

## **The Goddess, “Asherah”: An Appraisal of Yahweh’s Wife in the Old Testament.**

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### ABSTRACT

*It is a common saying that there is God the father and even God the son but it seems abnormal in the arena of evangelicalism and conservatism to hold to the fact that we also have God the mother. However, the imaginations That God of the Deuteronomistic writers(imaginative monotheistic movement of Old Testament) has no wife and Asherah was envisaging to be the enemy of the Deuteronomistic writers' God but the God of Archaeologists who seems to be anti-scriptural and otherwise scriptural seem to have a wife named Asherah who Deuteronomistic editors divorce her to form a monotheistic ideological group who finalize the scripture to what we are having today as the Hebrew Bible or Christian Old Testament. The issue is, to the scholars like Dever the patriarchs' majority and women that supported the Ashera who is an Israelites goddess were voiceless and pen-less in the Old Testament. The goddess is not a happenstance in the ancient Israelites' religion because she seems to be well respected before Deuteronomistic editors of the Old Testament help Yahweh divorce her, who knows why. It is uniformly veracity that this paper argued comparatively with the religion of ancient near eastern religion that the Yahweh of the Deuteronomic editors who is the God of Israel could be imagining having a Yahweh because it is clearly in the Old Testament that the YHWH is against any worship of deity either masculine or feminine apart from YHWH. I do argue in this paper that the YHWH of the Old Testament literature has a rival, not a wife name Asherah who he used the prophets to warn His people not to worship her but I do know that we can*

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*only claim this reality in our traditional Old Testament Deuteronomistic's ideology. I am not disputing the fact that Israelites were not only aware of the deity (Asherah) but also worship her outside אֲשֶׁרָה, her rival, not her husband.*

Keynotes: Asherah, goddess, Canaanite Religion, Hebrew Bible, El's wife, Yahweh's wife, Archaeology, gods, Ancient Near East.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Does God have a wife? The question is very outlandish to the evangelical and conservative scholars who were familiar with a wifeless God of the Deuteronomistic editors. Hard evangelicals and conservatives usually assert that oh! Oh! Spirit of immortal beings don't marry because they are sexless and they seem to be biologically unproductive because of their nature, why? Because the Bible says so, how sure are we? Plausibly, because we believe that the Deuteronomistic editors of the Bible are right. I do know that we find it difficult to acknowledge the fact that in the world of immortality marriage is unavoidable to ancient near eastern religions; plausibly Israel is all-encompassing. As mortal beings acknowledge the enjoyment of marriage so also seems to be to immortal beings. In the ancient near east marriage seems to be the act of creation by the gods. It is the fact that in the ancient near east gods and goddess creating beings either mortal or immortal out of reproduction like human beings. No sex no creation of human beings and gods in the ANE. Like the story of Apsu(the freshwater) and his beautiful wife Tiamat (the saltwater) in the beginning, and their Commingling produces a new generation of gods.<sup>1</sup> There must be a connection between gods and goddesses before any beings exist. It is hard for those who are well-attested with the ancient near eastern story who could imagine the creation of the world without asking for the woman who involves in the creation. Therefore, the focuses of

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<sup>1</sup> "Atrahasis," Foster, *Before the Muses*, 227-280.

this article on the woman who can be called the mother of the creation of the mortal and immortal beings call Asherah. The gods of the ancient near east, non in exceptional that refuse to marry, but it seems ideological only the makeup deuteronomistic's YHWH of the Old Testament.

Asherah has been presented in the Ugaritic texts' pantheon as the most outstanding goddess of Canaanite<sup>2</sup> religion for decades. It is factually true that there are several references to her in the Old Testament. There are many references, a few we are going to touch on. Remember in the King James Version the name "Asherah" was translated as grove(s). The term Asherah descript as a goddess in the Old Testament and others descript the term as the object of a goddess but there are several arguments about the usage of the term in the Old Testament by archaeologists and scholars of the OT. But was she the wife of Yahweh? Or was she the wife of El? Who is YHWH And who is El?

For years scholars have discovered a bride of a god of a Canaanite pantheon El, playing a prominent role in the Israelite religion. I have hardly found a passage in the scripture that descript Asherah as a wife of Yahweh or a goddess next to Yahweh, but it has been an argument that she seems to be the goddess next to YHWH and even more specific, אֲשֶׁרָה אֱלֹהֵי in the scriptures by the consensus scholars of ancient near eastern and archaeological studies which for sure seem equivocal not only to our Christian faith but also to the entire Judaism at large. Are there proofs that Yahweh marries Asherah? How reliable are the proofs? For researcher is

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<sup>2</sup> "The territory of Canaanites as follows "The Levant's Southern Part, Comprising Palestine, Lebanon, and Southern Syria." Beth Alpert Nakhai, "Archaeology and the Religions of Canaan and Israel." *JSS* 1.7(2001):6. To some Canaanites, boundaries seemed to begin in the south at Wadi al-Arish and reach north to the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Mountain ranges. The western Border was, of course, the Mediterranean and the eastern was Transjordan (mostly the Bashan) and the Jordan rivers and the Death Sea farther south. Nakhai, "Archaeology and the Religions of Canaan and Israel," 7.

imagining evangelicals rebuking the findings if they are reliable but let us be open-minded because that is the solution to maintain our faith in the scripture especially our monotheistic or Monolatry believes. The religion of Israelites historically and archaeologically we don't have evidence that is anti-polytheistic or anti-feminism as Old Testament the product of minority and anti-feminist proclaimed. Dever<sup>3</sup> stated that, the practice of ritual outside Jerusalem Temple at shrines in the home, the family compound, and the gates of the cities, the "high places" and temples other than the official Jerusalem temple built by Solomon.<sup>4</sup> These temples or places of worship highlighted above seem to be the places that Israelites worship YHWH and his pretty wife Asherah to the archaeologists.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Dever asserts, "The family shrines were likely the scene of private, unsupervised, ad hoc worship. Family members "probably stopped briefly at these convenient shrines daily singly or in group and women to him were seen to have unique roles in these places... Mothers in ancient Israel perform several functions among other things; they likely prepared ritual food, burned incense, made vows, and mourned for the dead. William Dever, *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 117& 239-247.

