'BAMOTH' IN THE OLD TESTAMENT*

By J. T. Whitney

The *bamoth* were the chief crucible for the conflict between the faith of Israel and the religion of Canaan. Israel had brought with her from the desert a faith based on historical revelation, covenant community, personal commitment and moral obedience./1/ The religion of Canaan, on the other hand, was based on an appeal to the senses, magical rites to manipulate the gods, a cyclic view of time, and gods which were merely part of the order of things rather than in control of them./2/ Between these two systems, and the different ways of life they represent, there was an inevitable conflict, and as Israel became a settled agricultural community, the local shrines became the focus of the encounter. The frequent reference to the term בָּמָה and its cognates (102 times in the Massoretic Text; about 90% in literature relating to the divided monarchy) is sufficient evidence of the importance of these shrines in Israel's history and in the development of her faith. It is clear from both Old Testament history and prophecy that here was something rejected by those who regarded themselves as heirs to the true Mosaic faith. Light shed on the *bamoth* will therefore illumine Yahwism also.

Yet, despite progress this century in understanding many aspects of Canaanite religion, the *bamoth* have remained an enigma. Clearly understood lines of interpretation, if not of scholarly consensus, have emerged from the study of the Ras Shamra texts about the mythology and

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* Based on a Nottingham Ph.D. thesis, 1975.

1. E. W. Heaton, *The Hebrew Kingdoms* (Oxford, 1968) 48.
2. G. A. F. Knight, *Hosea* (1960) 17-20.

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worship of Canaan./3/ Light has been shed on much of the religious equipment mentioned in the OT - Standing Stones,/4/ Asherah Poles,/5/ Incense Altars, /6/ and the ubiquitous Astarte plaque found in every Iron Age excavation illustrate the deep hold of fertility religion on the lives and homes of the ordinary Israelites during the monarchy period./7/ Yet it was the *bamoth* which the biblical historians singled out as the real source of the cancer in their midst. Every king, except two, is criticized because he 'did not remove the *bamoth*', and 'once again Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord'. Even kings for whom general approval is expressed, like Asa and Jehoshaphat, are faulted on this issue; only Hezekiah and Josiah made serious attempts to destroy their evil influence.

Study of the *bamoth* has hitherto been dominated by a series of unfortunate fashions. The earliest comment outside the OT is to be found in the Talmud. The Rabbis were clearly embarrassed that, despite the command of Moses to worship 'only at the place Yahweh shall choose' (Deut. 12 etc.), early heroes such as Samuel, Saul and Solomon are found worshipping at *bamoth*. The Talmud excuses their behaviour by a theory of the periodic lifting of the ban on *bamoth*/8/ and by

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3. G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (1956) and J. Gray, *Documents from Old Testament Times*, ed. D. Winton Thomas (1958) 118-136.
4. C. F. Graesser, 'Standing Stones in Ancient Palestine', *BA* 35 (1972) 34-63, based on the author's thesis submitted to Harvard University, *Studies in Massebot*.
5. W. L. Reed, *The Asherah* (1949).
6. Hebrew חמנים, translated 'sun-pillar' by KJV. M. d'Ingholt, *Le Sens du mot hamman, Melanges.... Dussaud*, Vol. 2 (1939) 795-802.
7. J. B. Pritchard, *Palestinian Figurines in Relation to Certain Goddesses known through Literature* (1943).
8. *E.g.* 'Before the Tabernacle was set up *bamoth* were permitted.....after the Tabernacle was set up *bamoth* were forbidden.....when they came to Gilgal *bamoth* were again permitted', Tractate Zebahim 112b, 113a.

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a supposed distinction between a great and a small *bamah*./9/ Neither suggestion has any real basis in the OT but similar concerns can be seen to motivate translations in the Targums,/10/ the LXX/11/ and the later Rabbis./12/ Early critical study of the subject was concerned with the same issue but proposed a different answer. Julius Wellhausen/13/ proposed that Deuteronomy was a 'pious fraud' and so Israel's early heroes could not be held guilty of contravening a law not yet in existence. Thus far there had not been any study of what *bamoth* actually were.

Possibility of real progress seemed to be offered by the early archaeological expeditions to the East. 'For a while sanctuaries blossomed luxuriantly under the pick and mattock',/14/ and the excavators of Tell es Safi,/15/

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9. *E.g.* 'There is no difference between a Great High Place and a small one save in the matter of the paschal lamb offering'. Tractate Megillah 9b.
10. Thus although the Targums normally render במה as במתא, Jonathan ben Uzziel uses a word normally meaning 'dining room' through 1 Samuel 9, thereby disassociating Samuel and Saul from the taint of *bamah* worship. See P. Churgin, *Targum Jonathan to the Prophets* (1907).
11. Βαμά is used for Hebrew במה only in passages relating to the lives of Samuel, Saul, David or Solomon, thereby putting them into a class by themselves. 19 different words are used in LXX to translate במה; the poetic non-cultic references are particularly poorly handled. Comparison with LXX renderings for other Canaanite religious terms shows the limited knowledge of the subject available in Hellenistic Judaism. Josephus, *The Antiquities*, omits all reference to the *bamoth*.
12. These references are collected together in B. Ugolinus, *Thesaurus* (1744) Vol. 10, Cols. 559f.
13. J. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (1878); see Part One, A History of Worship.
14. C. C. McCown, 'Hebrew High Places and Cult Remains', *JBL* 69 (1950) 205-219.
15. F. J. Bliss and R. A. S. Macalister, *Excavations in Palestine during 1898-1900* (1902) 31-34 on Tell es Safi.

