Urijahu, der Gouverneur, liess es schreiben:
 Gesegnet sei Urijahu von Jahwe
 meinem Beschützer, und von seiner 'Ašerah.
 Rette ihn, den Urijahu und durch seine Ašerah/..

Zevit (1984)⁸

1. 'ryhw h'šr ktbh
2. brkt 'rjhw lyhwh
3. wmmšrryyh/r hl' lš'rttrhhwš'lh
4. l'byhw
5. [d/r/b'g/? wll'šrth [?]??and to Asherata
6. []??rth [?]A[sh]erata

Uryahu, the prosperous, his inscription:
 I blessed Uryahu to YHWH
 And from his enemies, O Asherata, save him.
 by Abiyahu
]??and to Asherata
]A[sh]erata

Lemaire (1984)⁹

1. Uryahu the wealthy man had it written
2. Blessed be Uryahu by Yahweh
3. and by his asherah; from his enemies he saved him!
4. [written] by Onyahu
5. ...and by his asherah
6. ...[and by] his [ashe]r[ah]

Miller (1987)¹⁰

1. (l) 'ryhw. h'š.ktbh
2. brk. 'ryhw.lyhwh
3. wmmšryh.l'šrth/hwš' /lh
4. l'nyhw
5. wl'šrth
6. r h

[for] Uriyahu the rich: his inscription [or, has written it]
 Blessed is Uriyahu by Yahweh;
 Yea from his adversaries by his asherah he has saved
 him.
 [Written] by Oniyahu
 [...?]and by his asherah

⁶ Mittmann 1981: 142, 144.

⁷ As referred to and reproduced in Binger 1997: 165.

⁸ Zevit 1984: 43. Zevit tries to make sense out of the sequence l-'l-š-'r-t-t-r-h in line 3, stating that there is a series of repeated letters. Then again, he does not seem to explain further his reading of l'šrth in the above-mentioned sequence (except for the t-t sequence) (Zevit 1984: 44-45). Presumably, the extra letters in the sequence would be as follows (marked in square brackets): l-'[l] -š-[]-r-[t]-t-[r]-h. This also applies for his later reading, with a few minor changes in line 3 (see Zevit 2001 below).

⁹ Lemaire 1984: 44.

¹⁰ As referred to and reproduced in Binger 1997: 165 [the publication date is 1987]. See also Miller 2000: 31.

Hadley (1987a)¹¹

1. 'ryhw.h 'šr.ktbh
2. brk. 'ryhw.lyhwh
3. wmšryh l'šrth hwš 'lh
4. l'nyhw
5. wl'šrth
6. '??rth

Uriyahu the rich wrote it.
 Blessed be Uriyahu by Yahweh
 For from his enemies by his (YHWH's) asherah he
 (YHWH) has saved him¹²
 by Oniyahu
 and by his asherah
 his a[she]rah

Margalit (1989)¹³

1. 'ryhw. h 'šr. ktbh
2. brk. 'ryhw. lyhwh. <ky
 hšl(h)w. m(kp.) 'ybyh
3. wmšryh { ... } hwš 'lh
 l'nyhw

Ur(i)yahu the rich composed it
 “Blessed is Ur(i)yahu unto YHWH –
 <For he rescued him from (the hands of) his enemies>,
 And from his foes { ... } he saved him.”
(Inscribed) by On(i)yahu

Lower

[lyhwh.] wl'<š>rth
 (supralinear correction : l'šrth)

[(Dedicated) to YHWH] and to his consort
 [Asherah].

Shea (1990)¹⁴

1. 'ryhw. h 'šr . ktbh
2. brk . 'ryhw . lyhwh
3. wmšryh . l'šrth . wš 'lh
4. (hand) l'nyhw
5. wl'šrth
6. wl' . rth

Uriyahu was the one who wrote it.
 Blessed be Uriyahu by Yahweh
 And his Egyptian (servant) by his asherah, and here is
 his handprint:
 (hand sunk in relief) for Oniyahu.
 By his asherah
 And by his a . erah.

Binger (1997)¹⁵

1. 'ryhw h 'šr ktbh
2. brk 'ryhw lyhwh
3. h 'wryh l'šrt[h] hwš 'lh
4. lrpwh

Uryahu [qualification of Uriyahu] his writing [or,
 inscription]
 Blessed be Uriyahu by Yahweh,
 his light, by Asherah, she who holds her hand over him
 by his rpy, who...