<sup>4</sup> Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?* 260-261..

<sup>5</sup> To Dever and his scholars may agree that Israelites were more comfortable in their closer to home worship than going down to Jerusalem temples. The fact is the closer's church has followers than the long journey church especially today in fact because I don't even to some level observes how bible-based is closer church but as far is close is favourable to me and seems to be my comfort zone, so also seems to be the mentality of the people of Israel in the land of Canaanites. Therefore, worship closer to home was the reality of the everyday religion of Israel. Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?* 260.

## ASHERAH AS A GODDESS

Asherah has been view as a goddess for decades. Scholars and Archaeologists of the Old Testament through their excavations and researchers concurred to the fact that Asherah was a goddess of ancient near eastern religion especially the Canaanites and Israelites. A common nickname for Asherah included “Qudshu” (Holiness), and the goddess was closely associated with childbirth. Yet her roles extended beyond realms generally associated with birth; occasionally she was portrayed as a warrior goddess, defiant—even bellicose. In the earliest Canaanite myths, for instance, she destroyed sea dragon and led to the creation of the universe. The etymology of her name supports this critical if eventually disremembered role in creation.<sup>6</sup> Andrew imagining her in another sense, which she was describing to be like a sea goddess in the Canaanite pantheon, her long name is Rabbatu ‘athiratuyammi which possibly mean “the woman who walks on the sea”—in which Yam means both “sea” and a dragon-like being. According to the scholars she walked upon the dragon and overcome it.<sup>7</sup>

Matthiae claims that she appears as a "lesser but well-attested" Deity,<sup>8</sup> One of the scholars with this ideology and also widely accepted by many OT archaeology about Asherah been a goddess was Likpinkis work in 1972 he asserted that she was a well-known goddess in the ancient near east especially in Babylonian, Akkadians, Arabians and also in the Ugaritic texts also.<sup>9</sup> The question is how many Asherah in existence at this period to be at these places mention by Likpinkis. But he pointed Asherah back to the ancient near

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<sup>6</sup> Halladay Andrew, "The Ascension of Yahweh: The Origins and Development of Israelite Monotheism from the African to Josiah" (A Bachelor in Art Senior Excises Thesis, Pomona College, 2010), 64.

<sup>7</sup> Halladay Andrew, "The Ascension of Yahweh, 64.

<sup>8</sup> P. Matthiae, *Ebla: An Empire Rediscovered* (Leicester, London: Hodder& Stoughton, 1980), 187

<sup>9</sup> Matthiae, *Ebla: An Empire Rediscovered*, 188.

eastern places that she was mentioned as a shrine or sanctuary but he did not have a stand whether she should be addressed as a sacred grove or sanctuary. Like in Judges 4:25-30, Deut. 7:3-5 and also 2 Kings 21:3-7 in his opinion only few verses mention Asherah as a goddess.<sup>10</sup> However, he was just putting his mind in the term to coin the term the way he wants the term to be because nowhere is she mentioned as a Golden pole. These worldviews about those passages were unaccepted by Emerton and Day. For sure they see him putting his mind on those passages but Emerton said the passages mean the same meaning for Asherah in fact because there is no difference between the passages that mention Asherah both passages mention her as a goddess.

There is an argument about Lamar and Day on the issue of Asherah as a Goddess. Lamar said that Asherah was described as a sacred tree in Mesopotamian, and he argued that the verses that describe her to the goddess are the Pentateuch redactors especially the Deuteronomistic redactors turn her to fit their view of Baal as a god but how true is this statement by Lamar. Day fully disagreed with Lamar by seeing him being a problematic scholar doing eisegesis instead of exegesis of those passages that mention Asherah because no how is it not possible to Day for a Deuteronomistic redactor to create the name Asherah when the name has already been in existence in Canaanite Ugaritic texts.<sup>11</sup>

Asherah as a goddess possesses great status in the Ugaritic pantheon. She has been the most influential goddess close to El. She possesses the most unique title which no other goddess possesses.<sup>12</sup> Her titles carried weight like the “Lady Asherah of the Sea” or “She Who Treads the Sea”. This title showcasing to us that she must have been a sea goddess and

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<sup>10</sup> Matthiae, *Ebla: An Empire Rediscovered*, 188.

<sup>11</sup> Matthiae, *Ebla: An Empire Rediscovered*, 199.

<sup>12</sup> M. D Coogan, “Canaanite origins and lineage: reflections on the religion of ancient Israel,” *JETS*.13 (1987):115-124.

not just an object of the goddess-like some will argue she was. Many scholars considered her to be the mother goddess who beget other gods, about seventy of the gods called her sons, like in the Enuma Elish epic of creation which we have Apsu and Tiamat his wife begotten other gods so also Asherah and her husband "El".<sup>13</sup> The view that seems to be widely accepted is that she was the goddess of fertility. The goddess of the ancient near east is the sex goddess with a womb to give birth to as many goddess or children as they want.

#### GODDESS ASHERAH, THE WIFE OF EL IN UGARITIC TEXTS

EL has to be the powerful entity and the head of gods in the Ugaritic texts which Baal seems to be his assistance or next to him. Asherah was related to the role of birth and fertility as mother goddesses and gods, and El the father of gods and goddesses especially in the Ugaritic texts of the Canaanite. In the Canaanites' pantheon, almost all gods have wives like the wife of Baal was Anat but it seems to me that only the head and the assistance are permitted to have wives in the pantheon of voluminous gods but only El and Baal were married while others seemed to be eunuch either by force or by willingness not to have I do not know.