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Tell Taanach,/16/ Tell en Nasbeh,/17/ Beth Shemesh, /18/ Gezer/19/ and Tell Beit Mirsim/20/ all claimed *bamoth*. In 1941 James Montgomery wrote of Palestinian excavations 'every one of which has revealed the remains of such ancient sanctuaries'./21/ In fact Montgomery's claim was already out of date by the time the book appeared for, by the outbreak of the Second World War, it was clear that a drastic re-appraisal of results was necessary. Increasing sophistication of excavation techniques during the inter-war years had brought the uncomfortable conclusion that not a single excavated *bamah* could be supported; the only exception being that of Petra, which was a surface exploration and not an excavation./22/ Some *bamoth* had clearly been found because they were expected rather than because they were there. This 'wishful thinking' phase, as Albright called it,/23/ was followed by a period of disillusion. C. C. McCown/24/ attempted to show that *bamoth* were not public sanctuaries, which was why they had not been found. He proposed that any wayside altar or domestic libation vessel could be regarded as a *bamah* - a solution designed to fit the cultic equipment found at Megiddo, but which hardly does justice to the biblical evidence.

The new breakthrough that was needed appeared to come in 1957-8 when three articles were published proposing that

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16. E. Sellin, *Tell Ta'anek* (1904).
17. W. F. Badè, *Excavations at Tell en-Nasbeh 1926-7. A Preliminary Report, 1928*, 30-41.
18. D. Mackenzie, 'The Excavations at 'Ain Shems 1912', *PEQ* 1912, 173-178.
19. R. A. S. Macalister, *Gezer* (1912) Vol. 1, 105-107; Vol. 2, 381-406.
20. W. F. Albright, *BASOR* 23, 5-6 on Tell Beit Mirsim.
21. J. A. Montgomery, *I and II Kings* (1941).
22. The best description is in G. L. Robinson, *Petra, The Sarcophagus of an Ancient Civilization* (Macmillan, 1930) 107-134.
23. W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*^{5} (1968) 62.
24. C. C. McCown, *op. cit.*

bamoth were tomb-shrines. Samuel Iwry read Isaiah 6:13 with the help of the Qumran Scroll and proposed that it referred to the destruction of a *bamah* by the throwing down of the funerary *massebah*./25/ Ruth Amiran suggested that the structures she had been excavating west of Jerusalem were a type of tomb *bamah*./26/ However, it was W. F. Albright who brought these and other strands together to form a new picture./27/ By several textual emendations he found other OT references to tomb *bamoth*. He apologized to Vincent for arguing with him about Gezer and suggested that, like Byblos, Hazor, the Sinai Cairns and the Jerusalem Tumuli, it should now be interpreted as both a tomb monument and a *bamah*. Part of the prophetic reaction against the *bamoth*, he believed, could now be seen as 'against objectionable funerary beliefs and practices'. Cults of the dead were perhaps more common than hitherto supposed and the position of the Pharisees may have been 'a normal development from an age old Israelite faith'. Albright repeated his position in 1968/28/ and did not modify it in any of his subsequent publications.

The tomb theory has passed into general works on the Bible,/29/ and is probably to be regarded as the dominant hypothesis. Nevertheless, it cannot be regarded as securely based. Albright's biblical analysis is built on five textual emendations, which

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25. S. Iwry, '*Maṣṣēbāh* and *bāmāh* in 1Q Isaiah^{A} 6:13', *JBL* 76 (1957) 225-232.
26. R. Amiran, 'The Tumuli West of Jerusalem, Survey and Excavations 1953', *IEJ* 8 (1958) 205-227.
27. W. F. Albright, 'The High Place in Ancient Palestine', in *Volume du Congrès Strasbourg 1956*, published as *Supplement to Vetus Testamentum* 4 (Leiden, 1957) 242-258.
28. W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the gods of Canaan* (1968) 177-179.
29. G. T. Manley, 'High Place' in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Tyndale, 1962) 525-6; E. W. Heaton, *The Hebrew Kingdoms* (Oxford, 1968), 133; R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (1960) 284-288.

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themselves have not gone unchallenged./30/ There are, on the other hand, over a hundred firmly attested readings which carry no such implications. The archaeological evidence proves to be equally inconclusive in the light of the decisive re-excavations of Gezer/31/ and the so-called 'Conway High Place' at Petra/32/ and Carl Graesser's important classification of *masseboth* and their functions./33/

Popular literature on the Bible frequently lacks any explanation or comment on the *bamoth*. Where a comment is made, it is usually to a 'cultic platform'./34/ The knowledge of most Bible readers is probably limited to the English rendering of במה in a particular translation. The term 'high place', first coined by Coverdale/35/ under the influence of LXX,/36/ Vulgate /37/ and Wycliffe,/38/ was adopted by the KJV and has become the most commonly used English translation. It has long been realized that it is not particularly exact as it carries the idea of 'height' not present in every OT use of במה but not the idea of 'cult'.

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30. J. Sawyer, 'The Qumran Reading of Isaiah 6:13', *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 3 (1964) 111-113. See also W. Boyd Barrick, 'The Funerary Character of "High Places" in Ancient Palestine: a Reassessment', *VT* 25 (1975) 565-595. Barrick shows that Albright's textual and archaeological conclusions were derived from his presuppositions rather than from the evidence.
31. The excavations at Gezer were carried out between 1964 and 1971 by the Hebrew Union College and the British Archaeology School in Jerusalem. Preliminary reports of the re-excavation of the 'High Place' appeared in *BA* 34 (1971) 120-124; *PEQ* Jan.-June 1973, 61-70, and the full report in *Gezer Vol. Three, The High Place*, published H.U.C. and B.A.S.J. See also A. M. Furshpan, *The Gezer High Place*, unpublished doctoral thesis, Harvard 1970.
32. P. J. Parr, 'Le "Conway High Place" à Pétra: Une Nouvelle Interprétation', *RB* 69 (1962) 64-79.
33. Graesser, *op. cit.*
34. *E.g.* 'The high places were the elevated platforms or altars': J. Mauchline in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (Nelson, 1962) 340.
35. Coverdale: 'hye places' or 'hie places'.
36. Ὑψηλός is used 57 times for במה.
37. *Excelsum* is used 89 times.
38. Wycliffe: 'heeze thingis' or 'Hize thingis'.