¹¹ Hadley 1987a: 51.

¹² Or, «(and) by his asherah, for from his enemies he has saved him» (Hadley 1987a: 51).

¹³ Margalit 1989: 373.

¹⁴ Shea 1990: 110.

¹⁵ Binger 1997: 167.

Dever (1997)¹⁶

'Uriyahu the Prince; this is his inscription.
 May 'Uriyahu be blessed by Yahweh,
 For from his enemies he has saved him by his
 Asherah.

Keel and Uehlinger (1998)¹⁷

Line 1 *'ryhw. h 'šr. ktbh*
 Line 2 *brk. 'ryhw. lyhwh.*
 Line 3 *wmsryh l 'šrth hwš ' lh*
 Line 4 *l'nyhw*
 Line i *l'šrth*
 Line ii *wl' [š]rth*

Line 1 “Uriyahu, the honourable, has written [this] (or: “this is his inscription)
 Line 2 Blessed is/be Uriyahu by Yahweh
 Line 3 And [because?] from his oppressors,
 by his *asherah*, he has saved him
 Line 4 [written] by Oniyahu.”
 Line i “...by his *asherah*...
 Line ii ...and by his *asherah*...”

Zevit (2001)¹⁸

1. <i>'ryhw h 'šr ktbh</i>	Uryahu, the prosperous, his inscription ([or] an inscription)
2. <i>brkt 'rjhw lyhwh</i>	I blessed Uryahu to YHWH
3. <i>wmmšrryyh/r hlš'rttrhhwš ' lh</i>	to wit, from his enemies ... for the sake of Asherata, save him
4. <i>l'byhw</i>	by Abiyahu
5. [] <i>d/r/b 'g/? wll'šrth</i> [?] ?? and to Asheratah	
6. [] <i>'??rth</i> [?] A[sh]eratah	

Dever (2005)¹⁹

For 'Uriyahu the governor (or the rich), his inscription.
 Blessed is 'Uriyahu by Yahweh:
 From his enemies he has been saved
 By his a/Asherah.
 (Written) by 'Oniyahu.

¹⁶ Dever 1997: 45.

¹⁷ Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 237, 239.

¹⁸ Zevit 2001: 360, 361.

¹⁹ Dever 2005: 132.

Lemaire (2006)²⁰

1. 'RYHW. H'ŠR.KTBH
2. BRK. 'RYHW.LYHWH
3. WMŠRYH.L'ŠRTH.HWŠ' LH
4. L'NYHW
5. WL'ŠRTH
6. WL'ŠRTH

1. Uriyahu *the wealthy let it write*
2. Blessed be Uriyahu by Yahweh
3. and from his enemies, by his asherah, he saved him
4. (*Written?*) by Oniyahu
5. and by his asherah
6. and by his asherah

Leuenberger (2009)²¹

- 'ryhw . h'šr . ktbh (3:1)Uriyahu, the rich, (wrote it)/had it written:
brk . 'ryhw . lyhwh (2) Blessed is/be Uriyahu by Yhwh.
wmšryh . l'šrth . hwš' lh (3) And from his enemies – by his Ašerah he saved him.
l'nyhw (4) By Oniyahu.

My own reading

1. 'ryhw h'šr ktbh Uriyahu the rich wrote it
2. brk 'ryhw lyhwh Blessed is/be Uriyahu by Yahweh
3. wm(m)šr(r)yh(h) l'šrth(h) wš'lh²² and from his enemies, by his asherah, and the hollow of his hand
4. [hand] l'nyhw by Oniyahu
5. wl'šrth and by his asherah
6. l' rth by his a[she]rah

Kuntillet 'Ajrud

Inscription A1 (Pithos A)

Meshel (1978)²³

'mr. '....h..k. 'mr.lyhl ... wlyw'šh.w...brkt.'tkm.lyhwh.šmrn.wl'šrth.
“said [.....] Yo‘aśah [.....] May you be blessed by God, who guards us and his asherah (cella or symbol)”

²⁰ Lemaire 2006: 231.

²¹ Leuenberger 2009: 71-72.

²² The English translation is based on the reading of the line without the letters in brackets (what I believe are the ‘ghost letters’): *wmšryh l'šrth wš'lh*.

²³ Meshel 1978, ‘The Inscriptions’.