Asherah in the Ugaritic texts was a beautiful wife of El and gave birth to beautiful gods and goddesses in the Ugaritic pantheon. This should sink into our imaginations that goddesses in the pantheons' of the ancient near east were sexually productive; therefore, bearing children like human beings. There are scholars whose argues that she was explicitly mentioned as El's wife or not but Yamashi will be said she did not mention as El's wife<sup>14</sup> but it is the usual

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<sup>13</sup> N. Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit: The Words of Ilmilku And His Colleagues* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998),37.

<sup>14</sup> J. M Hadley, "Chasing shadows: the quest for the historical goddess," BASOR .4 (1997):169-184.

assumptions that she was El wife.<sup>15</sup> The populous conceptions were that Yahweh and Asherah were the head and latest couples in the pantheon, since the supreme head of the pantheon gods and goddesses was El however Asherah must also have to be the supreme goddess or Queen of the pantheon gods and goddesses as far as her husband El remains a king.<sup>16</sup>

One of the unique functions and the outstanding aspect of the Asherah was her role as a mediator between El and other gods and goddesses in the pantheon. Asherah was represented like Jesus who stood as a mediator between humanity and God because of his relationship with the father. she loves her children so much that even when the heartless father as they have always been disregarded the children because of their abnormal behaviour she stood as a loving mother to say no to her husband. The role of Asherah as mediator designated to us that she was higher and supreme deity next to El her husband.<sup>17</sup> The gods are denoted on one juncture as "the seventy sons of Athirat", Archaeological scholars could imagine Asherah to have seventy sons in the pantheon without any birth control. It seems Asherah was the granny and mother of gods and goddesses in the pantheon of Canaanite with love and caring over her children as a mediator between them and their father El.

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<sup>15</sup> A. Mazar, (ed), *Studies in the archaeology of the Iron Age in Israel and Jordan* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001),43.

<sup>16</sup> A. Mazar (ed), *Studies in the archaeology of the Iron Age in Israel and Jordan*, 44.

<sup>17</sup> My argument is that the religion of Israel has nothing to do with monotheism but rather is closer to monolatry and polytheism. But as Hasel asserted that, Evangelicals have traditionally responded to passages indicating such divine plurality in two ways: (1) by asserting that the gods in these passages are merely idols; (2) by appealing to "denial in Deuteronomy and Isaiah that have Yahweh saying there are no gods besides him statements." Michael S. Heiser, "Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Honest (and Orthodox) Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible," Logos Bible Software, 6.



## ASHERAH IN THE HEBREW BIBLE (OT)

It is not difficult to imagine about the Elohist writer claimed in the Hebrew Bible about the existence of gods and goddesses. The God of the “Elohistic” writers of Genesis seem to be more of polytheistic than Monolatry<sup>18</sup> (or preferably as evangelicals will claim “monotheism”) ideological perception. Which some scholars will prefer using an ideological phrase divine council then calling it the council of gods like in Psalm 82<sup>19</sup> which is highly associated with the Ugaritic Texts. The reality is that against the conservatism and evangelicalism translation of the noun *Elohim* as a singular God instead of plural God is the consideration of the writer. *Elohim* should be translated in more sensible connotation as gods instead of the biased sense of singular God who created the heavens and

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<sup>18</sup> “Evangelicals have commonly argued that similar phrases, such as references to Moses as אֱלֹהִים (Exo. 4:16; 7:1), Israel as Yahweh’s “son” (Exo. 4:23; Hos. 11:1) and Israelites as “sons of the living God” (Hos. 1:10 [Heb., 2:1]) inform us that the אֱלֹהִים of Psalm 82 are human rulers, namely the elders of Israel. This position is incoherent for several reasons. First, if these אֱלֹהִים are humans, why are they sentenced to die “like humans”? This sounds as awkward as sentencing a child to grow up, or a dog to bark. The point of verse 6 is that, in response to their corruption, the אֱלֹהִים will be stripped of their immortality at God’s discretion and die as humans die. A clear contrast is intended by both the grammar and structure of the Hebrew text, saving us from such awkward logic. It is also worth pointing out that one cannot argue that the references to the gods/sons of God outside Psalm 82 speak of humans. Job 38:7-8 has the sons of God present at the creation of the world, rendering a human interpretation impossible.” See Michael S. Heiser, “Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism?”<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Dever asserted, “Furthermore, we humans are constrained by language: neither Hebrew nor English has a neuter form. And given the choice, the male writers of the Bible opted for the masculine. Yet even they observed that “God created humankind (‘ādām) in his image. . . . Male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). the writers specify, “Let us make humankind in our image” (Gen 1:26; italics mine). And there are well-known passages in which Yahweh is portrayed with more “feminine” characteristics. These observations lead me to conclude that many in ancient Israel, men and especially women, were sophisticated enough to know that “God” transcends human gender categories. Asherah, then, was not a competing deity but the counterpart of Yahweh.” William G. Dever, “Israelite Women as “Ritual Experts”: Orthodoxy or Orthopraxis?” *University of Arizona*, 195.

earth with the fully aware of the Bara as a singular verb. Therefore, it is an imaginative true that gods and goddesses involve in creation of the heavens and earth because of the pluralistic masculine noun *Elohim* and the pluralistic statement of the Elohist writers in Gen.1:27 which use the phrase "Let us."<sup>20</sup> Therefore, I am imagining "Asherah" to be in the *Elohim* of creation and the "let us" translation of the creation of man and woman in the image of God and the goddess Asherah. I must not overemphasize to you that Adam seems to be in the image of Yahweh while Eve seems to be in the image of Asherah to my ideological conception of the Elohist imaginations. That means if man and woman are in the image of God that means against any evangelical ideology, God is not only male but also female and the female may be Asherah but no lucidity within the passage itself, but is that the intention of the Elohist writers of Genesis or my biased imaginations which I do not know but I think is very clear here to the reader.