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Modern translations have tended to move toward a more definitely 'cult' rendering. Hence *To-day's English Version* translates by 'heathen places of worship', *The Living Bible* by 'altars to other gods' or 'shrines on the hills'. *The New English Bible* generally translates by 'hill shrine' but *The Jerusalem Bible* retains 'high place'.

Confirmation that the time is ripe for a fresh look at the problem comes with the appearance of *The Meaning of Bama in the O.T.* by Patrick Vaughan, published in Oct. 1974./39/ Unshackled by any former approaches to the subject, Patrick Vaughan deals in detail with the etymological and linguistical material and also makes some general suggestions about the correlation of biblical and archaeological evidence. With over ninety pages of text and black and white illustrations, this is the first book length study of the subject to appear and it is certain to become the standard work. Members of the Tyndale Fellowship will be pleased to see prominent reference to the Tyndale House Library in a S.O.T.S. Monograph. I want to place on record my gratitude to Patrick Vaughan for his help in correspondence and for lending me a pre-publication copy of his work. Neither of us find the tomb theory supported by the evidence. However, my own study of the variety of shrines referred to as *bamah* in the OT leads me to reject his 'cult platform' views and therefore to find a greater variety of archaeological illustrations.

In the first section of his book Patrick Vaughan discusses the relationship between Hebrew בָּמָה and related words. Seven examples of *bmt* in the Ugaritic literature are noted and the translation 'flank' proposed rather than the more usual 'back'./40/ Akkadian *bamtu* which occurs in anatomical contexts can best be translated 'rib cage', 'chest',/41/ while

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39. S.O.T.S. Monograph Series, No. 3, Cambridge University Press.
40. So Driver, *op. cit., e.g.* 'She lifted up her father and put him on the *bmt* of a he-ass' (Aqhat I ii 10).
41. *E.g.* 'If he cries "woe" during his sickness, lies on his *bamtu* and does not turn over....' Omen text in I. J. Gelb and B. Landsberger, *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.*

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bamâtu, which occurs in agricultural and military contexts, means 'hilly slopes or foothills surrounding cities'./42/ *bamâtu* may therefore be the plural of *bamtu* occurring only in a specialized topographical context, being thought of as 'rib cages of mountains'./43/ Vaughan draws a sharp distinction between the two Hebrew plural forms במות and במתי. The former he regards as always cultic relating to the stone platforms or sanctuaries used for worship. The latter he believes is never cultic but, like Akkadian *bamâtu*, is thought of as 'hill sides'. The clue to the semantic link between the two lies, he suggests, in the cultic purposes to which the platforms were put. There are a number of OT places where Yahweh is said to ride or walk or set Israel or an individual upon the 'heights of the earth'./44/ Vaughan suggests these passages are evidence of a Hebrew myth about Yahweh appearing in theopany and that the cultic sense of the word was coined, perhaps in Israel, to 'actualize this mythology in cultic ritual'. Further semantic developments are seen in בהמה, 'beast', in the meanings 'grave-mound', 'cultic platform' and 'sanctuary' for במה and in the Greek βωμός to mean 'cultic platform'.

Two hesitations must be expressed about this analysis. First the distinction between the plurals is difficult to maintain in the light of Ezek. 36:2 and Num. 21:28 which use במות in a non-cultic sense. The attempt to show that these are in fact references to places of worship is not convincing. Ezekiel records the enemy's taunt, 'Aha! Now the everlasting highlands are ours'. (36:2) Ownership of the heights gave rights to the whole land, mountains, hills, streams, valleys, palaces and cities and now Ezekiel is told to prophesy to the heights of their restoration to Israel. As Vaughan

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42. *E.g.* 'I made their blood flow over the lowland and the *bamâtu* of the mountains'. H. Rawlinson, etc., *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser I* (1857) 1:79f.
43. So Vaughan, *op. cit.*, and W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*. Gelb, *op. cit.*, regards them as two unrelated words.
44. Amos 4:13; Micah 1:3; *cf.* Job 9:8; Deut. 32:13; 33:29; Is. 58:14; 2 Sam. 22:34 = Ps. 18:33; Hab. 3:19.

points out, battles often took place on heights in ancient times; possession of the heights therefore gave lordship over the land./45/ There is therefore a common link between the two plurals, במות and במתי, namely the idea of lordship or dominance. Secondly, it must be questioned whether the ride/walk passages are really sufficient evidence on which to suggest a ritual dramatizing the myth of Yahweh walking across the במתי. What happened at this ceremony? What other evidence is there for it? Restriction of the idea to Israel cannot be maintained in the light of at least two clear pictorial representations on cylinder seals showing Baal walking on two or three mountains./46/ It is more likely that we are dealing here with the language of faith. Israel asserted that Yahweh was lord even over the symbols of lordship! Thus Amos draws his terrifying picture of Yahweh, and no other, marching over the heights to visit his vengeance on his errant people (Am. 4:13).

