ME-Masseboth-Baetyl-Pagolu-1998  
Augustine Pagolu. 1998. The Religion of the Patriarchs London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark

Patriarchal religion was distinct from both ancient Near Eastern and Israelite religions, and compatible only  
with the patriarchal lifestyle portrayed in Genesis. Since Wellhausen, the study of patriarchal religion has  
been chiefly confined either to the divine names or to the social and legal practices attested in Genesis and  
has neglected the patriarchal cultic practices-altars, pillars, tithes, vows and purifications-frequently attested  
there. In this study, Pagolu investigates such aspects in the light of second-millennium ancient Near Eastern  
and Israelite parallels, concluding that the patriarchal practices bore no comparison to those of the ancient  
Near East or of Israel, in that the patriarchs themselves offered sacrifices, conducted prayer, raised pillars  
and offered worship, all without the aid of an established cult. Thus patriarchal religion was distinct both  
from ancient Near Eastern religions and from the religion of Israel itself. It is peculiar to the world of  
Genesis.

**Chapter 4**  
**SACRED PILLARS**  
***1. Introduction***

**Along with building altars and offering prayers, raising pillars' forms part of the patriarchal pattern of worship, although this is attested only in the Jacob cycle. While Jacob is also known to have built altars in response to theophanies, raising pillars appears to be his special re­sponse to theophanies. However, pillars were strongly proscribed in later Israelite history as symbols of Canaanite religion and inappro­priate in Yahweh's worship. This raises several questions: Why were the pillars approved in the patriarchal narratives while they were con­demned in Israelite worship? What was their nature and function in cult? Who wrote the patriarchal texts? Were they not familiar with the Yahwistic ethos? We have little evidence to answer these questions adequately from the patriarchal stories themselves, and later Israelite history shows a mixed attitude towards cultic pillars, sometimes ap­proving and at others condemning.**

**On the other hand, much has been made of Jacob's erecting a stone at Bethel, and it has been identified with sacred stones and *boa)\** of Aramaic and Greek texts of later times. Beteiyis or *baetvlia* as meteorite stones occur on Roman coins and in classical Greek writings from the first to the fifth centuries B. An unbroken tradition about the deity Bethel occurs in vassal treaties and in theophoric personal names from the early seventh to the late fifth centuries BCE, and again in Greek writings and inscriptions from the first to the third centuries CE. The expression tit-tht4t To which occurs in the Sefire texts from the eighth century BCE has been regarded as a Semitic counterpart to the Greek *baeiyls,* since the Semitic word sounds like its corresponding Greek word. Thus it is generally argued that these *baetyls,* as described in**

**1. Pillar and maggbah are used synonymously in this chapter.**

