The litigious questions are, what is El's wife doing in the Hebrew bible? Who brought the wife of El of Canaanites' Pantheon to the Hebrew Bible? The usages of Asherah in the Hebrew Bible can be overemphasized. The words Asherah the Canaanites' El's wife mentioned about 40 times in the overall Old Testament despite Dever the edited Deuteronomistic editorial version of the Bible speak caustically about Asherah because the editors hated her.<sup>21</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, the term

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<sup>20</sup> Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?* 183.

<sup>21</sup> The Asherah is attested in the northern kingdom in the period of the Judges, as Judges 6:25-26 indicates. Gideon is commanded to "pull down the altar of Baal which your father has, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it." Deuteronomy 16:21 forbids the "planting" of "the Asherah of any wood ... besides the altar that you put up for Yahweh, your God." These two passages illustrate that the Asherah was a wooden object erected next to the altar of a god. It is clear also that the devotion of the Asherah was being maintained by Israelites; otherwise, the prohibition would have been unnecessary. Finally, the association between the Canaanite deities Asherah and Baal was perceived by the Deuteronomistic school as having existed in the period of the Judges. By

Asherah (plural *asherim*) refers to a sacred tree or pole associated with the cultic worship of a goddess despite not always. Asherah was mentioned by name in I and II Kings. I quite have a problem with those who are agitating whether just a mere tree or pole is because maybe because no one knows whether both the goddess and the pole were called with the name Asherah. 1 Kings 14:23 talks about how Israelite situated themselves to set up the poles of Asherah in their shrines. 2 Kings also mention the cutting down of Asherah's pole as a right thing Hezekiah was doing in the eyes of the lord. Which after the death of Hezekiah, Manasseh his son came up and made up the poles of Asherah and other verses that use Asherah as a pole 2 Kings 23:15; 2 Chronicles 14:3; 17:6; 31:1; 33:3, 19; 34:3. Deuteronomy 7:5, 12:3 the pole stands in the Hebrew Bible as a symbol of goddess Asherah and it always set as a proclamation that they are worshipping or believing in Asherah.<sup>22</sup>

Andrew pointed out that the word *Asherah*, however, does appear in the biblical text some forty times (primarily in the Deuteronomist), but one must not immediately assume it directly refers to the goddess. Archaeological evidence suggests a type of ritual pole was also called Asherah many translations have proceeded cautiously in translating this word; the King James Version, for instance, generally rendered the word as "pole." While the translation masks the clear appearance of the goddess's name in the biblical text, it seems in the plural certainly (variously *asherot* or *asherim*) this term refers to ritual poles rather than the goddess proper. And yet it seems highly plausible that these poles were common in her worship, and therefore connected to her.<sup>23</sup>

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the time of the Israelite monarchy, this association was made between Asherah and Yahweh.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Halladay, "The Ascension of Yahweh," 67.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Halladay, "The Ascension of Yahweh," 67

The pole is just like a cross in so churches today like roman catholic and other churches around the world to showed the whole world possibly they do not worship the symbol “cross” but rather worshipping the one causes the designer of the symbols or the one that the symbol represented. As Andrew asserted, “What seems clear is that the biblical writers took every precaution to render Asherah Into the biblical text not as a goddess, but as a mere pole; though there is likely information about the jettisoned goddess behind these references, it is difficult to extract this meaning from the text alone.”<sup>24</sup>

Multiple texts suggest that it was the norm in Judah during the ninth to seventh centuries BCE to worship both Lord and Asherah in the Jerusalem Temple. “The explicit prohibition against planting a sacred pole or tree beside an altar of the Lord in Deut 16:21 show that this did happen”. From a very early period, the tradition of a sacred tree symbol formed part of most ancient Near Eastern cultures. King Josiah’s reform is also a clear indication of the veneration of Asherah,<sup>25</sup> particularly by the Israelite women, as stated in 2 Kings 23:7, “And he broke down the houses of the male cult prostitutes who were in the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the Asherah.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Malamud highlighted that, “But why is Asherah condemned? The judgment of the Hebrew Bible, its writers, and editors seem clear, but there is no explanation of why God hates (the) Asherah(s). While nearly universally condemning Asherah, the Hebrew Bible avoids describing anything about Asherah, besides connecting the term to wood or trees and suggesting that it was forbidden; yet used in worship. Furthermore, the hated Asherah is often found side by side with Ba’al. While Ba’al translates as “lord,” the word is widely accepted to be the epithet of a Semitic deity that the Bible’s monotheistic narrative decried as the main other, the main “false god.” David Malamud, “Asherah as an Israelite goddess: debunking the cult object myth,” HHUM, 206. (2016): 2.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew, "The Ascension of Yahweh," 67.

<sup>26</sup> In Lachish, a site in the Shephelah region of Israel, in 1934, British excavations found a temple with artefacts depicting Asherah that date to the late thirteenth century BCE. While the Lachish artefacts predate the

In Deuteronomy 44:18, the Israelites continue to say: “Ever since we ceased burning incense unto the queen of heaven...we have had nothing and have been dying by sword and famine” this verse must be a remembrance for the worship of Asherah.”<sup>27</sup> This is the factual truth that she is nice to Israelites and she has been sustaining them which was to the researcher Asherah was that “Queen of Heaven” in the imagination of Israelite. The issue in this verse is not that they stop worshipping Asherah despite which seems to be rejected the usage of the high post in the temple in the paramount passages but they stop burning incense to this productive goddess of fertility. The biblical texts seem to reject the uses of Asherah pole in the temple but nowhere stated that the priests and prophets stop the people of Israel from worshipping this powerful goddess Asherah. the worshipping of the pole of Asherah seems to be adulatory because is tantamount to the worship of her image which is condemned by Yahweh in the law of Moses because in Deuteronomy Yahweh was against any worshipping of Image either of heaven or earth, in fact even his image.

