Introduction

The discovery of the Khirbet el-Qom and Kuntillet ʿAjrud material in recent years has caused scholars to reconsider many previously held beliefs concerning the nature of Israelite religion. The mention of 'Yahweh (and) his asherah' in the inscriptions has generated much discussion and controversy. It is the intention of this study to examine this material in detail, and to try to discover just what the ancient Israelites meant by 'Yahweh (and) his asherah'.

The first chapter provides an introduction to the problem, and discusses the various interpretations of the Hebrew word *ʾăšērāh*, whether a type of wooden cultic object, the goddess Asherah, or both. I next consider the different PhD dissertations and recent books which have been written on various aspects concerning asherah.

I use the word *ʾăšērāh* as an English loan word, with both a capital and a small 'a'. I use the spelling Asherah only in those cases where it is certain that the goddess is indicated. In all other instances the lower case letter is used. This does not mean that 'asherah' (in my comments) never refers to the goddess; it simply means that it is not absolutely certain whether the goddess or her image is indicated. Furthermore, for those words such as asherah which have become more or less common loan words, I have used an Anglicized form; these include massebah and bamah (as well as their plurals) and most proper names such as Athirat, El, Baal, Astarte, Anat and the like. Transliteration is used whenever a technical discussion is entertained.

Chapter 2 introduces the Ugaritic material, and examines Athirat's role in the Canaanite pantheon. I next discuss the possible origin of the goddess, and the etymology of *ʾăšērāh*. In general I use the most common forms of the various Ugaritic and Hittite names (whose precise vocalization is not known anyway) in this chapter, such as Keret, Pabil, Huray and Elkunirša. I am not attempting to make any new contribution in this chapter, apart from those places where I interact with the views of other scholars. The main purpose of the chapter is to establish the identity of the goddess in the Ugaritic literature.

Chapter 3 considers the biblical material. An introductory look at the verbs which are used with asherah is followed by brief discussions on the deuteronomistic influence upon the verses which mention asherah, and the historicity of Josiah's reform. The next section examines the use of the definite article

with asherah. From this inspection of the material, I believe that one can discern the beginnings of the shift in meaning of asherah from the goddess and her image to that of only a wooden pole, with no specific deity represented.

I then consider in detail those verses which appear to mention the goddess, and in which the beginnings of the confusion between goddess and cultic pole are to be found. There follows a discussion of the views of other scholars about two verses which may allude to the goddess, and the chapter ends with my own conclusions about asherah on the basis of the biblical material.

In chapter 4 I discuss inscription no. 3 from Khirbet el-Qom in detail. The reading and translation of the inscription are my own, and are supported by my own autograph copy, although I acknowledge my general agreement with Lemaire's reading. An earlier, shorter version of this chapter has appeared in *Vetus Testamentum* 37, pp. 50–62 (Hadley 1987a).

Chapter 5 examines the finds from Kuntillet ʿAjrud, and includes a discussion of the nature of the site. I argue that the site was not a religious centre. The first section of this chapter contains that discussion. An earlier, shorter version of that discussion has appeared in *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 125, pp. 115–24 (Hadley 1993). The rest of chapter 5 considers the inscriptions and drawings on two pithoi discovered at the site. An earlier version of this discussion has been published in *Vetus Testamentum* 37, pp. 180–213 (Hadley 1987b). The proposed readings of the inscriptions (now including one of the inscriptions on plaster which Meshel believes contains a reference to Yahweh of Teman and (his) asherah) are largely my own, but since I was unable to study these inscriptions close up, I have had to rely to a certain extent upon the drawings, photographs and interpretation of others. My examination of the drawings makes use of Pirhiya Beck's excellent analysis of the artwork, but I carry the discussion further, and offer an interpretation of the drawings and a detailed refutation of Dever's proposals. My conclusions are summarized at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 6 considers some other finds which help to shed light on the worship of Asherah. First I discuss the Late Bronze Age ewer, gold plaque and 'asherah' discovered at Lachish. Ruth Hestrin's article on the decoration of the ewer is the most comprehensive to be published to date. In it, she comes to many of the same conclusions as I have about the iconography of Asherah, relating not only to the ewer, but to the Kuntillet ʿAjrud pithos as well. Many of my ideas on the topic were briefly summarized in *VT*, and from Hestrin's references it is clear that she knew my article. I next discuss the relatively unknown cultic stands from Pella. I am indebted to Dr Timothy Potts for discussing the topic with me, and to Dr Alan Walmsley and Professor Basil Hennessy for providing me with photographs of the stands. Next I turn to the cultic stands from Taanach. I discuss the less well-known stand discovered by Sellin as well as that discovered by Lapp. Concerning the latter, J. Glen Taylor has identified the two deities related to the stand as Asherah and Yahweh,

