ASHTORETH AND HER INFLUENCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

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THE average casual reader of the English Old Testament gains a somewhat vague impression that a good deal is said in it, at one time or another, about Ashtoreth; but when we take the passages in which her name occurs and put them side by side, the mentions of her are by no means numerous, and the impression of her character which they give is vague and shadowy in the extreme.

In Judges ii. 13 we read, "They forsook Yahwe, and served Baal and Ashtaroth." Judges x. 6 gives a slightly more definite statement: "The children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of Yahwe, and served the Baalim and the Ashtaroth, and the gods of

1 It has been necessary in the following pages to refer several times to the modern critical theories of the origin of the Pentateuch and Old Testament Historical Books. These theories are still sub judice. The critical analysis of the Old Testament is of too recent origin for its theories to have been proved or disproved to the satisfaction of all scholars. The writer does not present himself as a champion of those theories. It has been his duty to indicate, according to views now extant, what influence Ashtoreth may have exerted upon Israel. Many of the lines of influence indicated are necessarily only tentatively suggested. When further investigation and further discovery have shown the truth or falsity of theories now held by scholars, these suggestions will be either confirmed or consigned to oblivion. The part of scholarship, as of faith, is to work and wait, to seek for fact, but not to dogmatize.
Aram and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of
the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines.” 1 Kings
xi. 5 tells us that “Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the
Zidonians, and after Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites.”
Again, in 2 Kings xxiii. 13 we read, “And the high places that were
before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mount of cor-
ruption, which Solomon king of Israel built for Ashtoreth, the abom-
ination of the Zidonians.” A few other passages mention Ashtoreth
by name, but none are more explicit or throw more light upon her
character than those just quoted.

There are in the prophets a few possible references to Ashtoreth,
but these we could not identify as such had we no extra-Bibical
sources of information with reference to the goddess. One of these is
in Jer. vii. 18, where we read, “The children gather wood, and the
fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough to make cakes
for the queen of heaven.” Compare also Jer. xliv. 17–19, 25, where
the same expression, “queen of heaven,” occurs.

It is true that Stade, in two articles in the Zeitschrift für Alltesta-
mentliche Wissenschaft for 1886, argues, with the accustomed German
learning and exhaustiveness, that the “queen of heaven” in these
passages is not Ashtoreth, but a synonym for the “host of heaven”;
but Schrader has combated this view in two equally exhaustive
articles, published, the one in the Sitzungsberichte of the Berlin Academy
for 1886, and the other in the Zeitschrift für Assyriologie for
1888. It seems to me that in this discussion Schrader has the best
of the argument, and, following him, I identify the “queen of heaven”
with Ashtoreth. But Jeremiah’s references are by themselves very
vague, and as Schrader’s articles abundantly demonstrate, we could
not identify his allusion at all, could we not draw upon Assyrian
sources for additional information.

Ezekiel viii. 14 gives us the well-known mention of Tammuz, but
without extra-Bibical sources of information we should have no idea
that Tammuz was at all connected with Ashtoreth. I am inclined,
moreover, to see in the second Isaiah’s reference to those “who eat
swine’s flesh,” Isa. lxv. 4, and to those “who offer swine’s blood,” Isa.
lxvi. 3, allusions to the Ashtoreth cult, inasmuch as we learn from
Lucian and Johannes Lydus that in Phoenicia and Cyprus swine were
sacred to Ashtoreth.

All that these Biblical references taken by themselves tell us, is
that Ashtoreth was a goddess of the Zidonians; that certain Israelites worshipped her as early as the period of the Judges; that Solomon built a shrine to her near Jerusalem, which remained till the days of Josiah; that her worship lingered down to the time of Ezekiel, and possibly to that of Isa. lxv. and lxvi., which are probably post-exilian; that she was known to them as "queen of heaven"; that the wailing for Tammuz was practised at Jerusalem; and that connected with the whole cult there was something from which the pure morality of Israel's prophets and prophetic historians recoiled, and which forced them to regard Ashtoreth as "the abomination of the Zidonians." One other fact we may add as made probable by the Biblical evidence, viz. the union of the worship of Ashtoreth with that of Baal. In Judges ii. 13, x. 6; 1 Sam. vii. 4, etc. the two cults are classed together.

In his Religion of the Semites, Additional Note H., W. Robertson Smith suggests that because in Deut. vii. 13 and xxviii. 4 and 18, בקר is used for lambs, and because there is evidence in Cyprus and North Africa that sheep were sacred to this goddess, Ashtoreth may originally have been a sheep goddess. While these Deuteronomistic references are very helpful in a study of the etymology of the word Ashtoreth, yet when the facts regarding this goddess are collected from the whole Semitic field, the supposition that she was originally a sheep goddess entirely breaks down.