In the book of Jeremiah she was also referring to as the *Malkathha Shamayim* in Jeremiah 7:18; 44:77, she is a reputational goddess and highly respected by the Israelite to the level of King Solomon even built a temple for her (1 kings 11:5, 2 kings 23:13).<sup>28</sup> In this stream of argument, one of the archaeologist Day insisted that “there is nothing in first-millennium BC texts that singles out Asherah as 'Queen of Heaven' or associates her, particularly with the heavens at

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bounds of this paper, the following ewer (large water jug) and goblet demonstrate the existence of Asherah worship in this land.

<sup>27</sup> Lealand Ryken, et al (G, ed)., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998),339.

<sup>28</sup> John Day, “Yahweh and the gods and goddesses of Canaan” Continuum International Publishing Group – Sheffie Journal (2002):146.

all.<sup>29</sup> The imagination is this if Yahweh is the king of heaven as so many theologians believe then Asherah is the *Malkathha Shamayim* as a wife of the king Yahweh, but must a king has a (queen) if yes then Asharah is a chance of being the *Malkat* of Yahweh as historian and archaeologist seemed to anticipated with some of the scriptural references. There are consensuses on the imagination that Asherah was the tree of life in the book of Genesis which the Yashwistic writer may likely put down the verses to stop the worship of Asherah as a Tree of life. Because the tree of life imagine to symbolizes life and immortality Notwithstanding this issue of Asherah as a tree of life has only a few consensuses because of its paucity evidence especially historically and biblically.

Engle in his imagination pointed out after he examined the references that made mention of Asherah in the entire Old Testament stated that those passages that mention the worship of Asherah are more authentic and the passages come from antiquity.<sup>30</sup> The problematic assumption is this despite not popular is that there is a possibility that the Israelite worship Asherah but not likely to the hard evangelicals like us.

### **THE BASIS AND THE RESISTANCE OF THE LATEST COUPLE MR/MRS YAHWEH AND ASHERAH**

The religion of Israel was deemed to be a very unique religion in our evangelical and conservative imaginations of the Deuteronomistic' s Old Testament. Most of the Hebrews dismiss other religions as being polytheistic but how unique is the Jewish religion among other ancient near eastern religions? Most of the gods in the ancient near east married but YHWH seems to be exclusive. However, there is evidence

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<sup>29</sup> J.R. Engle, "Pillar of Figurings of Iron Age Israel and Asherah/Asherim," Vol.1.(1979), 53.

<sup>30</sup> Dong Mason, God at the Beginning, [http://www.jwstudies.com/GOD\\_in\\_the\\_beginning.pdf](http://www.jwstudies.com/GOD_in_the_beginning.pdf). (accessed 22nd November 2017)

that YHWH was not exclusive in this matter of marriage because he was not a force eunuch or voluntary eunuch so he may marry and his beautiful wife name is Asherah.

There is a lot of so call evidence but how evidence is the evidence that Asherah was the wife of YHWH, despite she was first and foremost the wife of El, which was possibly adopted by this God of the Midianite call "HWHY" who was later became the god of Israel.<sup>31</sup> The assumption of YHWH first and foremost the God of the Midianites seems problematic to the evangelicals because of the Exodus 3:6 which YHWH seemed to reveal his name to Moses for a very first time despite that sound likely but seemed not to be possible and acceptable to even evangelical scholars.

The imagination disposes of scholars stated, that YHWH was not known at all to the Patriarchs and matriarchs and the only God they were worshipping<sup>32</sup> was El the Canaanite god during the Late bronze age(ca 1200-1000BCE). At this period there is no scholar with any agreeable imaginations that YHWH was known to the Patriarch because YHWH was the god of Midian who later introduced to Moses by his father-in-law Jethro. after some couple of years later YHWH was brought possibly to the Midianite or Canaanite themselves to the pantheon to worship him possibly to the researcher thoughts Yahweh was more powerful then El and he overcame El and took over the throne from him, maybe that led to the vanishing of El and Yahweh took over the hegemony to those that hold the ideology that they were different gods. At this late Bronze Age Yahweh now become the chief goddess in the pantheon of Canaanite and married Asherah the wife of El.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> It was only after the exile that worship of Yahweh alone became established, and possibly only as late as the time of the Maccabees (2nd century BC) that monotheism became universal among Jews. Gonzalo Rubio, "On the Alleged "Pre-Sumerian Substratum," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, Vol. 51 (1999): 1-16.

<sup>32</sup> Dong Mason, *God at the Beginning*, 20.

<sup>33</sup> Dong Mason, *God in the Beginning*,23.

YHWH and Asherah now became the well-known couple in the Canaanite pantheon with the seventy sons left behind by El which Yahweh now the father of this seventy sons of El. It was during this period that the cult of Asherah penetrated through the Israelite religion and they stated worshipping Yahweh and Asherah during the iron age 11(1000-900BCE) till the time of judges and monarchy according to these Asherah scholars.<sup>34</sup> But the problem arises during the Iron Age 11 during united and divided monarchy religious become an “official.”<sup>35</sup> Threatening and the tradition of their patriarch and matriarch religion was deracinated especially the worship of Asherah. Almost during the time of Solomon life, the statue of Asherah was still in his temple. However, during the monarchy Ironage11 B, C (900-586), the nation’s dominant religion is polytheistic, with an array of idols, no different to that of its neighbors. They were worshipping other gods at this moment with his pretty wife Asherah. Goddesses played a more important role than gods did in the ancient time. Some were

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<sup>34</sup> William G. Dever. *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 59-60.

