'The Place' as an Appellation of Deity

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ONE of the most interesting appellatives for God in Jewish literature is המקום, מקום, 'The Place,' 'Place.' Other equivalents there are for the divine name which are much more intelligible. So, for example, Heaven, for in all advanced religions, and especially those of Aryan stock, some kind of identification is made between deity and the sky; we may instance Varuna-Ouranos and Dyaus-Zeus. But in המקום we find an earthly designation replacing the divine name, a phenomenon which, so far as is known to the writer, appears only on Semitic soil. Indeed the use of such a term as 'Place' for God is characteristic of the difference between the Indo-European religions and those of Semitic stock; the deities of the latter retain traces of their original character as beings attached to the soil, even into the most spiritual stages of theology.

For the statistics of the use of המקום as a divine name, it may be briefly noted that it occurs twenty times in the Mishna, and about twice as often in the Tosefta; it is found in the Gemara of both Talmuds, but most commonly of all in the Midrashic literature. It is avoided in the Targums, doubtless because of the objection to all sensuous ideas concerning God, but it appears abundantly in the philosophic and Kabbalistic literature of mediæval Judaism, and is still a living term in the Jewish liturgy. Philo uses it thrice, and in dependence upon that great theologian it appears in the early Christian writers, Theophilus and Arnobius.[1]

[1] Philo, *De somn.* i. 11 (Mangey, 629); *De profug.* 14 (M. 556); *Leg. alleg.* i. 14 (M. 52, quoted below). Theophilus, *Ad Autolycum*, ii. 4: *θεός . . . ἐστι τόπος τῶν ὅλων, αὐτὸς ἑαυτοῦ τόπος.* Arnobius, i. 31: (Deus) locus rerum et spatium.

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It is not strange that Jewish theology soon began to attempt explanations of this remarkable name for the spiritual and non-spatial God. "Why," inquires *Bereshith Rabba*, "do they surname the Blessed One and call him Place? Because he is the place of the world, but the world is not his place."[2] Ibn Ezra gives as explanation that "our first doctors called him Place because every place is full of his glory."[3] Most commonly Biblical authority for the usage is found in passages where God is connected with some definite מקום. Thus *Midrash Tehillim* answers the question why God is so called, in this fashion: "Because he is the place of the world, as it is written, 'And God said, Behold, a place is with me' (Ex. 33[21]);"[4] *Pirqe R. Eliezer*, on the ground that "in every place where the righteous stand, he is found with them (Ex. 20[24])."[5] *Bereshith Rabba*, in the passage already cited, has also a Biblical reference to offer: "[Jacob] came to a certain place and passed the night there, because the sun had gone down (Gen. 28[11]). Why do they call his name Place? Because, 'In whatever place I shall record my name,' etc. (Ex. 20[24])." Philo, naturally enough, has similar metaphysical explanations: "God is called Place (τόπος) because he embraces all, but is himself embraced by absolutely nothing, and is the refuge of all, and because he is his own space (χώρα), containing himself and being related to himself alone."[6] Again, "By Place (τόπος) is meant, not a space filled by a body, but, by suggestion, God himself, since he embraces but is not embraced, and because he is the refuge of all."[7] And in another passage, "God is his own place (τόπος)."[8]

The Kabbala rejoices in so mystical a term. It repeats the Philonic definition that God is his own place, and explains Ex. 33[21], "a place is with me," as of that which is "hidden

[2] Ch. 68.

[3] *Commentary on Esther*, i.

[4] *Midrash Tehillim*, quoted by Buxtorf, *Lex. s.v.*

[5] Ch. 35.

[6] *De somn.* i. 11.

[7] *De profug.* 14.

[8] *Leg. alleg.* i. 14 (Mangey, 52). Philo also uses οἶκος 'house' in the same way: "God is an abode [*i.e.* Heb. משכן], incorporeal space holding incorporeal ideas" (*De cherub.* 14, M. 148).

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and concealed and altogether unknowable."[9] In a word, the Kabbala and Maimonides only carry to the extreme of mysticism or abstract speculation the elder Jewish interpretation. The liturgy uses the term quite in the Rabbinic manner, of course without explanation.