It is time, however, that we turned to other parts of the Semitic area to inquire into the extent of the diffusion of the cult which Ashtoreth represents. As is well known, she was worshipped in Babylonia and Assyria under the name of Ishtar. The oldest traces of her worship as to form are at Erech, and as to date at Agade. At Erech she was a polyandrous vixen of a goddess, whose husbands, if they were not at the same time the recipients of her conjugal affection, followed each other with greater rapidity than the greatest facility for divorce would make possible. She was there the daughter of Anu.2 At Agade she was worshipped under the name Malkatu, or queen, and was regarded as the wife at once of Anu and Shamash.3 She was in Babylonia identified with the planet Dilbad, or Venus, and an inscription in III R. 53 tells us that "The star Dilbad at the rising of the sun is the Ishtar of Agade, and at the setting of the sun the Ishtar

2 See the Izdubar Epic, e.g. in Smith's Chaldean Genesis, ed. 1876, p. 221.
3 See hymn in A. S. K. T. 122 sq.
of Erech; at the rising of the sun, Dilbad is the Ishtar of the stars, and at the setting of the sun the queen of the gods.” At Erech and Babylon she was known in ancient times by the name Nana; and at Babylon in later times was usually called Zarpanit, and considered the wife of Bil-Marduk. Among the Suti, on the east of Babylonia, there was an Ishtar cult, as we learn from III R. 66, where, among various other images of Ishtar, there is one called the Ishtar of the lions. In Assyria there were three principal seats of the worship of the goddess: the cities Asshur, Nineveh, and Arbela. Of the worship at Asshur we know little, and that little is mostly gathered from the inscription of Tiglath-Pileser I., whose capital was Asshur. Of the worship at Nineveh we have the most abundant information, though it is nevertheless quite fragmentary. Here the goddess was regarded as the wife of Asshur, who was also called Bil, while the goddess herself was sometimes called Bilit. Sin, the moon-god, was her father, while Shamash, the sun-god, was her brother. It was of the Ishtar of Nineveh that the poem of “Ishtar’s Descent” to the lower world was written, as the mythological references in that poem abundantly prove. So far as we are able to trace the characters of the Ishtars hitherto described they were all goddesses of love; but the goddess worshipped at Arbela was a goddess of war. This development of her character was, however, late. We find no mention of Ishtar of Arbela before the days of Sennacherib, and she does not become really prominent till the reign of Esarhaddon. This Ishtar is called the daughter of Assur, and seems to have been really the outcome of the warlike tendencies of the Assyrian national character.

For Phoenicia the sources of our information are the Phoenician inscriptions, Philo of Byblos, Lucian, Sozomen, Zosimus, Porphyry, and Pausanias. From these we learn that Ashtoreth, or Ashtart, was worshipped at Tyre, at Sidon, at Gebal, at Aphaca, and at Laodicea; in all of which places she was a goddess of love. At Sidon the inscription of Eshmunazer reveals a curious connection between her and Baal, calling her Ashtoreth בִּשְׂמֹא (name of Baal). The goddess thus spoken of apparently shared the temple of Baal, indicating that here, as in Palestine, the worship of Ashtoreth and of Baal were connected.

From Phoenician inscriptions, Tacitus, and Johannes Lydus we have descriptions of the worship of Ashtoreth at Paphos and Kiti in the island of Cyprus, while the Phoenician inscriptions and Aelian
give us evidence of her worship in Malta and Sicily. In North Africa, as we learn from the inscriptions, she was worshipped under the name of Tanith, and G. Hoffmann and W. Robertson Smith are inclined to identify her also with Dido. One of the most common titles of Tanith on the votive cippi which are so abundant from North Africa is בֶּלֶת (face of Baal). This combined with the fact that many of these cippi are addressed to her and Baal conjointly, proves that there existed here the same connection between the goddess and Baal which we have already noticed in Phoenicia and Palestine.

In South Arabia we find this deity, as revealed in the Sabaean inscriptions, worshipped as a god rather than a goddess, under the name Athtar. He is, however, connected with the water supply in one inscription, and seems to have been a god of fertility. And lastly, when we combine evidence collected from DeVogüe’s Nabataean Inscriptions, from Herodotus, iii. 8, from Porphyry, de abstinentia, ii. 56, from Efrem Syrus, ii. 457–459, from Epiphanius, Panarion, li., from Jerome’s vita Hilarionis, c. 25, from Isaac of Antioch, p. 244, the Koran, liii. 19, Ibn Hisham, p. 93, 94, Ibn el-Kalbi, and Ibn Kutaiba, p. 60, with the evidence gathered from other parts of the Semitic field, there is a very great probability that the Arabian goddesses Al Lat and Al Uzza were originally one, that that one goddess’s name was originally Athtar, and that in the progress of time first Al Lat and then Al Uzza, both mere epithets, displaced the old name.4 It is, at all events, clear that Al Lat and Al Uzza were both goddesses of love, identical in character with Ashtoreth. Thus while it would lead us too far beyond the limits of the present paper to follow either the details of this worship or the proofs of its existence among the different Semitic nationalities, we may note that a deity identical in name or in character or in both with Ashtoreth is found among all the Semitic nations except the Ethiopians, and that our lack of knowledge of such a deity among them may be due solely to the paucity of non-Christian Ethiopic literary remains.5