In his second section, Vaughan discusses briefly the O.T. evidence for *bamah* shrines. In the third section, after dismissing the so-called 'Conway High Place at Petra', archaeological evidence for two types of *bamah* platform is discussed. Type 1 was round in shape with a flat top and examples are discussed from Nahariyah, Megiddo, Arad and the Jerusalem Tumuli. Type 2 was a low straight-sided platform and examples are discussed from Hazor, Arad, Dan and possibly Shechem. Mention is also made of three low platforms which had altars built on them at Shechem, Petra and Arad. Literary evidence for Type 2 platform is seen in the word חיק (Ezekiel 43:14).

The suggestion that *bamah* shrines were fundamentally 'platforms' has been made before, though it has never previously been given such sustained exposition. OT support, however, is not great. Vaughan cites four pieces of evidence in support. (i) Isaiah 16:12: concluding his dirge over Moab, Isaiah states that her

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45. *Cf.* 2 Sam. 1:19,25.
46. E. Porada, *Corpus of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in North American Collections*, Bollingen Series 14, Vol. 1 (Text), 129-130, Vol. 1 (Plates), Numbers 967E, 968.

worship at the *bamah* is of no avail; 'When Moab comes to worship and wearies himself upon the *bamah* and comes to his sanctuary to pray he will gain nothing'. במה is used in parallel with מקדש, a word used of substantial cult buildings and usually translated 'sanctuary'. The phrase על-הבמה is unique to this reference. If this particular *bamah* was on a height, the phrase may well be intended to be understood as 'up there at the *bamah* on the height'. (ii) Ezekiel 16:16 may imply a platform but it is a notoriously difficult verse to interpret due to the difficulty of knowing whether the 'clothes' are meant literally or symbolically (*cf.* verse 10). (iii) בבמות, as Vaughan states, can equally well be translated 'at the *bamoth*' as 'on the *bamoth*'. (iv) Although it is true there are passages which seem to identify *bamah* and altar, there are also others which clearly distinguish the two. The conclusion seems to be that all *bamoth* had an altar and that some were perhaps little more than an altar. Curiously the clearest evidence of platforms is a passage where MT does not contain במה at all. However, רמה should probably be read במה in Ezek. 16:24, 35 and 31 for the 'mound' which was 'in every open place' .... 'at the top of every street' doubtless refers to town *bamoth*.

On *a priori* grounds it is, of course, highly probable that some *bamoth* did contain raised platforms. Out of functional necessity, rather than any attempt to simulate height, most religious buildings contain a raised area so that the proceedings can be clearly seen. The simpler *bamoth* may have been little more than a platform on which sacrifice was offered, but this was merely the form the *bamah*-shrine happened to take in these instances. In other cases a platform may have been part of a whole complex of religious buildings, while a third type of *bamah* probably contained no platform at all.

Confirmation that fundamentally במה meant 'shrine' and was used of the whole cult complex, which may or may not have contained a platform, can be found wherever the literary evidence provides a detailed description of a *bamah*. There are examples from several periods. In 1 Samuel 9 the feast is described as 'at the *bamah*' (בבמה) but the meal is held in the dining room (לשכה), which was large enough to accommodate 30 people. When the party had dined, they came down 'from the *bamah*' (מהבמה).

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'Hill shrine' (NEB) is the only possible translation as במה is clearly being used of the whole cult area. Similarly in 1 Kings 3:4, 'Now King Solomon went to Gibeon to offer a sacrifice, for that was the chief hill-shrine'. Solomon used to sacrifice 'upon its altar'. There is no reference to a platform but altar, Tabernacle, and incubation facilities are all included in the term במה, which was clearly only one stage removed from being called a היכל. Similar implications about the use of במה are carried by 1 Kings 14:23 where chambers for prostitutes are implied and by the reference to priests' houses in 2 Chronicles 34:3-7. Particularly significant is Amos' bitter oracle against Israel where מקדש, a word commonly used of substantial cult centres such as Jerusalem Temple,/47/ is used as a synonym for במה. 'The hill-shrines of Isaac (במות-יצחק) shall be desolated and the sanctuaries of Israel (ומקדשי-ישראל) laid waste.' (Amos 7:9) The only non-biblical reference to במה in a cult sense, on the Moabite stone line 3, carries the same implication. Mesha refers to the shrine he has built to Chemosh in Qarhoh as 'this *bamah*' (also probably at the end of the line 'a *bamah* of salvation'). There are no suggestions in the text of height or platforms and the word can only be translated 'Sanctuary' (so Ullendorff/48/ and Albright/49/) or 'shrine' and not 'high place'.

It has perhaps been too readily assumed that the biblical evidence is of little help in understanding the ancient *bamah*, perhaps because many of the references are in the apparently cursory historical summaries in the books of Kings. Both Vaughan/50/ and Albright/51/ state that the biblical evidence is only of a very general non-specific kind. However, careful study of the MT supplemented by judicious use of the LXX reveals much important data, and this is the only basis upon which archaeological discoveries can be

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47. 66 of the 74 references to מקדש are to the Jerusalem Temple or to the Tabernacle. 29 are in Ezekiel, 13 of them in the idealized vision of the Temple in ch. 44-45.
48. E. Ullendorff, *DOTT*, 195ff.
49. W. F. Albright, *ANET*, 320-321.
50. Vaughan, *op. cit.*, 29.
51. Albright, *High Place*, 242.

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interpreted. Significant details emerge of important Israelite *bamoth* which existed at Bethel, Gibeah, Gibeon, Ramah and three in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem. There were also *bamoth* at Bamoth-Baal and other places in Moab. As already noted, the use of the phrase 'to walk upon the heights of the land' seems to indicate that the root meaning of the term to the Hebrew mind stood for heights symbolizing lordship. This may help us understand why shrines were first erected on heights. thereby claiming the symbol of lordship for the gods. Verbs of construction and destruction reveal general characteristics of the *bamoth* and references to Beth-Bamoth, the dining room at Ramah, Gibeon, rooms for prostitutes and houses for priests indicate that some *bamoth* at least were considerable establishments. Officiating priests were probably normally called כמרים. Not only were prophets, prostitutes and priests found associated with the shrines, but even once a cook.