instead of Baal, as most other scholars believe. After an examination of the salient points of the dispute, I have decided to follow Taylor and throw in my lot with Yahweh. I next consider the new inscription from Ekron, mentioning asherah in the form of *ʾšrt*. This attestation, although possibly in a non-Hebrew inscription, raises anew the suggestion by Zevit and others that perhaps the term asherah at Kuntillet ʿAjrud and Khirbet el-Qom should be read 'Asherata'. Alternatively, the term *ʾšrt* at Ekron may refer to a shrine, and not the goddess Asherah. The last find under discussion in this chapter is the small ivory pomegranate 'discovered' in an antiquities shop in the Old City of Jerusalem, and which most scholars believe comes from the Jerusalem temple. A brief section relating my conclusions about the finds discovered at these sites ends the chapter.

In chapter 7, I consider the many female figurines which have been found at numerous sites in Palestine. My discussion of the Middle and Late Bronze Age figurines is largely based upon Tadmor's views, but I have added an examination of the Iron Age figurines and a criticism of Engle's views, as well as a brief discussion of two new figurines discovered near Ekron and at Aphek.

Chapter 8 contains a summary of my conclusions about the completed study.

1
An introduction to asherah

In recent years archaeological discoveries have helped to shed some light on the goddess Asherah and her possible role in Israelite religion. Because of these discoveries, much has been written on what has become a quickly developing subject. In this introductory chapter, I shall first discuss the basic views about the meaning of the term 'asherah', followed by a brief summary of some of the relevant dissertations and monographs.

A. Who or what is asherah?

Scholarly opinion differs widely concerning the identification of asherah, but can be broken down into two general categories: first, that the term 'asherah' in the Hebrew Bible did not refer to a goddess at all, but described solely an object (either some type of wooden image, a sanctuary, a grove or a living tree); and secondly, that asherah could indicate both a wooden image and the name of a specific goddess. These two basic positions will now be discussed briefly.

(1) Asherah as merely an object

Before the discovery of the Ugaritic material (see chapter 2), this interpretation was most prevalent. Admittedly, in most of the verses in the Hebrew Bible which mention asherah, it is clear that some sort of wooden object is meant (see chapter 3.A). In those few verses which appear to indicate a goddess, most scholars assumed that the goddess was Astarte, as a goddess Asherah was unknown at that time (although a few scholars, including Barton, Sayce, and Kuenen and his followers, held to (2) below; see Kuenen 1874; Barton 1891, pp. 82–3; and cf. Emerton 1993). W. Robertson Smith, on the other hand, believed that asherah always referred to a wooden pole, which had no divine associations whatsoever (1907, pp. 188–9; and cf. Hadley 1995a for a full discussion of Smith's views concerning the asherah). Reed (1949) includes an excellent summary of this position up to the time of his writing, and so there is no need to discuss these older writers here. However, a few more recent scholars (notably Lipiński and Lemaire) have followed this position, and so a brief examination of their views is in order.

Lipiński (1972) mentions that a goddess Athirat/Asherah is known from Arabian, Babylonian, Akkadian and Ugaritic texts (see also chapter 2). However, in the Hebrew Bible, Lipiński believes that asherah refers rather to a sacred grove or shrine (1972, p. 112). He believes that Hebrew asherah is to be compared with the corresponding Akkadian, Phoenician and Aramaic terms which designate a shrine or sanctuary (1972, p. 116; cf. also chapter 2.B.2). He states (1972, p. 112) that in the earliest texts (Judg. vi 25–30 and Deut. xvi 21), as well as Ex. xxxiv 13; Deut. vii 5; xii 3; II Ki. xviii 4; xxiii 14, 15; II Chron. xiv 2 (v. 3 in Eng.); xxxi 1; and Mi. v 13 (v. 14 in Eng.), the asherah is a Canaanite sacred grove, whereas in the monarchic period, asherah could also denote a chapel or shrine (e.g. I Ki. xiv 15, 23; xv 13; xvi 33; II Ki. xiii 6; xvii 10, 16; xxi 3, 7; xxiii 6, 7; II Chron. xv 16; xix 3; xxiv 18; xxxiii 3, 19; xxxiv 4, 7 (although Lipiński erroneously cites the chapter as xxxiii); Isa. xvii 8; xxvii 9; and Jer. xvii 2). In Lipiński's opinion, the only texts which mention a goddess or her emblems are Judg. iii 7 and I Ki. xviii 19, both of which he considers textually dubious (1972, p. 114, and see the discussion of these verses in chapter 3.E.1, 3).