The fact that this cult was so widely diffused among the Semitic peoples naturally suggests the inquiry as to whether it was not really

4 See Smith’s Kinship in Arabia, p. 295, and my forthcoming Ishtar Cult, § 15.
5 For a collection and classification of the material referring to this cult, with discussions of its history in the various countries, its origin, and the etymology of the word Ashtoreth, see my Semitic Ishtar Cult, to appear in the first number of the Harvard Semitica.
native in Palestine. In answer to this question there are a few facts which afford a little light. In Gen. xiv. 5 we have a town mentioned the name of which is Ashteroth-karnaim; in Josh. xiii. 31 there is mention of a town called Ashtaroth; on the Moabite stone the name Ashtar occurs in the compound Ashtar-Chemosh, showing a consider-
able popularity for the name in the same general region in the ninth century B.C. Herodotus (i. 105) describes an ancient temple of the celestial Aphrodite at Askelon, which must have been a shrine of Ashtoreth, possibly the very shrine in which the Philistines hung Saul's armor after the fateful day of Gilboa (1 Sam.xxxi. 10). There would seem, then, if these facts may be considered as pointers towards the truth if not as proofs, to be a strong probability that Ashtoreth was an old deity in Palestine; a deity which, if not aboriginal, dates from the earliest Semitic occupation. At least this would seem to be the most natural origin for these Ashtoreth towns and shrines. This supposition receives confirmation from the Deuteronomistic use of Ash-
taroth for lambs, referred to above. That they should use such a word in such a sense—a sense which seems to be etymologically con-
ected with the name of the deity—indicates that, if not among the Hebrews themselves, at least among the Canaanites, whose language the Hebrews adopted, this goddess was a native. The Israelitish his-
torians speak of her, indeed, as the "goddess of the Zidonians," and "the abomination of the Zidonians," for which the pre-eminence of the Phoenicians and the alliances of David, Solomon, Omri, and Ahab with that people, by means of which the Phoenician zeal for Ashto-
reth worship would impress the Israelitish mind, would sufficiently account; while, on the other hand, it would be hard to explain how in the chaotic and rustic period of the Judges a worship wholly Phoenician, and not native Canaanitish as well, could have penetrated Israel as Ashtoreth worship seems to have done.

We now come to the inquiry, Was there immorality connected with this worship? The answer will be the more clear and decisive if we glance first at other countries than Palestine.

From cuneiform sources the only evidence of any obscene features in this or any other cult is found in the Izdubar Epic. Indeed, the only passages in the known Assyrian literature which can really be called obscene are there. I refer to those passages which describe how Shamkhat and Kharimtu—apparently two female emissaries of Ishtar—overcome the scruples of Eabani to go to Erech, and in
which Ishtar offers herself to Izdubar as a wife, and he refuses her. These passages, especially the former, are in some details disgustingly obscene—indeed some of the obscenities are spared the English reader, being still locked up in the Assyrian,—and represent a goddess, which, measured by our standards, would be rather a demon of impurity. But one must remember in reading it that it is a picture of very antique society, and apparently a society in which anything corresponding to our ideas of marriage and sexual purity had never arisen. The goddess, therefore, and her creatures are probably but the reflection in religious thought of the position and character of woman in the age in which the epic originated.

The only other trace of obscene rites connected with Ishtar come from the testimony of foreign sources. The passage in Herodotus, i. 199, in which he says, “Every native woman is obliged once in her life to sit in the temple of Aphrodite and have intercourse with some stranger,” is too well known to need quotation here. Strabo bears witness to the same custom; in Book xvi. i. 20 he says, “All Babylonian women have a custom, in accordance with some oracle, of going to some temple of Aphrodite with a numerous retinue and throng to have intercourse with some stranger.”

The authority of Herodotus on Assyrian and Babylonian matters, as is shown by a comparison of many of his statements with those of the Assyrian inscriptions, is open to grave suspicion. And inasmuch as the cuneiform sources later than the very antique epic already referred to do not give the slightest hint of such a custom there, it has justly been urged that his authority here does not merit our belief. But in Strabo we have another, and as far as language and description go an apparently independent witness of the same thing, though it is conceivable that Strabo borrowed his statement from Herodotus. If so, he did his cribbing skilfully. We have, however, another witness in the apocryphal letter of Jeremiah, vs. 42, 43. Jeremiah is represented as warning the Israelites against Babylonian gods and customs, and says, “The women also with cords about them sitting in the ways, burn bran as incense; but if any one of them drawn by one of the passers-by lies with him, she reproaches her neighbor that she was not thought as worthy as herself, nor her cord broken.” When this is compared with the description of details in Herodotus, which for brevity I omitted, it is evidently an allusion to the same custom. This letter of course is very late, and may be imagined along with
Strabo's reference to be but an echo of Herodotus; but this I find it difficult to believe. With three witnesses which it is not easy to reduce to one, with the fact in mind that customs sanctioned by the authority of religion are of all customs the hardest to uproot, and with the knowledge that at Erech in very early times a society existed in which sexual purity was not regarded, and in which its opposite was deified in Ishtar, it seems easier to suppose that these old customs of society nurtured by religious sanction survived down to a very late date, than to suppose that our three witnesses are in reality but versions of one, and he either a blunderer or a liar.