A wide range of cultic activity was practised,/52/ including the bringing of gifts, libations, prayers, prostitution and probably ritual lamentation. However, worship centred on the acts of sacrifice. The shaŕed offering and the incense offering were the most common, also whole offerings, and in one instance, which appears to be exceptional, child sacrifice.

An important conclusion to emerge from the biblical evidence relates to the position of the *bamah*. The first *bamoth* mentioned were clearly on high ground (*e.g.* Num. 22:41; 1 Sam. 9 & 10:5; 1 Kings 11:7). Later *bamoth* were described as 'on every high hill and under every spreading tree', a phrase which, by quoting extremes of high and low ground, indicates that *bamoth* were to be found everywhere./53/ Other *bamoth* are said to be in the city,/54/ or even in a valley./55/ This

52. See especially, Ezekiel 20:27-29.
53. 1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 16:4; 2 Chr. 28:4; Ezek. 20:27-29. The phrase is an example of the Hebrew idiom of expressing totality by quoting extremes (*cf.* 2 Kings 17:9).
54. 1 Kings 13:32; 2 Kings 17:9,29; 23:5,8a,19; 2 Chron. 14:5; 21:11; 28:25.
55. Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5; 32:35.

development did not happen everywhere at once, for of all human activities, cult is among the most conservative. Doubtless established *bamoth* remained where they were; thus Solomon's cult places on the Mount of Olives were still there two centuries later (1 Kings 11:7; *cf.* 2 Kings 23:13). But as the population grew during the monarchy period and new cult places were established, it was natural for them to be placed within easy reach. This was a period when Israel occupied a central place on the stage of world history. Egypt and the successive Mesopotamian empires vied with one another for the control of the Palestinian land bridge. Many towns improved their defences and developed means of obtaining water in time of siege. It was therefore natural to bring the point of access to the gods also within the city. In some cases, like Jerusalem, the city may have grown to include the sacred area within itself; in others the highest point of the town may have been chosen for the establishment of a cult centre.

A vivid insight into the variety of shrines which were regarded as *bamoth* is afforded to us by the literary deposit of the final decades of Judah's existence. Fortunately, this is one of the most detailed records of any period of OT history; 2 Kings 23 contains ten references to *bamah* shrines, more than any OT chapter. Verse 8b refers to a small *bamah* probably to be interpreted as a shrine to gate *numenes* not situated on a height and little more than a wayside altar with no regular cultus or staff. Verse 13 refers to Solomon's *bamoth* on the Mount of Olives built for Ashtoreth of the Sidonians, Chemosh of Moab and Milcom of the Ammonites. Bethel, the ancient Canaanite shrine, which was given new status by Jeroboam I and had risen to become a 'royal shrine' by the time of Jeroboam II,/56/ is called a *bamah* in verse 15. Verses 5, 8a and 9 refer to *bamoth* 'in the cities of Judah and the neighbourhood of Jerusalem'. Verses 19 and 20 refer to 'all the *bamoth* in the cities of Samaria' which had been encouraged by the kings of the northern kingdom and taken over by the Assyrian settlers for their own gods. Both of these are clearly references to the common local shrines where the people slaughtered and burnt sacrifices. Verse 10

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56. Amos 7:13.

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refers to Topheth in the valley of Ben-Hinnom where child sacrifices were made to מלך. The writer of Kings does not call this shrine a *bamah* but the contemporary prophet Jeremiah did so./57/

Such a survey shows that in the closing years of the monarchy period many types of cult centre were thought of as *bamoth* - small gate shrines, royal centres to foreign gods, large public shrines, local rustic shrines and even Topheth. Their situations are as varied as their cults - on hills, in cities and settlements, by the city gate and in a valley. The inescapable conclusion is that by this period במה was a general word for a small shrine. Thus the usage of the word had developed from being a purely secular word with no cult content to become primarily a place of cult with no indications of position.

Once it is realized that במות often means no more than 'local shrines' and the general movement in location from heights to many different kinds of situation is recognized, it can be seen that new perspectives for interpreting archaeological data are open. In one sense, the task is more complex for there was clearly no common feature such as a *massebah* or a platform for which we can search. On the other hand, every excavated cult site of moderate size for a period of more than a millennium becomes relevant.

Only a few *bamoth* are given a named geographical position in the OT,/58/ so it is perhaps not surprising, if disappointing, to record that none of them has yet been exposed. The large cult platform built by Jeroboam I, and excavated by Dr. Biran at Dan,/59/ was almost certainly regarded as a *bamah* by later generations, but it is not so named in the OT. Jerusalem has yielded the Kenyon shrine/60/ and the

57. See note 55.
58. Bethel (2 Kings 23:15); Gibeah (1 Sam. 22:6); Gibeon (2 Kings 3 etc.); Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 23:8b; Jeremiah 7:31); Ramah (1 Samuel 9); Bamoth-Baal (Num. 21:19-20 etc.).
59. A. Biran, 'Excavations at Tell Dan', *BA* 37 (1974) 26-51.
60. K. M. Kenyon, *Jerusalem, Excavating 3000 years of history* (1967) 63-65; *PEQ* 1963, 9-10; 1964, 8-10; 1967, 66; *Digging up Jerusalem* (1973).

Tumuli,/61/ both from the Iron Age, but not Solomon's shrines on the Mount of Olives, or the shrine by the gate of Joshua or Topheth. Nothing yet has been found of the biblical *bamoth* at Bethel, Gibeah, Gibeon, Ramah or Bamoth-Baal.