Naveh (1979)

'mr X 'mr l-Y wlyw'sh w[l-Z] brkt 'tkm lyhwh šmrn wl'srth

“X says : Say to Y and to Yau‘ašah and [to Z]: I bless you by Yahweh our guardian, and by his asherah.”

Garbini (1981)²⁴

'mr... k 'mr lyhl...wlyw'sh w...brkt 'tkm lyhwh šmrn wl'srth

“X ha ditto: di a Yhl...e a Yaw‘ašah e...: ‘vi benedico da parte di Yahweh nostro custode e della sua Asherà’”.

Angerstorfer (1982)²⁵

*'mr. '...h...k. 'mr . lyhl... wlyw'sh
w... brkt . 'tkm . lyhwh . šmrn . wl'srth*

Er sprach..... er sprach zu JHL...und zu Jo‘ašah : ‘...Ich will euch segnen durch Jahwe, meinen/unseren Beschützer und durch seine ‘Aserah!

Emerton (1982)²⁶

“One of the inscriptions includes the words:

brkt. 'tkm . lyhwh . šmrn . wl'srth

I have blessed you by Yahweh *šmrn* and his Asherah

Dever (1984)²⁷

*'mr X 'mr l-Y wlyw'sh w[l-Z] brkt 'tkm
lyhwh šmrn wl'srth*

“X says : Say to Y and to Yau‘ašah and [to Z]: I bless you by Yahweh our guardian, and by his Asherah.”

Hadley (1987b)²⁸

'mr. '...h. .. k. 'mr. lyhl[l'l] wlyw'sh. w... brkt. 'tkm. lyhwh. šmrn. wl'srth.

“X says: Say to Yeha[l'el] and to Yo‘asah and [to Z]: I bless you by Yahweh of Samaria and by his asherah.”

Margalit (1990)²⁹

(‘the relevant part of the inscription’)

... brkt. 'tkm. lyhwh. šmrn. wl'srth

“...I have blessed you to [= ‘in the name of’] YHWH-of-Samaria and to his ‘ŠRH”

²⁴ As referred to and reproduced in Binger 1997: 167.

²⁵ As referred to and reproduced in Binger 1997: 167.

²⁶ Emerton 1982: 2.

²⁷ Dever 1984: 21.

²⁸ Hadley 1987b: 182.

²⁹ Margalit 1990: 275.

Keel and Uehlinger (1998)³⁰

Line 1 'mr. ' [...]h[.]k. 'mr. lyhl[.] wlyw'sh. w... brkt. 'tkm

Line 2 lyhwh.šmrn.wl'srth.

Line 1 "Thus says '[...]' (PN 1) ...:

Say to Yehalle[lél?] (PN 2). Yo'asa (PN 3) and ... (PN4?):

I bless you (herewith – or: have blessed you)

Line 2 to/before Yahweh of Samaria and his *asherah*."

Smith (2002)³¹

'mr X 'mr wlyw'sh w[l-Z]

X says: Say to Y and Yau'aśah and [to Z]:

brkt 'tkm lyhwh šmrn wl'srth

I bless you to Yahweh of Samaria, and to his/its *asherah*.

Inscription B1 (Pithos B)

Meshel (1978)³²

'mryw 'mr l.'dnyh... brktk.lyhwh...

wl'srth.ybrk.wyšmrk wyhy 'm. 'dny...

" 'Amaryau said to my lord...may you blessed by God and by his *Asherah*. God bless you and keep you and be with you..."

Naveh (1979)³³

'mr 'mryw 'mr l'dny X brktk lyhwh [šmrn] wl'srth.

"Amaryau says: Say to my lord X: I bless you by Yahweh [our guardian], and by his *Asherah*."

Garbini (1981)³⁴

'mryw 'mr l'dny h...brktk lyhwh...wl'srth ybrk wyšmrk wyhy 'm 'dny...

'Amaryaw ha detto al mio signore... "ti benedico da parte di Yahweh...e della sua *Asherà*. Ti benedica [e ti] custodisca e sia con il mio signore..."

Angerstorfer (1982)³⁵

'mryw 'mr l'dnj h...

brktk . lyhwh . jt-n . wl'srth

jbrk . wjšmrk wjhj 'm . 'dnj

'Amarjaw sagte zu meinem Herrn / den Herren von...

Ich segne dich bei Jahwe ...und bei seiner 'Ašerah!

Er segne dich und schütze dich und er sei mit meinem Herrn

³⁰ Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 225-226.