From Phoenicia also we have traces of obscene rites at Byblos. Our authority in this case is Lucian's de Syria Dea, § 6. He is there, as will be remembered, describing the feast of Adonis as celebrated at Byblos, and says, "But when they have bewailed and lamented, first they perform funeral rites to Adonis as if he were dead, but afterwards, upon another day, they say he lives and carry him in procession out of doors, and they shave their heads, as the Egyptians do when Apis dies. But such women as do not wish to be shaven pay the following penalty: on a certain day they stand for prostitution at the proper time, and the market is open to strangers only, and the pay goes as a sacrifice to Aphrodite."

Of obscene rites in connection with this cult in Cyprus we have a glimpse from a Phoenician inscription, C I S, No. 86, where provision is made for a class of men called בִּינֶלָ, which we translate, following Deut. xxiii. 18, 19, male prostitutes. These persons were evidently supported at this temple at Kiti as a regular portion of the temple retinue. Of the existence of similar rites in North Africa in connection with Tanith, Augustine is thought to give evidence in de civitatis Dei, ii. 4. He says, "We ourselves went once in our youth to view these spectacles and their sacrilegious sports. We saw those rapt with fury, and we heard the pipers and were greatly pleased with the filthy sports which they acted before gods and goddesses, before the celestial virgin and Berecynthia, the mother of all; before whose litter, on the day of her purification, such things were publicly acted by the beastly stage-players as, I will not say the mother of the gods, but the mother of no senator or honorable man, nay nor the mother of the actors themselves ought to hear. Natural modesty controls us somewhat towards our parents, nor is vice itself able to abolish this. Nevertheless such foulness of obscene speeches and actions as the players would
be ashamed when rehearsing to act at home before their own mothers, they acted publicly in the presence of the mother of the gods in sight and hearing of a very great multitude of both sexes.”

Efrem Syrus, moreover, gives us reason to think that among the Arabians similar obscene rites were practised to the goddess who represented Ashtoreth. In Vol. ii. p. 457, he says, “A pure man or woman conquers in the contest her who is impure, whom they reckon among the seven stars. It is the star goddess who led astray (?) her own worshippers, the Ishmaelites, and into our lands is she come whom the sons of Hagar adore.” Again, ibid, p. 459, he says, “The dwellings of the Hebrews and the tents of the house of Hagar declare that will is ordinance and law. Where are the wild feasts and the tinkling bells and the dice playing and the elaborate babblings of the Chaldeans? Who did away with the feast of the raging idol, on whose festal days women prostituted themselves? Did then some star arise upon those virgins, that forthwith they vowed their virginity to prostitution?” What Efrem here indicates is confirmed by other considerations, among which is the fact that Arabian writers compare women to antelopes,6 which animal is sacred to the Arabian counterpart of Ashtoreth.

Of such obscene rites in the Ashtoreth cult as practised by the Hebrews, the Old Testament affords only indirect indications. If we connect the statement in 1 Kings xvi. 31, 32, of the introduction by Ahab into Israel of Phoenician worship with the statement in 1 Kings xxii. 38 (“Now the harlots washed themselves there”), we might suppose we had a case in point, and so it is often taken. While it seems very probable that such is the case, the connection is not sufficiently close to enable one to assert it. The use of הָרִית for harlot in Gen. xxxviii. 21, 22; Deut. xxiii. 18, etc., the universal recoil of Israel’s moralists from the cult of Ashtoreth, and the wide-spread immoralities found in her worship elsewhere, make it morally certain that the same or practices similar to those which we have noticed in other countries were current in Palestine. This conclusion we shall find at a later point receives confirmation.

We have noticed above the connection of Ashtoreth with Baal, and before proceeding to inquire into the influence of the Ashtoreth cult in Israel we must determine what the Ashera was, and what connection, if any, it had with Ashtoreth on the one hand and Baal on the other.