Such a metaphysical exegesis, however, has not in general satisfied modern scholarship, although there are still those who adhere to it, as for example the late Dr. Jastrow, who in his *Lexicon s.v.* makes the word equal 'existence, substance,' and therefore 'the Existence, the Lord.' Dr. Ginzberg, in the *Jewish Encyclopædia*, iii. 460, repeats the traditional interpretation. Some modern writers avoid any explanation, as Weber in his *Jüdische Theologie*, and Bousset, *Religion des Judentums*. It may, therefore, not be amiss to summarize the attempts at a more probable explanation made by some modern scholars, inasmuch as their studies are contained in a literature not generally accessible. Furthermore, the present writer hopes to add to the explanation a factor which has so far been ignored.

In consequence of the Philonic acquaintance with the term and with its Rabbinic exegesis, it was natural to refer the use of 'Place' to Hellenistic speculation. This view was advanced by Gfrörer, who was followed by Dähne, Siegfried, and Freudenthal in their studies of Hellenism.[10] But Geiger has disproved this theory by showing that with the Alexandrians the use of Place is isolated, and that Philo employs it only with symbolical intent; while, on the other hand, in the Jewish literature המקום is a usual and popular name for God. Geiger's own explanation is that המקום is nothing else than a sensuous appellation, used with the intention of avoiding the name of God but without philosophical notion.[11] However, Geiger's negation is of much more value than his affirmation; he gives no reason why

[9] *Sohar*, i. 147 b; ii. 207 a.

[10] Gfrörer, *Jahrhundert des Heils*, p. 290; Dähne, *Die jüdisch-alexandrinische Religionsphilosophie*, pp. 72, 282; Siegfried, *Philo*, pp. 202, 204; Freudenthal, *Hellenistische Studien*, p. 72.

[11] Geiger, *Jüdische Zeitschrift*, xi. 228; *Nachgelassene Schriften* (Breslau, 1885), iv. 424.

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the spiritualizing Jewish theology should have used this sensuous term; its origin then was purely wilful.

The true direction for the understanding of the term has, to the writer's mind, been given by Schürer in his essay, *Der Begriff des Himmelreiches aus jüdischen Quellen erläutert.*[12] Confining his studies to the passages in Philo and the Mishna, he comes to the conclusion that "the dwelling of God is equivalent to God himself, and so gradually became an appellative for God." A proof of his theory is found by Schürer in the comparison of Berachoth, iv. 5–6 and v. 1. In the former passage it is required that in prayer the face, or, if this is impossible, the thoughts, should be directed to the most holy House (בית קדש הקדשים); in the second it is asserted that the early Chasidim were accustomed for an hour before prayer, to wait, in order that they might direct their mind אל המקום 'to the place,' which latter phrase must be equivalent to 'toward God.' The equation of the two passages then makes the Temple and God practically identical terms. A criticism of the proof thus claimed will be given immediately below; it is to be noticed, however, that Schürer does not explain how this equation arose historically.

Still more recently an entirely fresh study of the spatial designations for God as found in the Jewish literature has been made by E. Landau, *Die dem Raume entnommenen Synonyma für Gott in der neu-hebräischen Litteratur.*[13] This thesis contains an exhaustive treatment of the Jewish material with a large apparatus of references, and also offers parallels for the subject under discussion from all quarters of religion.[14] Landau admits that Schürer's explanation is not without probability, but he finds it unsatisfactory because Schürer cannot show that the Temple is called המקום anywhere in the Talmud. Furthermore, he denies the validity

[12] *Jahrbücher für protestantische Theologie*, 1876, p. 166, and especially pp. 168 ff.

[13] *Inaugural-Dissertation*, Zürich, 1888, p. 30.

[14] The writer would express his debt to Schürer and Landau, as also to Buxtorf, for the history of the question and for most of the references to Jewish sources.