<sup>35</sup> The next mention of the Asherah in the north is found in the conflict on Mount Carmel between Elijah and the 450 prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18. There is a reference in verse 19 to 400 prophets of the goddess Asherah, yet they play no role in the story. Baal is mentioned five times, and his prophets four times, but Asherah and her prophets appear only once. Scholars explain the single reference to Asherah as an editorial gloss, designed to condemn the goddess by associating her with Baal the Canaanite deity. ...In the southern kingdom King Asa (913-873) is the first monarch blamed for approving of the devotion to the Asherah (1 Kgs 15:13; cf. 2 Chr 15:16). The predecessors of the two great reforming kings in the south, Hezekiah and Josiah, were patrons of the Asherah (2 Kgs 18:6, 21:7, and 23:4, 6, 15). The Asherah which Josiah removed had been housed in the Jerusalem temple (2 Kgs 23:4, 7). While the Asherah was wrong in the eyes of Hezekiah and Josiah, it was right to their predecessors. It is noteworthy that these two kings were acceptable to the Deuteronomistic Historian precisely because their reforms included the removal of the Asherah. One may ask, however, if the other kings were any less devoted to Yahweh because their Yahwism included a devotion to the Asherah. It would appear from the inscriptions and the biblical evidence that the Asherah was not simply a Canaanite import; it appears to have been perfectly at home in ancient Israel in the pre-exilic period. Mark S. Smith, “God Male and Female in the Old Testament: Yahweh and His Asherah.” *Theological Studies Journal*, 48 (1987): 336-337.



with the opinion that the religion of Israel was not the fight to restore true monotheism but a fight of detachment from true polytheism.<sup>36</sup> Asherah was a victim of the Deuteronomistic guys' desire for a centralized cult and a so call monotheistic ideological movement.<sup>37</sup> What happened with Asherah? Are the Deuteronomistic guys resisted her due to the syncretism with either Canaanite or Mesopotamian religion and the vigorous insistence on the sole worship of Yahweh<sup>38</sup> at the period of Monarchy?<sup>39</sup>

The issue of Monolatry or Monotheism by the people of Israel was the cause of a small group of people in the pitch of Israelites religion. Dever one of the great Palestinian archaeologists insisted that Israelites were worshipping in some of the other Asherah shrines possibly apart from centralizing Temple by King Solomon and to his worship closer to home was the reality of everyday religion of Israel.<sup>40</sup> Von Feldt does believe, Dever argues that the people of the countryside of Israel did believe in God who had a wife and possibly Asherah and seems to be the argument of Dever in his Book. <sup>41</sup>

The concepts are the fact that the people not only worship and sacrifices to Yahweh but also to his wife Asherah who seems to be a helper of the majority and females in those days. Some scholars are considering *shekinah* as a wife of God who is

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<sup>36</sup> Dong Mason, God at the Beginning, 5.

<sup>37</sup> L.EBreingan, Economic implications of the Deuteronomistic reform and the elimination of the Goddess Asherah ( A Doctoral thesis, Australian Catholic University, 2014), 141. Retrieved from <http://researchbank.acu.edu.au/theses/513>, (Accessed 21, November 2017).

<sup>38</sup> Patrick D. Miller, "The Absence of Goddess in the Israelite Religion." HAR 10,(1974):241.

<sup>39</sup> Dever, Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel, 233-343.

<sup>40</sup> Alyson Skabelund Von Feldt, Does God Have a Wife? FARMS Review 19/1 (2007): 81-118.

<sup>41</sup> Moshe Weinfeld, "Feminine features in the imagery of God in Israel: the sacred marriage and the sacred tree," VT 46(4) (1996):515-529.

Yahweh not just a theological dilemma of divine presence. Weinfeld argued that:

The union between God and his *shekinah*. Intercourse between man and his wife is recommended for Jews on the eve of the Sabbath. Human intercourse-as it were-imitates the intercourse of the Holy One with the *Shekinah*. The union between the *Shekinah* and the Holy One is the main purpose of the sacrifices. The union of the *Shekinah* with the Holy One is remarkable in the high priest's worship on Yom Kippur. At his entrance to the Holy of Holies, he heard the voice of the wings of the cherubim being lifted for intercourse. The destruction of the temple brought the separation between her and her O love God. Holy of Holies is pictured as the holy couple's bed-chamber, and, indeed, as we will see, we find in rabbinic sources that the poles of the Holy Ark were seen as two breasts of a woman, and the Holy of Holies appears as a place of communion for the Holy One and the *Shekinah*.<sup>42</sup>

The Holy of Holies is the sacred bed of YHWH and his wife shekinah where they have husband and wife communion service and gave birth to other deities. The Canaanites moniker/nickname of Asherah is (Holies) and no one should be disturbed with the fact that God nickname in the Old Testament is (Holy). Therefore, out of the evangelical box the usage of the phraseology "Holy of Holies" does not connote Holiness of God as wallop evangelicals are imagining but could also mean "Yahweh of Asherah" or Yahweh husband of Asherah which is all over the Old Testament and New Testament, depends on the preferable despite I know that is so

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<sup>42</sup> Dever arguably asserted that archaeology, and archaeology alone, is the only reliable source for the religion of Israel, which can also bring back those anonymous, forgotten folk of antiquity and give them their long lost voice, allowing them to speak to us of their ultimate concern....he is without a doubt that the complete understanding of the ancient Israelite religion is still not possible, one that studies object that has been recovered from the earth will be better, than one derived only from the texts hundred of years and many hands distant from their origin. Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?* 62.

waloped to convince hard evangelicalism and conservatism on this. The trend of this argument is the imaginative reality that Asherah is both Holies and Shekinah. The fact is Weinfeld does not have fundamental historical proofs for those statements above neither do Old Testament deuteronomistic believer disputed the fact that the word shekinah is feminine and could mean Asherah.

The issue of complete Yahwism was a late coming issue in the Israelite history according to some scholars of ancient near eastern studies. The goddess Asherah the wife of the Jewish god lasted for so long till the time of Babylonian captivity in 586/7-539BCE that led to the serious decline from the Yahweh's wife (Asherah) to her husband (HWHY) but I don't know what she did to deserve this hatred which led to the absolute monotheism to some but to the researcher Monolatry is preferable. The issue of monotheism was triune in the post-exilic period, it can also be called the post-exilic Persian era in 539-332 BCE. At this period of post-exilic, they were moving their interest from Asherah to YHWH and that led to the disappearance of Asherah to some extent.