6 See Smith’s Kinship in Arabia, p. 195.
Sayce, in an article in the *Contemporary Review* for 1883, argued that Ashera was a goddess similar in character to Ashtoreth, and that one of these goddesses received the homage of southern and the other of northern Canaan. There is some evidence — much more than there was in 1883 — of the existence in ancient Syria of a goddess Ashera. In the tablets discovered at Tell-el-Amarna, as published by Winckler in his *Königliche Museum zu Berlin — Mittheilungen aus dem Orientalischen Sammlungen*, there is found a name Arad-a-si-ir-ta or Arad-a-si-ir-ti, which is the equivalent of Ebed-Asherā. I have noticed this name some twenty-five times in these tablets, always except once in the letters of a certain Bir-Adda, governor of the Syrian town of Dula, to his royal master the king of Egypt. Once (No. 97) Ebed-Asherā himself writes to the king. The name is clearly theophorous; but that all doubt on this point may be removed it occurs twice (Winckler, No. 73, l. 8 and No. 97, l. 2), written with the divine determinative ilu before a-si-ir-ti (once spelled as-ra-ti), the second element of the name. Thus we have conclusive proof that that element is the name of a goddess. These letters are Syrian, and date from or before the fifteenth century B.C. Moreover, in a tablet of this series acquired by the Boulaq Museum (see Sayce's transliteration, *PSBA*, Vol. xi. p. 405) this Ebed-Asherā is called a Canaanite. These facts point clearly to the existence of Ashera as a goddess in Syria in very early times. So far from dividing the honors of Syrian worship with Ash-toreth there are but two possible traces of Ashera as a goddess in the Old Testament. These are in Judges iii. 7, where "they served the Baalim and the Asherōth," and 1 Kings xv. 13, where the queen mother of Asa "had made an abominable image for Ashera." These references may be taken as proof that down to Asa's time Ashera was a goddess. If so, the way in which she is spoken of, especially in Judges, would indicate that in character she was kindred to Ashōreth. There is also from Cyprus evidence of a goddess Ashera. In the *ZDMG*, Vol. xxxv., Schroeder published a Phoenician inscription from Kiti in which an object is dedicated לִיהָבְתִי נְתַמְתָה אֲשֶרֶת ("to my lady, the mother Ashera").

The question arises, What became of the worship of this goddess in later times if it existed extensively in Syria in pre-Israelitish days? It must be said that we do not know much of its existence — nothing of an extensive existence — in pre-Israelitish days, and if it did then

7 [Cf. Stade, *ZAT*, 1. 344 f.]
extensively exist, it is possible that in later times the more popular and perhaps somewhat kindred worship of Ashtoreth supplanted or absorbed it. Be this as it may, Ashera became in the Old Testament, in most cases, the name of something else than a goddess.

This something was a sort of pole, which may, perhaps, as W. Robertson Smith suggests, be compared in form to a May-pole. This may be gathered from the following facts: 1. It was made of wood (Ex. xxxiv. 13; Deut. vii. 5, xvi. 21, etc). 2. It was planted (אר), Deut. xvi. 21. This word אִיר is used not only for planting a tree, but also for fixing a nail, driving a tent-pin, and then for pitching a tent. That it was used in connection with the Ashera in the latter sense is shown by Micah v. 13, where the prophet represents Yahwe as saying "I will pluck up (אר) thy Asherim." 3. That these were poles, and not goddesses or the images of goddesses, is shown by their plural, which occurs in the masculine form sixteen times, and in the feminine only three times. 4. These wooden stumps, or poles, were sometimes carved (see 2 Kings xxi. 7), and are often connected with idols and graven images; cf. Isa. xxvii. 9; 2 Chron. xxiv. 18, xxxiii. 19, xxxiv. 4, 7; and Isa. xvii. 8.

The Ashera in this latter sense, i.e. as a pole, seems to have been specially connected with the worship of Baal, since the Old Testament constantly mentions it along with that god; cf. Judges vi. 25, 28, iii. 7; 1 Kings xvi. 32, 33, xviii. 19; 2 Kings xvii. 16, xxi. 3; 2 Chron. xxxiii. 3. In 1 Kings xviii. 19, there is a passage which greatly confirms our inference of a connection between Baal and the Ashera, though it is often wrongly quoted to show that Ashera was a goddess. I refer to the passage which says "The prophets of Baal were four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the Ashera four hundred." A glance at the context shows that the prophets of the Ashera are here a synonym for the prophets of Baal, for in the remainder of the narrative the prophets of the Ashera are not mentioned, and only those of Baal appear. Verses 22, 25, and 40 indicate that it was the prophets of Baal only whom Elijah was opposing, and that they were four hundred and fifty, and not eight hundred and fifty, in number.

If then the Ashera and Baal were associated, and Baal and Ashtoreth were also associated, it would follow that these wooden poles would be found around the altars of Ashtoreth also. This seems really to have been the case in Palestine, and was probably the case
in North Africa, from which we have two inscriptions which prove the connection we have supposed between Ashera and Baal really to have existed there. Schroeder, Tafel xv. 3, reads, "To the lord Baal-Hamman Ebed-melek erected this Ashera, and he heard his voice." Tafel xvi. 8 reads, "To the lord Baal-Hamman Melek-aman, son of Baal-yathon, son of Melek, erected this Ashera, and he heard his voice." These inscriptions establish the connection with Baal, and the close connection between Baal and Tanith—the North African counterpart of Ashtoreth—who, as we have noticed, was called לְשַׁמַּה, makes the connection between Ashtoreth and the wooden Asherim also probable.

If then we attempt to trace the influence of Ashtoreth upon Old Testament legislation and thought, it is obvious that the thread of her influence is so intertwined with that of Baal and the Asherim that we shall not be able to disentangle it, but shall have to consider the influence of all three together.