Emerton (1982), Winter (1983) and Day (1986) disagree with Lipiński's interpretation of asherah. Emerton notes that the verbs used with asherah in the Hebrew Bible seem to indicate that it is a wooden symbol of a goddess (1982, pp. 17–18; cf. U. Winter 1983, p. 556, and chapter 3.A). Emerton (1982, p. 18, and cf. Day 1986, p. 403) further disagrees with Lipiński's translation of 'grove' in II Ki. xviii 4 and xxiii 14, 15, as opposed to 'shrine' in I Ki. xiv 23 and II Ki. xvii 10. Emerton observes that all these verses contain a polemic against bamoth, masseboth, and asherah or asherim, and so asherah should probably have the same meaning in each verse. 'The former group of verses refers to the Asherah being cut down and Lipiński agrees that a shrine is not meant, and the latter says that the Asherah was found under a tree and tells against the view that it was a grove. If both groups of verses are taken together, they suggest that the Asherah was neither a shrine nor a grove' (1982, p. 18).

With regard to Judg. iii 7 and I Ki. xviii 19, Day believes that even if these two verses are textually dubious (which seems likely; see chapter 3.E.1, 3), the parallelism in both verses with Baalim (or Baal) still testifies that the term asherah carries with it some understanding of divinity (Day 1986, p. 400).

Furthermore, both Emerton and Day note that Lipiński fails to discuss II Ki. xxiii 4, which describes the vessels which were made for the Baal, the asherah and all the host of heaven (Lipiński merely dismisses this verse in a footnote, saying that it summarizes II Ki. xxi 3; 1972, p. 113 n. 77). As asherah is here mentioned between the god Baal and the heavenly deities, both Emerton and Day believe that asherah more likely refers to either the goddess or at least the symbol of a goddess, rather than a shrine (Emerton 1982, p. 18; Day 1986, p. 401).

Lemaire believes that the interpretation which fits the majority of the verses in the Hebrew Bible is that the asherah is a living tree. He believes that

'asherah' is the technical term for a sacred tree planted beside an altar, just as 'massebah' is the technical term for a standing stone (1977, p. 605). There are a few verses in which this interpretation is a little awkward, which he admits. In all the verses where the verb *ʿśh* 'to make' is used (I Ki. xiv 15; xvi 33; II Ki. xvii 16; xxi 3, 7; and II Chron. xxxiii 3), he believes that the verb is used in a more general sense, and does not necessarily imply that the subject of the verb must be fabricated. He uses as a parallel I Ki. xii 32 (although he does not specify which of the four occurrences in this verse of *ʿśh* he means). The first refers to a feast, and the second to an offering upon the altar. The third occurrence refers to the calves which Jeroboam had made, and is therefore straightforward. The last instance is in conjunction with the priests of the high place which he had made. In the previous verse, *ʿśh* is used for both the high place and the priests, and so the verb could here refer to either. Although one cannot strictly interpret making a feast, offering or priest as a fabrication, nevertheless in all these instances the thing 'made' could not exist (or be instituted) without human action. A person needs to be made into a priest. However, this is not the case for a tree. It is possible that an ordinary tree needs to be 'made' into a sacred tree in some way, but that is far from proven. Besides, Lemaire has cited only one reference by means of explanation for six occurrences. On the basis of the information which we have, it is more likely that the verb in these instances refers to some sort of object which is constructed. He similarly explains the use of *bnh* 'to build' in I Ki. xiv 23 and *nṣb* (Hiphil) 'to set up' in II Ki. xvii 10 as referring to the other objects mentioned (bamoth and masseboth) (1977, p. 606).