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of the equation between the two passages in Berachoth, for in one the Temple is meant, in the other המקום means God, as Schürer himself admits, so that the identity of the Temple and God does not appear. In this criticism Landau is certainly right.[15]

Landau, having found all previous hypotheses unsatisfactory, proceeds to give an original explanation drawn from that welcome resource of those who would uncover the mysteries of Judaism, namely, Parseeism. He shows that a Zoroastrian designation for deity is "the Space." He refers to certain Pahlavi texts, which are possibly of great antiquity, in which "the Beneficial Space" is equivalent to deity, and also quotes the Syrian Damascius to like effect, that as for "the Magians and the whole Aryan race, some call the Intelligible All and Unity, Place (*τόπον*), and some call it Time."[16] Accordingly he concludes that "there is great probability that the Rabbinic המקום thence took its origin as appellation for God." Landau further thinks that he can discover the actual historical connection between the Parsee and the Jewish theologumenon. Simon b. Shetach, who flourished in the reign of Alexander Jannæus, is known to have had intercourse with Persian magnates who came on an embassy to the Jewish court;[17] and Landau thinks that, as Simon was something of a metaphysician, it is therefore reasonable to conclude that he became the medium of the introduction of this foreign idea into Judaism.[18]

[15] Landau's other objection, that the use of המקום as a divine appellative appears 170 years before the age of the *Mishna*, having been used by Simon b. Shetach (*Taan.* iii. 8), and hence cannot have arisen from those passages, amounts to nothing, as Schürer makes no such claim.

[16] For the Pahlavi texts, see, for example, *Vendîdad*, xix. 122 (*Sacred Books of the East*, iv. 221); *Sîrôza*, i. 30 (*SBE*, xxiii. 12). There is considerable variation in the translations of the term in question; see West, *SBE*, xviii. 70. Landau refers especially to remarks by Spiegel in his *Avesta*, iii. p. xxxix; *Eranische Alterthumskunde*, ii. 13; *Die arische Periode*, 132. The passage in Damascius is found in *De primis principiis*, ed. Kopp, p. 382.

[17] *Ber. Rab.* 91; *Midrash Qoheleth*, 7. 11, etc.

[18] His support for this is Simon's use of the expression הידע מחשבות for God, but certainly this is no peculiar notion; cf. Amos 4[13].

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But the same objection holds good against this hypothesis of Landau's as against that which makes המקום a Hellenistic philosophumenon; it does not explain how this term became part of the popular religious vernacular of Judaism. It is also most doubtful whether unphilosophic Palestinian Judaism attempted to express the idea of space and of spatial infinity in this divine designation; certainly in the Rabbinic explanations המקום 'place' is not interpreted as 'space.' The metaphysical explanation would seem to have been due to Philo or his school.

There remains the possibility, which has not as yet been examined in this connection, that המקום is a conception native to Hebrew soil. This I think can be shown to be true, and the proof establishes Schürer's theory that המקום takes its theological connotation from an identification of the deity with his place of worship, although not originally with the Temple at Jerusalem. The following argument will attempt to show that the basis of this connection lies in the Old Testament and in primitive Semitism.

In the first place it is to be noted that המקום is a primitive religious term; it means 'the place of the deity.' In this sense the word is notably used in Gen. 28^{11} (cf. v.^{19}), "Jacob came to the place," which place was none other than Bethel, the House of God since immemorial times and the chief sanctuary of the Northern Kingdom. This passage, it should be observed, belongs to the Elohist. The same sacred connotation is found in Ex. 20^{24}, "In every place (read כל מקום) where I record my name," etc. In this sense is to be understood the phrase, "the place of Shechem," Gen. 12^{6}, *i.e.* "the sanctuary at Shechem." In Jer. 7^{12}, YHWH speaks of "my place which was in Shiloh." The word is also used absolutely of heathen shrines, *e.g.* Dt. 12^{2}, 2 Ch. 33^{19}. It appears in various collocations with reference to the Temple at Jerusalem, which is "the place which YHWH your God will choose" (Dt. 12^{5}); "the place of the Name of YHWH Ṣebaoth, Mount Zion" (Is. 18^{7}); "his holy place" (Ezr. 9^{8}), etc. This technical sense of המקום is also probably to be understood, with many modern commen-

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tators, in 2 Ki. 5[11].[19] Here Naaman thinks that Elisha should have waved his hand, not "over the spot of the disease," as in the traditional interpretation, but "towards the place," *i.e.* the local sanctuary of Elisha's particular deity.