Of the simplest hill-top *bamah*, perhaps consisting of a *massebah*, altar and rude enclosure, little would have survived to be discovered. In any case, most excavations are of Tells and most evidence can therefore be expected of *bamoth* established in towns or where the town grew to include the *bamah*. In fact, despite the false starts of the 'wishful thinking' phase, we can be confident that shrines illustrative of the main types of *bamoth* indicated by the literary evidence have now been discovered. Their dates span the whole period of the OT, and both before and after. The majority, however, are concentrated in the Iron Age, the period in which the literary evidence encourages us to believe the *bamoth* were most common.

Bamoth outside settlements are illustrated by the shrines of Nahariyah, Samaria, the Jerusalem Tumuli and Petra. At Nahariyah (MB 17-16th centuries) a temple and circular cult area were probably used by people from the unexcavated Tell 900 m. away./62/ At Samaria the trapezoid shaped enclosure SE of the 8th century town showed evidence of sacrifice and cult use and was connected to the town by a natural rock bridge at the west./63/ The Jerusalem Tumuli (Iron Age, 7th century) still present a number of problems, not least the large number of them./61/ Nevertheless, present evidence suggests that they are some of the *bamoth* 'in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem'. (2 Kings 23:5) The late date and non-Jewish characteristics of the civilization of the Nabateans recommend caution in relating the 'high places' of Petra to the biblical evidence./22/ Nevertheless, parallels with biblical evidence can be noted, and it seems that some Semitic traditions were preserved though height clearly remained a feature rather longer.

61. R. Amiran, *op. cit.*
62. M. Dothan, 'Excavations at Nahariyah, Preliminary Report 1954-55', *IEJ* 6 (1956) 14-25.
63. J. W. Crowfoot etc., *Samaria Volume Two, The Buildings* (P.E.F., 1942) 23-24.

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Bamoth on heights in the towns are illustrated by Megiddo, Arad, Qedesh and perhaps Beersheba. Megiddo's structure 4017 (EB/MB, 2500-1900) must, despite interpretation problems, be regarded as the first known *bamah* within a settlement and therefore advanced for its day./64/ Early Iron Age Arad (11th century) had a paved area, crescent shaped platform and probably a *massebah*. It was situated on the summit of the hill while the settlement was down below on the slopes./65/ At Qedesh Stratum V (Iron Age 10-9th centuries) a sacral area was found on the summit of the mound./66/ A raised floor at Beersheba (Iron Age, 10th century) has revealed cult equipment./67/

Small shrines in towns, but not on heights, such as the literary evidence shows were called *bamoth* by the Exile, are known from Hazor, Dan and Jerusalem Kenyon. LB Hazor (13th century) has revealed two possible examples. Platform 8019 was clearly used for cult purposes and shrine 6162 in Area C provided a rich supply of religious objects./68/ It is difficult not to regard these shrines as *bamoth* even though they are several centuries earlier than the earliest literary references to town *bamoth*. They may illustrate how an advanced urban society found the need for local shrines within the city ahead of other areas. The large platform at Dan (Iron Age, 10th-9th centuries) appears to have had adjacent buildings connected with the shrine./59/ The Kenyon shrine at Jerusalem (Iron Age *c.* 700) illustrates some of the features of a town *bamah* of the divided monarchy period./60/

Another type of *bamah*, mentioned only once in the OT, is the gate-shrine (2 Kings 23:8) and is paralleled by archaeological evidence from Tirzah and Dan, and

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64. G. Loud, *Megiddo II, seasons of 1935-1939* (Chicago, 1948).
65. Y. Aharoni, *IEJ* 17 (1967) 170 and *BA* 3 (1968) 19.
66. E. Stern, *IEJ* 18 (1968) 193-4.
67. Y. Aharoni, 'Excavations at Tel Beersheba', *BA* 35 (1972) 111-127.
68. Y. Yadin *et al.*, *Hazor*, Vol. 2 (1959) 127-139.

perhaps also from Hazor and Beersheba. The Tirzah shrine (Iron Age, 1000-722) was a small stone platform with a pillar and basin, which went through several phases during its three centuries of life./69/ At Dan (Iron Age 10th-9th centuries) a small structure in the gate which was covered by a canopy has been discovered./70/ At Beersheba (Iron Age, 10th century) a fine incense altar was found near the gate and may have stood nearby./71/ Carl Graesser reports a small cultic installation by the gate of Hazor./72/ Gate-*bamoth* were doubtless very simple affairs and are to be associated with threshold superstitions. They may well have been more common than the few discoveries indicate. Their simplicity will have meant they rarely survived an invader's destruction of the gate.

The tendency of a shrine to change its status, as illustrated in the OT at Bethel and Gibeon, is frequently shown by archaeology. The sacredness attached to a holy site leads to a tendency to perpetuate the location. Thus, if the evidence can be accepted as reported, the barren eminence of Chalcolithic Bethel (3000) was followed by a temple in MB1./73/ Megiddo's structure 4017 (EB/MB, 2500-1900) was joined in successive periods by three temples erected alongside./64/ At Sukas (Early Iron 1150-675) Complex IV and the level area around it preceded the Greek temple./74/ At Arad (Early Iron, 11th century) the *bamah* of Stratum XII was replaced by a temple in Stratum XI./65/

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69. R. de Vaux, *RB* 58 (1951) 428; and in *Archaeology and Old Testament Study*, ed. D. Winton Thomas (Oxford, 1967) 376-377; Graesser, *op. cit.*, 52.
70. A. Biran, *op. cit.*
71. Y. Aharoni, *op. cit.*
72. Graesser, *op. cit.*, 56. No detailed description or
73. reference is given.
W. F. Albright and J. L. Kelso, *The Excavation of Bethel (1934-1960)*, (*AASOR* 39) 1968, 20-27; D. L. Newlands, 'Sacrificial Blood at Bethel?', *PEQ* July-December 1972, 155.
74. P. J. Riis, *Sukas 1, The North East Sanctuary* (Copenhagen, 1970).