Lemaire admits that in certain texts it appears as though asherah represents a goddess. He attributes these verses to the deuteronomistic redactor who wanted to eradicate the cult of the asherahs (sacred trees) by associating them with Baal and hence idolatrous practices (1977, p. 606). Day is unconvinced by this argument, and views it as a 'desperate attempt' by Lemaire to explain away these passages which do not agree with his interpretation. Day further notes that 'Lemaire nowhere comes to terms with the fact that it would be a remarkable coincidence for the Deuteronomic redactors to create a Canaanite goddess Asherah in such a haphazard way when there actually was a prominent Canaanite deity with the very same name, as we know from the Ugaritic texts' (1986, p. 400). As Day observes, it is far more likely that any allusions to a goddess Asherah in the Hebrew Bible would refer to the Syro-Palestinian goddess of that name, despite the interval of a few hundred years.

Finally, the references to the *miṗleṣeṯ* which Maacah made for the asherah (I Ki. xv 13 and II Chron. xv 16) as well as the women who wove *bāttîm* for the asherah (II Ki. xxiii 7, not xxxiii 7 as cited by Lemaire), Lemaire dismisses as 'enigmatic'. He states that the weavings could be hangings to be placed upon the sacred tree, but that the interpretation of these passages remains uncertain (1977, pp. 606–7, and see chapter 3.E.2, 5). It is true that these pas-

sages pose difficulties, but these problems are not so great if one supposes that either the goddess or her image is indicated here.

It therefore appears that the interpretation of 'asherah' as merely an object (whether sanctuary, grove, wooden pole or living tree) does not fully meet the requirements as presented in the Hebrew Bible. Let us now turn to the alternative position.

(2) Asherah as both a goddess and her image

As mentioned above, this view has gained considerable popularity, especially after the discovery of the Ras Shamra material which definitely established the identity of a goddess Asherah. Indeed, most modern scholars hold this view, albeit with some differences (e.g. Cross, Day, Dever, Emerton, Freedman, Meshel, Patai and Reed, to mention but a few).

As will be seen in chapter 2, the identity of the Ugaritic goddess Athirat is in no doubt. Chapter 3 discusses the nature of asherah in the Hebrew Bible, where it is seen that most of the references indicate some sort of wooden object, whereas a few verses seem to refer to the goddess (see chapter 3.E for a full discussion of these verses). The idea that a cultic object can bear the same name as the deity which it represents is not necessarily a foreign concept to the people of the ancient Near East, to whom the worship of the symbol of a god or goddess was identical with the worship of the deity represented. This could lead to the hypostatization of certain attributes of the deity, which in turn became deified (cf. Olyan 1988). An example of a fertility goddess depicted with her symbol is given by Hartmann (Abb. 1). That the symbol represents that particular goddess is clear by the fact that they both have the same style of branches. Of course in this instance it is impossible to tell if the image and the deity are called by the same name. However, on an Egyptian seal, the goddess Nut is depicted standing next to a tree. That the tree represents the goddess is clear from the fact that the word 'Nut' is written above the head of the goddess as well as on the trunk of the tree (Keel 1978, fig. 255, and Winter 1983, Abb. 466; and see chapter 5.D for a fuller discussion). It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that the same term (asherah) can be used to describe both the goddess and the symbol of the goddess. This is similar to the view of M. S. Smith, who distinguishes between Asherah the goddess and asherah the cult object, but he believes that already by the time of the Judges the term asherah referred to a symbol that was a part of the Yahweh cult and did not symbolize a goddess (1990, p. 16), although passages such as Gen. xlix 22–6 may refer to worship of Asherah as a goddess (as El's consort), but that did not persist into the monarchy period (1990, p. 19; although cf. Smith 1994, p. 206 where he says that Asherah *was* a goddess in Israel during the Iron Age). However, it will be suggested here that one can trace the 'evolution' of the term asherah in the Hebrew Bible from indicating both the goddess and her symbol to merely a designation of the object itself (see chapter 3).