This technical use of מקום is maintained into Hellenistic times; *ὁ τόπος* is so used of the Temple in 3 Macc. 1[9], a reference which in part meets an objection of Landau's to Schürer's theory. The same use of the term is found outside of Israel. Punic coins bear the city-name מקום שמש,[20] which is the equivalent of the Biblical Beth-shemesh. There are also traces of the same use in Arabic. Wellhausen quotes from Aghâni, xv. 131, 30, an oath to the effect: "May I be slain at the Maqâm and the Kaaba and the Bait al-Nâr and by the grave, the grave of Abu Righâl."[21] This *maqâm* may be in general the holy *place* at Mecca; or it may be identified with an object within the Haram of that city which capitally illustrates our point. This is the *Maqâm* Ibrâhîm, which is a stone partly built over and partly protruding, the exposed portion being now used as a preaching-stand. According to Hurgronje this is evidently an ancient holy stone which has come down from heathen times; by the distortion of legend it has become associated with Abraham, and the word is now understood to mean a stand for the Imam.[22] But the stone seems to have gained the name *maqâm* from antique usage for the *place where* of deity, indicating that *maqâm* was once used as equal to *beth-el*. Indeed, it might be questioned whether by "the place" to which Jacob came (Gen. 28[11]), the holy stone was not meant rather than its area. The same word has survived in Islam in other localities. Rosen mentions two places whose names have this component, close by Shechem.[23] One of these is the

[19] See Kamphausen and Kittel *ad loc.*; also Kautzsch-Socin, *Genesis*[2], p. 62; Gunkel on Gen. 12[6]. Stade, in *SBOT*, regards the passage as an interpolation.

[20] Lidzbarski, *Handbuch der nordsem. Epigraphik*, i. 316.

[21] *Skizzen*, iii. p. 163.

[22] Hurgronje, *Mekka*, i. p. 11. The Moslems have established three other *maqâms*, and the four are used as pulpits for the four orthodox rites.

[23] Rosen, *ZDMG*, xiv. p. 635.

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Maqâm of the Prophets, the Sons of Jacob; the other the *Maqâm rijâl al-ʿamûd*, the Place of the Men of the Pillar. The common tradition is that here forty Israelite prophets were buried, but a Samaritan informant told Rosen of another tradition, that here Jacob buried the idols his family had brought from Mesopotamia. This may well be an ancient legend, and "the pillar" may be the tradition of an ancient *maṣṣeba*. These two places are now built over, and have become Moslem chapels.

For the identification of the sacred thing with the deity, due originally to the fetish stage of religion and later preserved as a reverent euphemism, we have many examples in the Old Testament. Such is the most natural explanation of Rock and Stone as divine appellatives;[24] a later spirituality knew how to invest these crass terms with spiritual significance. Most noteworthy is the transfer of the term *beth-el* to God himself. Following a suggestion of Peiser's, a name with this divine component, namely Bethel-sharesar, 'Bethel-protect-the-king,' should be read in Zech. 7[2], while several extra-Hebraic references prove the existence of a divine appellative *Bethel* upon Semitic soil.[25] Now the transfer of *beth-el* to deity is exactly parallel to the use of המקום as a divine name. It is true the actual transfer cannot be found in the Old Testament, but we can mark the nature of the process, for in the passage 2 Ki. 5[11], the waving of the hand toward the sanctuary is equivalent to the same gesture made toward the deity.

We possess then in the later theological use of המקום a purely Semitic phenomenon.[26] The Jewish doctors are jus-

[24] Cf. Beth-sur; perhaps Eben-ezer. That צור was a common divine appellative is shown by Dt. 32[31]. For the literature of the subject, see Hastings's *D.B.*, *s.v.* "Rock"; *Enc. Bib.* iii. 3328, iv. 5442.

[25] The references are collected in *KAT*[3], pp. 437 f., and Hilprecht and Clay, *Bab. Exp. Univ. Penn.* Series A, vol. x. p. 70.