### **ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS AND YAHWEH'S SPOUSE**

Some scholars declare, It is the verdict of archaeology and archaeology alone could bring back this divorce wife of Yahweh because is free from biased than the biased and distorted texts of the scripture.<sup>43</sup> Archaeologist seems to

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<sup>43</sup> Hadley asserted that "From Kuntillet 'Ajrud, a late 9th century or early 8th century religious centre, which may have served as a pilgrimage site judging by the predominance of diverse 'prayerful' inscriptions to various Semitic gods found there, Hadley examines both inscriptional evidence and drawings. Pithos A shows two Bes figures (the Egyptian dwarf-god, with associations of protection from demonic powers) and a seated lyre player; below and off to the left, a cow and suckling calf are depicted. Inscription 1 appears along the top of the scene, reading 'X says: say to Yehal[l'el] and Yo'asah and [to Z]: I bless you by Yahweh of Samaria and by his Asherah'. However, Hadley concludes that the inscription should not be read as a legend for the Bes figures and lyre player, as they are written with different materials. On the other side of Pithos A, a sacred tree bearing fruited palmettes is flanked by two

discover other sources in the ancient near east that pointed us to the imaginations of the YHWH which hard evangelicalism would say that is the work of the devil, but let face the reality if it is true, but how real is the reality that we are pondering upon especially this archaeological discoveries. The discovery by Ze'ev Meshel disclosed in 1979 that he had discovered the rock shelter at Kuntillet 'Ajrud,<sup>44</sup> a site in the north-eastern region of Sinai, brought to the fore the significance of a consort for deities in the ancient Near East, and in particular for YHWH. A similar inscription was found in a burial cave close to Khirbet „el Qom.<sup>45,46</sup> In both instances, the inscriptions, which are dated to the eighth century BCE, refer

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feeding caprids; immediately beneath them appears a striding lion. After early attempts by some scholars to interpret the seated lyre-player with the goddess Asherah, Hadley and others conclude that there is no compelling textual or iconographic reason to make this identification.”. Judith M. Hadley, “The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah,” *University of Cambridge Oriental Publications*, 57 (2000):23.

<sup>44</sup> Marlene Mondriaan, “Influence of Ugarit on the Understanding of the Hebrew Bible,” *OTE* 18(3) (2013):234.

<sup>45</sup> Hadley takes up an intricate discussion of the Khirbet el-Qom inscription (dated to ca. 750- 700 BCE) which Hadley reads as “Uriahu the rich wrote it./Blessed be Uriyahu by Yahweh/for from his enemies by his (YHWH’s) Asherah he (YHWH) has saved him./ by Oniyahu/by his Asherah/and by his a[she]rah” (p. 86). A small human hand is engraved upon the rock beneath the inscription. Hadley concludes that, since elsewhere in biblical Hebrew, the pronominal suffix is not attested on personal names (this does, however, occur in Ugaritic), the Asherah mentioned here refers to the sacred pole, probably part of a cult installation (cf. Deut. 16.21). Since Jewish communities in Elephantine did swear by the ‘mind’ (a temple, or cult stele or pillar), Hadley concludes that by the time of our inscription, Yahweh worship had begun to swallow up the worship of Asherah into its cult, and that ‘Yahweh/Asherah’ were a ‘paired set,’ which might be invoked in such blessings. Hadley, “The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah,” 104-105.

<sup>46</sup> Andrew stated, “Archaeological evidence suggests Israelite worship of Asherah in pottery as well; a jar found in Kuntillat ‘Arjud (in the Sinai) dates to the ninth century BCE and includes an interesting inscription: “I bless thee by Yahweh and his Asherah. That Asherah was Yahweh’s consort instead of El’s probably derives from the collapsing of El and Yahweh into one deity.” For many, it must have made sense that Yahweh (now indistinguishable from El) would associate with Asherah as well Halladay Andrew, “The Ascension of Yahweh,” 66.

to “Yahweh and his Asherah”.<sup>47</sup> This is the Storage jar with Asherah on her throne.<sup>48</sup>



The inscription in the above picture that was discovered by the archaeologist. The inscriptions at Kuntillet, Ajrud read: "May you be blessed by YHWH of Shomron [Samaria] and his Asherah" and "Amaryo said: Tell my lord, may you be well and be blessed by Yahweh of Teman and his Asherah. May he bless and keep you and be with you."<sup>49</sup> And also the phrase, "Yahweh and his Asherah", could mean Yahweh and his consort.<sup>50</sup> The inscriptions have almost the same connotation with their nicknames Yahweh (Holy) and Asherah (Holies). The above figuring seemingly suggests male and female figures. Scholars have, as yet, contrasting views on the interpretation of these drawings. Scholars generally agree that in the Israelite cult of Asherah signified both a goddess and a cult object symbolizing her. The discovery of inscriptions referring

<sup>47</sup> E. Scheffler, "Fascinating discoveries from the biblical world," OTE 9.2 (2000):102, 105.

<sup>48</sup> Scheffler, "Fascinating discoveries from the biblical world," 233.

<sup>49</sup> B. Margalit, "The meaning and significance of Asherah," VT 3 (1990):284. And also the description figuring explanations in the work of A. Lemaire, "Lee inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qom et Asherah de Yhwh," Revue biblique, 84 (1977):597-608.