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At Lachish (Early Iron, 10th century) there may well have been a 'High Place' before the later Solar Shrine. /75/ At Qedesh (Iron Age, 10-9th centuries) the 'High Place' of Stratum V was covered by a room containing an altar in Stratum IV./66/ Dan appears to be an unusual example of a *bamah* which remained fundamentally unchanged for many centuries./59/ Its excavator suggests it was erected by Jeroboam I and was still in use in Hellenistic times. The inference to be drawn from these shrines is that the only difference between a *bamah* and a *hekhal* was size. The shrines of a community which grew in wealth and status could be 'promoted' whereas neglect, due to political, economic or religious factors, might result in a 'demotion'.

Literary and archaeological evidence also complement one another about the structures and cults of the *bamoth*. Despite some slight indications that early *bamoth* may have been tents,/76/ it is clear from the verbs used in the OT to 'construct' or 'destroy' a *bamah* that for the most part they were man-made structures requiring considerable effort to build or to demolish. Mesha's use of עשׂה and his erection of a commemorative stele on completion of the project have the same implication. Shrines at Megiddo,/64/ Dan/59/ and Samaria/63/ must have involved substantial planning and effort. The destroyers of the altar from Hazor's shrine 8019 had in fact been unable completely to dislodge the altar 8002 and left it at a rakish angle for the excavators to find./68/ The OT indicates that some, though not all, of the *bamoth* had buildings attached to them. Excavated shrines in the towns of Megiddo,/64/ Hazor,/68/ Arad,/65/ Lachish,/75/ Tirzah /69/ and Jerusalem Kenyon/60/ were surrounded with houses, although it is not easy to prove that any of them were specifically associated with the shrine. Hazor's Shrine 6136 in Area C had a potter's shop attached to it./68/ The Kenyon shrine at Jerusalem was associated with nearby caves/60/ and several of the Petra shrines had houses and dining rooms closely connected with the shrine./22/

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75. Y. Aharoni, *IEJ* Vols. 16, 18, 19.
76. See the proper name Oholibamah, 'tent of the high place' (Gen. 36:2) and also, possibly, Ezek. 16:16.

Two other types of archaeological evidence which may be relevant to the physical appearance of *bamoth* are shrine houses and cultic scenes. Several shrine houses are known known from ancient ruins including well known examples from Beth Shan and Megiddo. Several are in a very poor state of preservation but can be partially reconstructed and appear to have been used as stands for incense bowls in shrines./77/ At Gezer, Macalister found another type of pottery shrine, consisting of a small courtyard with some fragments of walls and door sills. Unfortunately the shrine itself had been completely broken off and the object is badly reported and photographed./78/

Another type is represented by two examples: one was bought from a Trans-Jordanian dealer in 1947, its exact provenance being unknown./79/ It is barrel-shaped and has clear indications of an attempt to represent a pillar at each side of the barrel. A similar type, although more elegant in appearance, comes from a pit in Stratum III, Tell el Farah./80/ It seems that at least some attempt is being made in these two shrines to give a visual impression of a religious building. There are obvious parallels with pillars used in other religious buildings, the most well known being the pillars of Jachin and Boaz which flanked the entrances to Solomon's temple./81/ A number of scenes depicting worship on platforms, or with some of the main features of *bamoth*, have been discovered in archaeological research, and a selection of them are given in W. L. Reed's *The Asherah* (1949). Unfortunately such items prove little, as there is insufficient evidence to link them with the *bamoth*. More instructive, though still not definite evidence, is the Sit-Samsi tablet, discovered in the 1904-1905 campaign at Susa./82/ It was found in the centre of the

77. A. Rowe, *The Four Canaanite Temples of Beth-Shan* (1940) 44-56; H. G. May, *Material Remains of the Megiddo Cult* (1935) 13-17.
78. R. A. S. Macalister, *Gezer*, Vol. 2, 437-439.
79. J. H. Iliffe, 'A model shrine of Phoenician Style', *QDAP* 11 (1944) 91-92.
80. R. de Vaux, *RB* 62 (1955) 571-2; also in *Archaeology and OT Study*, 376.
81. A. Parrot, *The Temple of Jerusalem* (1956).
82. J. E. Gautier in *Memoires....Perse*, Vol. 12 (1911) 143-151.

mound with nothing about its location to suggest a shrine nearby. However, the scene it depicts is unquestionably of a cult ceremony and the inscription can be read sufficiently clearly to show that it was dedicated by the Elamite King Silhak-in-Susinak as a 'Sit-Samsi' towards the end of the 12th century BC. Interpretation of 'Sit-Samsi' is not without difficulty, but it is usually held to represent a dawn or sunrise ritual of ablution. The plaque depicts two naked men in the centre, presumably priests, performing the ceremony, also trees, pillars, posts and two large platforms or altars.