[26] Landau would also find evidence of this use of *maqâm* in Arabic literature, but his references are not satisfactory. "The place of God," Koran, Sur. lv. l. 46, is hardly pertinent. I cannot verify the meaning of a quotation he gives very curtly from the poet Lebîd (ed. al-Châlidî, Vienna, 1880, p. 12), as he gives no context, and the verse is not to be found in Brockelmann's edition, the only text I have at hand.

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tified in their interpretations of this usage, so far at least as they bring it into connection with the references to מקום 'sanctuary,' in Gen. 28[11] and Ex. 20[24]. It may be supposed that the reason why מקום came to be preferred in the later theology rather than Rock or Stone or Bethel was its less sensuous and more general import. 'God's holy place' did not mean necessarily that God was localized there; the phrase could be understood in its general sense as the place of his sanctuary (Is. 60[13]), or the place where he was worshipped.

Still it may seem strange that the later spiritualizing religion should have preserved this crude term with its physical notion, in connection with the transcendent and non-spatial God. The rabbis themselves seem to have struggled against the incongruity, in their forced metaphysical explanation that God was the place of everything. But the incongruity may be explained through the observation of another fact. With the elevation of deity to heaven and the heaven of heavens, came also the assumption to the same heights, of his 'place.' The holy place was now in heaven, so that this term of primitive religion could still be used, but with reference to the heavenly place or temple of God. So מקום is frequently used in the Old Testament of God's temple or palace in heaven. Thus in Mi. 1[3], YHWH is said to "come out of his place;" cf. Hos. 5[15], Is. 26[21]. Now מקום in such passages may be understood as referring to heaven merely as the place where God is, as is meant, for instance, in 1 Ki. 8[30], "the place of thy abode." However, God's residence has been exalted into the heavens, so that, to the spiritual mind, his temple (היכל) is now found there; cf. Ps. 18[7], 11[4], 29[9], Hab. 2[20], especially Mi. 1[2], in connection with v.[3] cited above.[27] Hence we may suppose that some of the ancient religious meaning of מקום was preserved by the word when it gained a celestial connotation; parallel to the antique local deity and his earthly place is the heavenly God with his

[27] The same thought is present in the euphemistic rendering of the Greek for Ex. 24[10]: "They saw the place where the God of Israel stood," and for v.[11]: "They appeared in the place of God."

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celestial sanctuary-place whither the eyes and hearts of the faithful are now directed. Finally, we may compare with this identification of the heavenly place of God with God himself, the similar frequent identification of heaven with God in the later Judaism. The heavenly מקום and השמים are practically identical in their theological import. The preceding argument then would carry the analysis of these two terms back into the domain of primitive religion, contrary to Schürer, who stops with the psychological explanation that heaven came to be used for God because the worshipper's hands or prayers could be spoken of as directed toward either indifferently; and it finds no reason to assume, with Landau,[28] foreign factors as controlling influences.

By way of postscript, notice may here be taken of מעון, which appears to have experienced much the same theological treatment as מקום. In general, reference may be made to Landau, who has collected the data for the usage of this term.[29] In the case of this word, however, the ambiguity in its Rabbinic use both for God and for his dwelling-place in heaven[30] is based upon the double sense which it already had in the Old Testament. מעון has properly the meaning of lair or haunt, as of wild beasts, and then either dwelling-place or place of refuge. Hence in the language of religion it is used in the former sense of the sanctuary of God, thus the Temple is "his dwelling-place" (2 Ch. 36[15]);[31] then like מקום and היכל it was transferred to the heavenly abode, *e.g.* Dt. 26[15]; and in the sense of 'place of refuge' it was applied to God himself, *e.g.* Ps. 90[1], 71[3], and in the feminine מעונה, Dt. 33[27]. The two meanings of the word are quite distinct in the Old Testament, but the Jewish doctors have confused them, explaining that by the title מעון it is meant that God is the dwelling-place of the world.[32] The development of the theological connotation of מעון is therefore different from that of מקום.

[28] *Op. cit.* pp. 21, 41. [29] *Ibid.* p. 45.

[30] Later, specifically, 'the fifth heaven.'

[31] The place-name Maon and the same component in Beth-baal-meon, probably indicate a general ancient use of this term for sanctuary.

[32] *Ber. Rabba*, 68.

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