A few scholars (notably Yamashita, Bernhardt and Spieckermann) agree that a goddess Asherah is mentioned in the Old Testament, but do not believe that she is to be associated in any way with the Ugaritic goddess of the same name. Yamashita's reasoning will be discussed below (chapter 1.B.2). Spieckermann believes that Asherah, Astarte and the host of heaven are Assyrian imports, forced upon the ancient Israelites by their Assyrian overlords. Asherah is therefore related to the Assyrian Ishtar (1982, pp. 212–21). This view will be discussed more fully in chapter 3.C. However, if the origin of Asherah was the Assyrian Ishtar, then why did the ancient Israelites call her Asherah and not Ishtar? If they called her by the name of Asherah (even if they considered her to be identical with Ishtar), it is reasonable to assume that there must have been a local goddess by the name of Asherah; otherwise why would they choose that particular name as opposed to the one she already had? As there was a Ugaritic goddess Athirat, it seems plausible that the local inhabitants would identify the new Assyrian goddess with their own similar indigenous one, if Spieckermann's theory is correct.

Bernhardt believes that the two goddesses are related in name only, and that the Ugaritic texts present a picture of the specific situation at Ugarit alone. He says that 'gewiß sind die Götter und Mythen Ugarits parallelen Größen in anderen Städten Phönikiens und Kanaans verwandt; aber sie tragen eben doch ein unverkennbares lokales Gepräge' (1967, p. 167), i.e. he assumes that the situation is similar at other sites, that one has collections of locally formed myths, which therefore reflect the relationship between the various cults on a local level. Bernhardt thus believes that the 'identity of name' between the various deities does not mean much. They may have had a common origin in antiquity, but the important consideration is their function and position in the local pantheon, which may differ widely among the different city-states (1967, pp. 168–9). However, it is also possible that gods of the same name were identical. This would be expected when one is talking about a god being sent out as a 'god-export' to found a subsidiary holy place. Bernhardt believes that the extent to which this similarity of name indicates similarity of function can be determined only in individual cases (1967, p. 169). In his opinion, the only Ugaritic deity for whom there is clear evidence of a 'god-export' situation is Baal, in the case of the Hittite Elkunirša myth (cf. chapter 2.B.2), although the god(s) Kothar (-and-) Khasis shows a case of 'god-import' (1967, p. 169 n. 29). Bernhardt therefore believes that one should exercise caution before identifying Hebrew Asherah with Ugaritic Athirat, especially since there is a gap of 400 years between the two accounts. He notes that Athirat is a goddess of the sea and a mother goddess, with no evidence that she is a vegetation goddess. Indeed, she is often portrayed as antagonistic towards the fertility god Baal (1967, p. 171, and cf. chapter 2). On the other hand, asherah is most frequently a cult object, and a special form of a fertility goddess in the shape of a tree goddess. Furthermore, in Bernhardt's opinion, Asherah is often associated with Baal instead of El, and therefore bears no similarity with the Ugaritic deity of the same name (1967, pp. 172–3).

The following arguments can be presented against Bernhardt. First, it is not unreasonable to assume that a deity will take over specific needs in the local pantheon. The origin of Athirat/Asherah will be discussed in chapter 2.B, but it may be that she came to Ugarit from Amurru, where she was the goddess of the steppe. Since the coastal city of Ugarit had no need for an inland goddess, she took on the attributes of a sea goddess, but her earlier inland associations may be seen in a donkey for her chosen mount (not a very typical choice for a sea goddess!), and a few myths which locate her in the desert lands or the fringes of settled society (cf. especially Shachar and Shalim). It may be that the Hebrew Asherah is a direct 'descendant' of Amorite Ašratum, and did not come to Israel by way of Ugarit, although that cannot be proved. However, given the fact that Athirat still retains some of her inland characteristics, despite her identity as a sea goddess, it is not surprising to find that these inland characteristics were modified to suit the specific needs of ancient Israel.