Few images are discovered in Palestinian excavations, perhaps because they were destroyed by the zeal of the enemy. Hazor's Shrine 6162 in Area C produced a seated figure in basalt but he could be a king, governor or god./68/ Nahariyah/62/ and Samaria/63/ produced many male, female and animal figurines, but we cannot say with confidence that any of the images associated with the *bamoth* have been found. The literary evidence indicates that every *bamah* had an altar and the shrines of Hazor F, Hazor C/68/ and Jerusalem Kenyon/60/ provide examples. At Bethel,/73/ Megiddo,/64/ Nahariyah,/62/ Sukas,/74/ Arad,/65/ Dan,/59/ Samaria/63/ and Jerusalem Tumuli/26/ there was some kind of platform or level area which may have served either as a base for an altar or in place of one. Incense altars (חמנים) or basins have come from the Hazor Shrines,/68/ Lachish,/75/ Tirzah/69/ and Beersheba./67/ *Masseboth* are not always easy to identify, but credible examples have been found at Nahariyah,/62/ Hazor C,/63/ Arad,/65/ Tirzah,/69/ Lachish/75/ and Jerusalem Kenyon./60/ A preliminary report by the excavators of Lachish even claims a burnt Asherah./75/

Archaeological evidence also parallels the fertility cults of the *bamoth*. Animal bones, thought to be from sacrifices, were found at Megiddo,/64/ Nahariyah,/62/ Hazor F,/68/ Sukas,/74/ Arad/65/ and Samaria./63/ Bloodstains were claimed by the excavators of Chalcolithic Bethel./73/ The incense altars mentioned above are as much evidence as we can expect of this type of offering. The oily deposit at Nahariyah is probably a unique survival of ancient libation./62/ However, the most common deposit on any Palestinian site is pottery, and the quantities which have come from every excavated *bamah* not only assist dating, but also

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indicate aspects of the cult. Vessels of a clearly cultic character have come from several sites. From Nahariyah came dozens of small pottery bowls with seven cups, and several seven-wick saucer lamps;/62/ from Hazor F an alabaster double goblet;/68/ from Hazor C curved sided and carinated vessels, also a pottery cult mask;/68/ from Dan an oil lamp with seven spouts./59/ Quantities of ordinary household pottery were found at all the sites, and it is likely that they had contained the *qorbanim* brought to the shrine. They could not pass back into secular use for, in the later Jewish phrase, they 'made the hands unclean' so they were deposited in *favissae*, either whole (as at Jerusalem Kenyon/60/) or having been deliberately smashed.

Israel was bound ultimately to reject the *bamoth* if she was to remain true to her historic faith. During the dual monarchy period some loyal Yahwists did use *bamoth* in the service of Yahweh. This was done as D. F. Payne put it 'in all innocence'/83/ but must be judged as naive. It was left to finer spiritual insight to realize the danger of syncretism which this involved. The political instability of the three centuries before the Exile gave full rein to any local experiment, and as *bamoth* became established in the towns, so, to those who cherished Israel's historic traditions, the picture darkened. The publication of the Book of the Law in 621 and the reform of Josiah were attempts to implement the vision of one nation, one God and one temple. Josiah's reform therefore was the beginning of the end of the *bamoth*, even though his successors did not follow his lead. But Judah could no longer survive on the stage of world history by changing her course and her policy with every wind. Involvement with the empires of the day proved her undoing, as Isaiah had predicted, more than a century before. Her inner life eaten away by amoral cults, Judah had no vision and so the people perished. Nemesis came at last with the Babylonian invasion and exile, which gave an opportunity for national soul-searching, and it was a very different nation which returned a generation later.

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83. D. F. Payne, in *New Bible Dictionary* (1962) 115.

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The end of the *bamoth* is as difficult to date as the end of the Canaanite religion itself. Their demise is lost in the obscurity of the post-exilic era. All that can be said is that they disappear from both the literary and archaeological evidence at the time when Judaism began to emerge as a central orthodoxy, based, as Simon the Just later expressed it, 'on the Torah, on the (temple) service and on the doing of kindness'./84/

The *bamoth* were not a wholly negative experience for Israel; some positive lessons were learned.

First the connection between height and divinity had been re-inforced. It would not be correct to say that it was the *bamoth* which first taught Israel to connect the two; Mount Sinai was the definitive height experience of the Israelite faith. Nevertheless it is striking how many important events of the Bible take place on heights and the *bamoth* appear to have made a contribution to a vital motif of the Judaeo- Christian tradition. As Dr. Tewfik Canaan expressed it:

> It is interesting to note that all the great divine works have, traditionally, been performed on mountains: Ararat and the ark of Noah, Moriah and Abraham's sacrifice, Sinai and the law, Ebal and Gerizim with the blessing and the cursing. It is the same also with Jesus: on a mountain he was tempted, was transfigured, preached, prayed, was crucified, and from a mountain he ascended to heaven./85/

Secondly, the experience of the *bamoth* before the Exile made a dual contribution to the development of Judaism after the Exile. The origins of the synagogue are still obscure but are usually held to be in the small groups meeting for prayer during the Exile. Parallels with the *bamoth* are instructive. Both were for the expression of religious devotion on a local level, but *bamah* worship centred on sacrifice, whereas the synagogues were 'houses for prayer' and based firmly on obedience to the Torah. The amount of control over the early synagogues

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84. Quoted in the *Pirke Aboth*, 1:2.
85. T. Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine* (Luzak, 1927) 6.

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exercised by the Jerusalem Temple is unknown, but it is certain that sacrifice was reserved to Jerusalem. As time went on Judaism became increasingly centrally organized by Torah and temple.

In rejecting unitary views of the *bamoth*, whether platforms or tomb-shrines, we are being true to the spirit of Canaanite religion. It was essentially a response in polytheistic fertility terms to the concerns of an agricultural way of life. Central control was foreign to its nature and made impossible by political fragmentation. Variety was of its essence. *Bamoth* were therefore different things in different places at different times. Jeremiah, agonizing over Judah's infidelity, contrasted the One whom they had given up with the worthless substitutes: 'On me they have turned their back.....for you Judah have as many gods as you have towns.' (Jer. 2:27-28)

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