As is well known, Baal in Old Testament times was a god of fertility, productivity, etc., being in general a male counterpart of Ashtoreth. This at least is the character of the deity to which the name clung, for, as we shall have to notice soon, the title Baal was in early Israelitish times applied to Yahwe. It would also seem from the general tenor of such passages as 2 Kings xxiii. and the first Kiti inscription of Cyprus referred to above, that with the combined worship of Baal and Ashtoreth there were connected both male and female prostitutes.

In attempting to trace the influence of these united cults on Israel we must remember that Baal was only a title, and that it was anciently ascribed to Yahwe. This latter fact is proved by such considerations as that one of Gideon's names was Jerubbaal; that Saul and David, both faithful Yahwe worshippers, had sons whose names were respectively Ish-baal and Beeliada (Baal knows); that in Hosea's time the people still addressed Yahwe as Baali (Hos. ii. 16); and that Hosea apparently applies the name Baalim to the golden calves which were representations of Yahwe (Hos. ii. 13, 17).

These blended cults of Canaan, then, were not only supported by the Canaanites who lived side by side with Israel, tending to draw them away from Yahwe by the seductive influence of depraved appetite, and as the patrons of agriculture and material plenty; but the

* See Smith's Religion of the Semites, pp. 91-102.
masculine representative of the pair was known by a name which was one of the titles of Yahwe, so that it must have been difficult for the untutored common man, and perhaps for the priests themselves, to distinguish between the cults of Yahwe and of Baal. We should thus expect the Baal-Ashtoreth cult to make insidious inroads upon the Yahwe cult, until that cult was either entirely perverted and absorbed or until a tremendous effort wrenched the two asunder, and definitions of Yahwe were so framed and his titles so limited that no confusion could in future arise. This latter is what we actually find in the history. Down to the time of Elijah the Yahwe cult and the Baal-Ashtoreth cult seem to go quietly side by side, apparently acting and reacting on each other. The Book of Judges records several instances in which the children of Israel served Baal, Ashtoreth, etc., and its author attributes several of the oppressions suffered by the Israelites to this cause; but of the judges who he tells us were raised up to deliver Israel, none but Gideon, according to his record, made war on Baal. The other Judges down to Samuel seem to have been all Yahwe worshippers, but apparently were satisfied to relieve their land of its foes without tampering with the worship.\(^9\) Samuel, we are told in 1 Sam. vii. 3–6, exhorted Israel in his day to put away the Baalim and Ashtaroth, which in a most docile manner they did; but Solomon did much to make the same cult popular again, without, so far as we know, drawing so much as a protest from any contemporary. It was not until the days of Ahab and Elijah that the initiative was taken in a conflict to last for centuries, and of whose issue we are the heirs. Ahab had apparently no desire to neglect the worship of Yahwe, neither had he any scruple against worshipping the Tyrian Baal with Jezebel; so a temple to Baal was reared in Samaria, an Ashera was planted, and doubtless the impure parasites of the temple were introduced. Against this Elijah raised his voice in vigorous protest, but apparently gained little sympathy from the populace, so similar did the Baal and Yahwe cults seem, until the judicial murder of Naboth (as W. R. Smith has pointed out) roused the people to a consciousness that this foreign worship was apparently hostile to their old ancestral rights. The check Elijah gave to Baal worship and its overthrow by Jehu soon followed, but the work was not complete. The two cults, that of Yahwe and that of Baal-

\(^9\) Modern critics have suggested that the story of Gideon's conflict with Baal arose to explain his name, which was offensive to the ears of a later age.
toreth, had lived side by side so long that even Elisha left many things uncondemned, apparently as connected with Yahwe, which Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, the framers of the Deuteronomic code, and the reformers of Josiah's reign found it necessary, one after another, to root out of the popular affection and the popular faith at the expense of years of painful toil.

It would be strange if in this prolonged struggle, as well as in the previous prolonged association of these cults, some definite trace of influence was not left on the Israelitish religion. Unfortunately we do not know enough of the Yahwe cult of very early days to tell how far it had deteriorated under the influence of this prolonged association with Baal and Ashtoreth; but in the struggle for separation we are able to trace elements which it sloughed off, as in the consciousness of the reformers not favorable to the worship of Yahwe. It is thus quite possible that some elements originally native with the worship of Yahwe were then eliminated, but the matter is involved in too much obscurity to enable us to speak with certainty. At all events, we can trace the influence of the recoil from Baal and Ashtoreth in Israel's religious ideas, ethical practices, and ritualistic regulations.