Bernhardt mentions (1967, p. 171) that there is no evidence at all that Athirat was a goddess of fertility or love. However, this may not be totally true. The myth of Shachar and Shalim (*CTA* 23) may show some erotic characteristics of Athirat. Additionally, in recent years scholars have been returning to the question of identifying the numerous female figurines which have been discovered in Palestine, dating from the Middle and Late Bronze Age. On the basis of the material from Ugarit, many scholars now associate at least some of these figurines with Athirat (cf. especially Tadmor 1981, 1982a, 1982b, and chapter 7). Furthermore, an Egyptian stele published by Edwards bears a depiction of a naked goddess, with an inscription which reads 'Qudshu-Astarte-Anath'. This stele, together with certain Ugaritic texts, has led many scholars to identify Qudshu with Athirat (cf. e.g. Cross 1973; Pettey 1985 and 1990; Maier 1986; Day 1986; and cf. chapter 2.B.1). This identification seems probable, thereby showing that Athirat did have fertility characteristics, although these were not fully exploited in the Ugaritic texts. It is possible that, as the Ugaritic pantheon already had a fertility goddess in Astarte, this aspect of Athirat's character did not need to be stressed. However this need was not fully met in the Palestinian region, and so these characteristics appear more prominent in the Hebrew Asherah. Furthermore, Schroer (1987b) discusses some Late Bronze Age pendants from Ugarit and Minet el-Beida, which depict a stylized 'twig goddess'. She is naked, and has a tree or branch carved beneath the navel or over the pubic area. On several plaques she wears a Hathor hairstyle. Similar plaques have been found in Palestine, and together with the Syrian ones probably represent Athirat/Asherah (although one must be cautious in identifying these depictions with any one goddess; cf. Winter 1983, pp. 192–9, and chapter 7). There is therefore little difficulty in admitting the fertility characteristics of both Athirat and Asherah, especially considering that in the ancient Near East the same attribute is often shared by more than one deity.

The apparent discrepancy between the alleged consorts of the two goddesses need not be worrisome either. In the Ugaritic literature, Athirat is the

consort of the chief god, El. However, some scholars believe that Asherah in the Old Testament is to be paired with Baal. Day says that the Hittite Elkunirša myth shows that Athirat is already leaning towards Baal (1986, p. 399, and chapter 2.B.2 where this myth is discussed more fully). This may be so. However, a sure connection between the deity Asherah (as opposed to the wooden symbol) and Baal in the Hebrew Bible has yet to be proved (see chapter 3). It may be that the deuteronomists tried to discredit Asherah's cult by associating her with Baal, when in actual fact during the period of the monarchy there was no such understanding. It is interesting that the only references which we have to asherah (whether goddess or cult object) in Hebrew from extra-biblical sources occur with Yahweh, and not Baal (see chapters 4 and 5). Although Baal occurs as well in inscriptions at Kuntillet ʿAjrud, he is not mentioned with asherah.

Bernhardt also mentions that Athirat was considered the mother of the gods, and that Asherah was not understood as such. He mentions the listing of the asherah with the host of heaven (II Ki. xvii 16; xxi 3; and xxiii 4), but states that there is no comment in any of these verses about the relationship between the host of heaven and Asherah. He admits that the Old Testament is somewhat ambiguous about the worship of the host of heaven in any case (1967, p. 173). On the basis of his admissions, to conclude that Asherah has no function as a mother goddess may be premature. We simply do not have enough evidence from the Hebrew Bible, about either the goddess Asherah or the host of heaven. The Kuntillet ʿAjrud and Khirbet el-Qom material (as well as Deut. xvi 21) shows that either the goddess Asherah or her symbol is closely connected with the worship of Yahweh. It must be mentioned, however, that Bernhardt wrote before the discovery of this material. Day notes that 'the sons of God (deriving from the Ugaritic *bn ʾil*) are clearly the sons of Yahweh in the OT, [and so] it follows that the sons of God were regarded as Asherah's offspring in syncretistic circles. Since the sons of God clearly correspond with the host of heaven (cf. Job 38:7), it appears that we may hold that the host of heaven were probably regarded as the offspring of Asherah' (1986, pp. 399–400). Day thus believes that there is evidence that Asherah was considered to be the mother of the gods in Israel, just as was Athirat at Ugarit. This view would be strengthened if one were to identify the pillar figurines of a woman holding her breasts with the goddess Asherah. These figurines date from the period of the monarchy, and are found at numerous sites throughout Judah, as well as a few sites in Israel (see chapter 7 for a full discussion).

Finally, there is no real difficulty with the gap of 400 years from the time of the Ugaritic texts until the earliest biblical records. The mere fact that the fourteenth-century BCE people at Ugarit sought to keep copies of their older legends seems to indicate that they still had some interest in them. It is far more likely that knowledge of the goddess Athirat/Asherah remained within the local cults, although not mentioned, than that her cult faded completely, and that when the ancient Israelites discovered their fertility goddess, they just