³¹ Smith 2002: 118.

³² Meshel 1978, 'The Inscriptions'.

³³ Naveh 1979: 28.

³⁴ As referred to and reproduced in Binger 1997: 169. The square brackets in line 3 indicate my correction of the Italian translation.

³⁵ As referred to and reproduced in Binger 1997: 170.

Chase (1982)³⁶

	['mr]	Utterance of
1.	'mryw'	Amaryaw
2.	mr l. 'dn[y]	Say to my lord,
3.	hšlm . '[t]	Is it well with you ?
4.	brtk l[y]	I bless you by
5.	hwh [...]	Yahweh
6.	wl'šrth . yb	and by his/its (?) 'asherah.
		May
7.	rk. wyšmrk	he bless and keep you
8.	wyhy 'm . 'd[n]	and be with my lord.
9.	y...]	

Emerton (1982)³⁷

(Extracts of the inscription)

'mrjw says: brtk . lyhwh [...] wl'šrth . jbrk . wyšmrk wjhj 'm . 'dnj

I have blessed thee by Yahweh [...] and his Asherah. May he bless and keep thee, and be with my lord.

Dever (1984)³⁸

'] mr 'mryw 'mr l'dny [X] brtk

lyhwh <šmrn> wl'šrth.³⁹

“Amaryau says: Say to my lord [X]: I bless you by Yahweh [our guardian] and by his Asherah.”

Hadley (1987b)⁴⁰

'mr 'mryw 'mr l.'dny hšlm. 't brtk. lyhwh tmn wl'šrth. ybrk. wyšmrk wyhy 'm. 'd[n]y...k

“Amaryaw says: say to my lord: Is it well with you? I bless you by Yahweh of Teman and by his asherah. May he bless you and keep you and be with my lord ...”

Margalit (1990)⁴¹

... brtk. lyhwh. tmn. wl'šrth. ybrk. wyšmrk. wyhy. 'm. 'd[n]y

“I have blessed thee to YHWH-of-Teman and to his 'ŠRH. May he bless and keep thee and may he be with my lo[r]d.”

Keel and Uehlinger (1998)⁴²

Line 1' ['mr

Line 2' 'mryw

Line 3' 'mr l. 'dn[y]

³⁶ Chase 1982: 63.

³⁷ Emerton 1982: 3.

³⁸ Dever 1984: 21-22.

³⁹ Dever (1984: 21) notes that this line division is uncertain.

⁴⁰ Hadley 1987b: 185.

⁴¹ Margalit 1990: 275.

⁴² Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 226.

Line 4' *hšlm. 't*
 Line 5' *brktk.l[y]*
 Line 6' *hwh tmn*
 Line 7' *wl'šrth. yb*
 Line 8' *rk.wyšmrk*
 Line 9' *wyhy 'm. 'd[n]*
 Line 10' *y [...]*
 Line 11' *k [...]*

Line 1' "Thus says Amaryau:
 Line 3' Say to my lord:
 Line 4' Is it well with you?
 Line 5' I bless you (herewith – or: I have blessed you)
 to/before Yahweh of Teman and by his *asherah*.
 May He [i.e., Yahweh] bless (you)⁴³
 and keep you
 Line 9' and be with my lord..."

Smith (2002)⁴⁴

[']mr 'mryw l'dny [X]
brktk lywh [šmrn] wl'šrth

Amaryaw [sa]ys: Say to my lord [X]:
 I bless you to Yahweh [of Samaria,] and to his/its
 asherah.

Inscription B2 (Pithos B)

Keel and Uehlinger (1998)⁴⁵

...[brkt=...] lyhwh htmn wl'šrth
...kl 'šr yš'l m'š hnn ... wntn lh yhw klbbh
 "...by/before Yahweh of Teman⁴⁶ and his asherah...
 Whatever he shall request of anyone,
 may he [i.e., Yahweh] grant it...
 and may Yahweh give him according to his intention..."

⁴³ Keel and Uehlinger (1998: 226, note 75) say that "this should be understood substantially in this way, even though the suffix =*k* is missing".

⁴⁴ Smith 2002: 118.

⁴⁵ Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 227.

⁴⁶ Keel and Uehlinger (1998: 227, note 77) comment on the possibility of the *he* in *htmn* being a dittograph of the *he* on the end of *lyhwh*.

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(Note: Items marked with an asterisk (*) were only available to the present author through secondary sources).

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FIGURES

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