To begin with ritualistic regulations and paraphernalia, it would seem probable that the calves at Bethel and Dan were due to the influence of the Baal-Ashtoreth cult, and that their abolition was due to the recoil from that cult already spoken of. I know these calves are often supposed to be of Egyptian origin, but in Egypt it was the living animal and not the image that was worshipped. Yahwe, the one who gave Israel his land and received the first fruits of the land at the yearly festivals, occupied for the Israelite the place which Baal and Ashtoreth occupied for the Canaanite. That there was a bovine image of some sort connected with this cult is indicated both by the name of the city, Ashteroth-karnaim, and by the statement of Philo of Byblos that "Astarte put upon her head, as a mark of her sovereignty, a bull's head."¹⁰ During the early centuries of Israel's residence in Canaan they apparently felt little hesitation to use religious images. At least it seems fair to infer this from the fact that the teraphim formed a prominent feature in the temple of Micah which the Danites robbed (Judges xvii., xviii.), the fact that David had a teraphim in his house large enough to appear like a man in bed, when put in David's place (1 Sam xix. 13), and from

¹⁰ See Sanchoniathonis Fragmenta, p. 30.
the further fact that these calves of Jeroboam were so readily accepted as representatives of Yahwe by so large a portion of the people. If, then, the calf images were a part of the Ashtoreth cult, as seems probable, nothing would be more natural than that in course of time this way of representing the Canaanitish deities of agriculture and increase should have been transferred to Yahwe. Thus the cult we have been considering seems through these calves to have for centuries influenced the ritual of Israel, and in the reaction from it which eventually came, to have given point to the command, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, the likeness of any form that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth."

In the recoil from these Canaanitish cults, the Ashera also was banished from the altars of Yahwe. That it had formerly been allowed is indicated by the fact that when Jehu destroyed the Baal cult from Samaria he left the Ashera; by the fact that in Josiah's reformation a part of his reform consisted in bringing out the Ashera from the house of Yahwe, and by the mention of the women who wove tents or hangings in the house of Yahwe for the Ashera (2 Kings xxiii. 6, 7); and by the fact that the prohibition in Deut. xvi. 21, "Thou shalt not plant an Ashera of any kind of tree beside the altar of Yahwe thy God," implies the previous practice. Now, however, it was felt that this symbol of deity was a source of confusion and a cause of weakness to the worship of Yahwe; hence the modification of the ritual.

Along with the Ashera the masseba, apparently for the same reason, was banished. These stones as symbols of deity had been consecrated in the popular tradition by the patriarchs who founded their race. From Tacitus hist. ii. 3, we learn that the representation of Astarte at Paphos in Cyprus was a stone, which must have been nothing else than a masseba. It is therefore probable from this, as well as from the internal implications of the Old Testament itself, that while the masseba represented any deity, it was in Palestine used of Ashtoreth and Baal also, and that the effort to differentiate Yahwe worship from these and other cults (although Hosea did not condemn the masseba)\(^{11}\) resulted finally in its removal from Israelitish ritual.

The same tendency, due largely though not exclusively to the Baal-Ashtoreth cult (for other foreign cults were mingled also in

\(^{11}\) See Hosea iii. 4.
Israel), led, according to modern critical theories, to the abolition of the bamoth in the reform of Josiah, and the concentration of the worship at one central shrine (see Deut. xii. 8 ff.). As an indirect result, according to these theories, growing out of this centralization of the worship, but directly referred by its author to this mingling of heathen worship, the degradation from their priesthood of the Levites who had acted as priests in the bamoth, and the consequent distinction in the ritualistic service between priests and Levites may be noted (see Ezek. xlv. 9 sq.). This distinction, as is well known, was not made in the Deuteronomic legislation, but is introduced by Ezekiel as a new thing, and is fully recognized in the Levitical code.

Thus far the influence of the Baal-Ashtoreth cult on Israel seems to have been one of purification through recoil. But we may also ask if, in the centuries when the two cults existed side by side without coming to open warfare, some influence was not exerted and some borrowing done which left lasting traces in Israel. Scholars of the modern critical school answer this inquiry in the affirmative. Kuenen and W. Robertson Smith suggest that the order of the prophets arose at first in Israel through the influence of Canaanitish cults. This, while it cannot be proven, does not on the critical theory of the Pentateuch seem impossible. In the time of Samuel the prophet was a seer who gave oracles for a small fee on all sorts of every-day topics, such as where to find lost asses, and it was enough to constitute a man a prophet if he spoke in ecstatic frenzy. It was only after a time of considerable development in prophecy that such men as Elijah, Amos, and Isaiah are found in prophetic circles. From 1 Kings xviii. we learn that Baal had his prophets, and the order, on this theory, first appears in Israel after the settlement in Canaan. It therefore does not seem impossible that the idea of the order may have come in the first instance from the cults we are considering, and that in course of time the exigencies of Israel's life and the character of Yahwe made the order the noble thing it became.