<sup>50</sup> Mondriaan, "Influence of Ugarit on the Understanding of the Hebrew Bible," 235.

to “YHWH” and his “Asherah” implies that, in the Israelites’ minds, Canaanites’ Asherah was the consort of YHWH.<sup>51</sup>

Dever imagined that; Three inscriptions found here provide important evidence that a goddess named Asherah was understood to be Yahweh’s wife or consort. One was on a wall and the other two on large storage jars (pathos).<sup>52</sup> All three include phrases linking Yahweh and Asherah, as does another inscription that Dever found in a tomb from the same period at Khirbat El-Qôm. The jars are painted with icons, including a seated female figure (fig. 1). Dever is convinced that this is Asherah sitting on a cherub and she is Yahweh’s wife.<sup>53</sup>

The small Clay figurine was discovered and Dever dated it to the two hundred years preceding to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem— the time of Isaiah, Josiah, Jeremiah, and Leviticus. The most prominent feature of these little statues is the breasts, which she is cupping with her hands;<sup>54</sup> the figuring of the feminine Asherah below with attractive breasts was not for immodesty to Dever,<sup>55</sup> nothing immodest about the figuring below. The breast is the sign of the ability to nourish the human family.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?* 233-343.

<sup>52</sup> Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?* 233-343.

<sup>53</sup> Dever. *Did God Have a Wife?* 233-343.

<sup>54</sup> Dever. *Did God Have a Wife?* 233-343.

<sup>55</sup> Von Feldt, *Does God Have a Wife?* 233-343

<sup>56</sup> Leal & Ryken, et al (G, ed.), *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 339.



She seemed to fall victim on the hand of Deuteronomistic editor according to the scholar like Dever, she was served at this moment as a nursing mother of both gods and human beings and nursing mothers Von Feldt stated that Dever envisages that these figurines were used as talismans, or charms. Women in ancient Israel, for whom childbearing was imperative socially as well as life-threatening physically, may have hoped that the figurines would bring successful conception, safe birth, and protection for the child. Von Felt stated that no scholar or archaeologist that accepted the breasts figuring above as Asherah and wife of Yahweh except Dever. Therefore, for sure there is no archaeological consensus on the issue of these discovered even dated to the reformation Josiah except Dever which is very biased and unreliable because anyone can imagine the clay breast figuring to be any Idol of his/her choose because there is no any inscription attach to this figuring to show that it is Asherah my God's spouse.

Von Felt Quoted Dever that Dever's suggestion that Asherah was venerated in templelike places throughout the countryside may open the possibility that the story of the Wisdom Woman has its roots in a belief in Asherah. Again, Asherah was not worshipped as an alternative to Yahweh, but rather alongside

him.<sup>57</sup> The discovered of the goddess is real and sure by the archaeologist but the connection between this goddess Asherah with Yahweh sound too biased because scholars even archaeologist are not in agreement whether she is the wife of Yahweh or idol worship against the will of Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible. The Writer Imagining Archaeologist, to force Yahweh of the Deuteronomistic editors to marry Asherah to please their presupposition about their interpretations upon the ancients' documents and the Hebrew Bible to the evangelicals' ideology. The attribution of Yahweh to El and his wife Asherah seems to be the product of scholars' assumptions because Yahweh of Israel can be El but no El was and is Yahweh of the Hebrew Bible who was against any form of idolatry in his sanctuaries and punishes Israel for worshipping other gods apart from him. Therefore, other gods like El, Baal and Yam might have married Asherah but not the Yahweh of the Hebrew Bible who is self-existing and exclusive above other gods of ANE in the writer biased imagination if is biased depends on your imagination. Therefore, archaeologists don't know that Yahweh of the Hebrew Bible possibly is not Yahweh of Midianite or Yahweh the successor of El in Canaanite pantheon notwithstanding writer doesn't know whether is out of his preconception or not depends on your perception.

## **CONCLUSION**

The encapsulation of the entire piece is an ongoing struggling of interpreting Asherah in the ancient near east and her relationship as El or Yahweh's wife in the Old Testament. The issue of the El mingle with Yahweh is not clear to so many scholars either Yahweh was the one that took over the wife of El or Baal was the one.<sup>58</sup> Other scholars are saying that

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<sup>57</sup> Leal & Ryken, et al (G, ed)., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 339.

<sup>58</sup> Leal & Ryken, et al (G, ed)., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 33. . Margalit, "The meaning and significance of Asherah," *VT* 3 (1990):284. And also the description figuring explanations in the work of A. Lemaire, "Lee



Asherah was the wife of Baal, not even El at all.<sup>59</sup> This also seemed to be attested in the scripture that Baal and Asherah could have a connection because during the time of judges Israelite worship Asherah and Baal (Judges 2:13, 10:6) also a problematic and idolatry way of living to God at the time of Samuel (1 Samuel 7:3-4; 12:10). Dever may assert that the mingling and coupling of Asherah with Baal is an attempt to discredit.

However, Yahweh is a unique God of Israel who can also be called אֱלֹהִים or plausibly one of the אֱלֹהִים as a generic title for deities or gods. Yahweh is not a human being or gods of Canaanite that will have a wife like other Els and Baals of Mesopotamians and Egyptians. These gods may likely maneuver as human beings and spirit beings. Some scholars claimed that God is not only a spirit being but also seems to fully have physical and spiritual bodies. Smith argues that the Hebrew Bible presents three different bodies of God: (1) the natural 'human' body as in Genesis, (2) the superhuman 'liturgical' body (as in Exodus and Isaiah), and (3) the cosmic 'mystical' body (as in the latter prophets).<sup>60</sup> Imagining the ideological imagination of smith above inline of the fact that if God is both human and superhuman that means he may likely marry as any human being and remained god as any spirit being if you agreed with smith about the bodies of God in the Bible.

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inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qom et Asherah de Yhwh," *Revue biblique*,84 (1977):597-608.

<sup>59</sup> E. Scheffler, "Fascinating discoveries from the biblical world," *OTE* 9.2 (2000):102, 105. Mondriaan, "Influence of Ugarit on the Understanding of the Hebrew Bible," 235.

<sup>60</sup> Scheffler, "Fascinating discoveries from the biblical world," 233