Wellhausen has suggested that the feasts of the Jews which are of agricultural origin are from the same source. As is well known, of the three great Jewish festivals two, at least, were originally wholly agricultural — the Qasir or Harvest (also called Feast of Weeks), and the Asif or Ingathering (also called Succoth). The third feast combined two elements, the Pesah and the Massoth, of which the Massoth element seems to have been of agricultural origin. Now
before the conquest of Canaan the Israelites were nomads, and would not naturally keep agricultural feasts. They learned their agriculture from the Canaanites after the settlement in Canaan, and as these Canaanites, so far as we can trace their customs from the few hints which ancient authors have transmitted to us, seem to have celebrated such agricultural feasts to the gods who gave agricultural increase, it is but natural, on the critical theory, to suppose that the Israelites should thence also adopt the custom of keeping such agricultural festivals to Yahwe. The festival of the men of Shechem (Judges ix. 27), combined with the statements of Lucian, Aelian, Johannes Lydus, Efrem Syrus, and Augustine about such festivals elsewhere, are vouchers for their existence in the Baal and Ashtoreth worship, and the attitude of Amos and Hosea towards these feasts would seem not inconsistent with such an origin. (See Amos iv. 4, 5, v. 21-23, and Hosea ii. 8-15.)

In close connection with the ritualistic effects of the foreign cults, of which the cults of Ashtoreth and Baal formed such important elements, are the moral effects which they wrought on Israel. Indeed, it was in the impurity of its ritual from a moral point of view that the Ashtoreth cult touched the moral life of Israel. This is what we should expect a priori, and it is also what Hosea actually tells us: “They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under the oaks and poplars and terebinths, because the shadow thereof is good; therefore your daughters commit whoredom, and your brides commit adultery” (Hosea iv. 13). It would appear from 2 Kings xxiii. 7 that this was not only done in open and definite worship of Ashtoreth and Baal, but that it had penetrated the Yahwe cult also, for a part of Josiah’s reform consisted in “destroying the houses of the sodomites that were in the house of Yahwe, where the women wove hangings for the Ashera.” These sodomites and women seem to be a recognized part of the temple retinue, so far as appears, recognized by priest and people alike. This impression is confirmed by Deut. xxiii. 17, 18: “There shall be no harlot of the daughters of Israel, neither shall there be a sodomite of the sons of Israel. Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore or the wages of a male prostitute (lit. dog, but בְּּהָ is evidently parallel to גַּרֶּה) into the house of Yahwe thy God for any vow.” This prohibition would probably never have been made had not a definite exigency demanded it; the very enactment of the law implying a previous contrary practice. Thus we
see how under the sanction of religion — and as many were no doubt coming to think, under the sanction of Yahwe — the very basis of family life and social purity was being subverted. Against this Amos, Hosea, and other prophets raised their voices. They reminded Israel that in Yahwe worship these were innovations, and innovations which Yahwe abominated. They kept alive the agitation until legislation was enacted or resuscitated against such practices; until the means of carrying them on were forcibly ejected from the temple, the high places, the natural haunts of such practices, were destroyed, and a code enacted for Israel of such exalted ethical standard in this particular as to be for subsequent ages a successful barrier against such corruption. That Israel’s moral code was now lifted above the ideals of her earlier leaders is perhaps improbable, but that this struggle to root out the excessive impurity of Ashtoreth and Baal worship impressed a higher moral standard upon the people as a whole, which in subsequent centuries wrought out its beneficent results, seems really to have been the case.

This long conflict waged by Israel’s prophetic leaders with these impure cults left its trace, too, upon their religious ideas; not that it originated anything new in this respect, for that is not likely, but that it led them to emphasize and keep in the foreground a fact of the greatest importance to Jew and Christian alike. The tendency, as we have seen, was to regard Yahwe as the same sort of god as those around him. They were nature gods. They were the ancestors of their tribes or members of their clans. The god might be angry with them, might get sulky and for a time abandon them, but ultimately, let them displease him ever so much, he would be forced by the clan constitution and the principle of blood revenge to come to the rescue of his people. Thus an obstinate people could coerce its god to accede to its own will. In opposition to this, the prophets from Hosea onward represent Yahwe’s relation to Israel as a relation not of kinship, but of covenant; not of nature, but of grace. The basis of that covenant was obedience to Yahwe; and Yahwe required a life of moral purity, of mercy towards the poor, and a service of himself as absolute and whole-hearted as a wife should render her husband. Were this not given, his covenant might be abrogated. A nature god might be coerced by his kinsman; but a people who were faithless to their part of a divine covenant had no
ground by which to compel the other party to the contract to fulfil His portion.

Thus in this long conflict with heathenism, as prophet after prophet took up this strain, Israel at length learned, as bitter misfortune enforced the prophetic instruction, that personal conduct and personal purity are the conditions of Yahwe's favor and help; or, to put it in the words of Heraclitus, that "character is destiny." The conflict with Ashtoreth and her allies was the occasion rather than the cause of this magnificent result. The cause lay in the fact that Yahwe's character and relation to his people were such as they were, that the better minds were enabled to discern that character and relation, and that the Providence controlling the fortunes of the people so shaped those fortunes that they impressed upon the popular conscience the teaching of the better minds. None the less, however, does it become us to note the part of opposition played by Ashtoreth and her associates in this accomplishment, and to note the fundamental religious truth for us and for all time which was thus set in the foreground of prophetic teaching.