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19:1). Nothing is outside the purview of God. The claim that God is the one "who is and who was and who is to come" is a restatement of the same idea.

The author of Revelation, because of his exalted Christology, can apply the same phrases to Christ that he used for God. He too is the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega. Elsewhere in the NT, Christ's role in creation is explicitly stated (John 1:3; Col 1:16). The idea of Christ as the Omega or the end is particularly appropriate in Revelation which depicts Christ as the means through which God's purposes are accomplished, not only as the slain lamb (5:9), but also as the victorious rider on the white horse (19:11–21).

The source for the author of Revelation's description of God as the first and the last was likely the Hebrew Bible, specifically Is 41:4; 44:6; and 48:12, passages which emphasize the uniqueness of God. Although the symbolic use of the first and last letters of the alphabet is not found there, this practice can be documented in Hellenistic writings, in Josephus, and in rabbinic literature.

Bibliography

MITCHELL G. REDDISH


2. Father of James the apostle, as distinguished from the apostle James the son of Zebedee (Matt 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13).

Although nothing more is known for certain about either Alpheus, it has been suggested that the two are actually the same person. Assuming that Levi is to be identified with Matthew the apostle, then another pair of brothers in addition to Peter, Andrew, James, and John would be among the twelve, i.e., James and Matthew. The manner in which Alpheus is used in the lists of the apostles, however, strongly suggests that two different individuals are intended. Alpheus is used to distinguish this James from the son of Zebedee. Furthermore, since two sets of brothers among the twelve are identified (Matt 10:3), if there were a third set, they surely would also have been identified as such.

Several textual witnesses for Mark 2:14 read "James the son of Alpheus" rather than "Levi the son of Alpheus," thus eliminating one difficulty, but suggesting that another tax-collector, named James, was a follower of Jesus. The textual variation is likely an attempt to harmonize Mark 2:14 with Mark 3:18 and Matt 10:3 = Luke 6:15. But it creates another difficulty when compared to its parallel, Luke 5:27, which reads "a tax-collector named Levi." The variant reading is unlikely original.

The second Alpheus is sometimes identified with Clopas (John 19:25) or Cleopas (Luke 24:18). The identification with Clopas is based on the assumption that only three women at the cross are mentioned in John 19:25 (and not four) as in the parallel verses (Matt 27:56; Mark 15:40). Thus, Mary the sister of Jesus' mother is said to be the wife of Clopas, and is supposedly listed second in Matt 27:56 and Mark 15:40 as Mary the mother of James and Joseph (Joses in Mark). Consequently, James is the son of Alpheus (Clopas) and Mary, thus making him a cousin of Jesus. This conclusion would suggest that five cousins of Jesus were among the twelve apostles. While such possibilities are interesting they are more speculative than provable.

Identifying Alpheus with Clopas/Cleopas is based on the claim that they are variations of a common Aramaic original (e.g., Edersheim 1889:2, 603). Since the form of the original has not been established, such an argument offers little support for identifying Alpheus with Clopas. Cleopas is an abbreviated form of the Greek name Cleopatros and should not be identified with Clopas. See also CLOPAS, CLEOPAS, JAMES (PERSON), LEVI, MARY (PERSON), MATTHEW.

Bibliography

FRANK E. WHEELER

ALTA [Heb mizba‘ah; Gk thusastetion, bemos]. Altars occur in a wide range of religions, both geographically and chronologically, often related to the concept of tables, hearths, thrones, or burial mounds. In the ancient world, any surface on which offerings were made or placed for a deity could be considered an altar. Altars could be portable or stationary, simple or elaborate (EncRel 1:222–27).

A. Altars in the Hebrew Bible

While scholars speak of altars in connection with a variety of phenomena, the primary term for altar in the Hebrew Bible is mizba‘ah (400x) which is derived from the root zbh, "to slaughter." Altars are distinguished from other cultic structures such as temples and high places. Although all temples had associated altars, it appears that not all altars were part of a temple complex. Altars were constructed at places which were considered to have a sacred character, points where contact between the human and the divine could occur. For a discussion of Heb bama‘, see HIGH PLACE.

1. Construction. Throughout the period of the monarchy, it was the king who was held accountable for the construction and maintenance of altars and related structures (Ahlström 1982: 1–9). It is uncertain if altars were built by private persons. Although a variety of nonroyal figures from the Hebrew Bible are credited with the construction of altars (e.g., Noah, Abraham, Moses, etc.), it may be that these figures were given "royal" prerogatives in the tradition because of their status. While there are other clear cases of nonroyal figures constructing altars (e.g., Balaam in Numbers 23), these figures are acting on the authority of a royal patron.

It appears that "natural" rock altars were used for rituals in some cases (Judg 1:13–20), although the term mizba‘ah is not always used in the description of this type of situation (1 Sam 6:14–15; 14:33–34). The terminology associated with altars in the Hebrew Bible indicates that altars were normally thought of as being constructed in some sense. The most common verbs used for the establishment of
altars are “to build” (bnh) and “to make” (šh). In some cases these are used interchangeably (cf. Gen 35:1–7) although bnh is not used with altars constructed with metal. Other terms associated with the construction of altars are “to establish” (qwm), “to set up” (rsh), “to put/placement” (šlm), “to arrange/set in order” (šrk), and “to found” (kân). The terms used to describe the repair of altars include “to heal” (rp), “to make new” (hds), and “to purify” (šhr).

Within the Hebrew Bible are several accounts of religious “reforms” which include the decommissioning or destruction of altars. A variety of terms are often used for this activity. Since these same terms are often used for the demolition of buildings and other man-made structures, it indicates that altars also were normally constructed. The most common verb for destruction is “to tear down” (nts), occurring often in the Deuteronomistic material. Other terms include “to cause to depart/decommission” (štr), “to throw down” (hrs), “to tear apart” (qr), “to smash” (šdr), “to be waste” (hrb), “to be desolate” (šnm), and “to break” (šhp).

Although very often single altars are assumed in the Hebrew Bible, it is clear that multiple altars were known. This is indicated by the occurrence of the plural (mizbahot) and from the fact that it was necessary to distinguish certain altars (e.g., the altar of burnt offering). The story of Balaam’s construction of seven altars (Numbers 23), while not necessarily reflecting historical reality, does indicate knowledge of the use of multiple altars.

One feature of the design of Israelite altars was the presence of “horns” (qérânóh). As can be seen in numerous examples of smaller incense altars and from the larger altar found at Beer-sheba (see below), these “horns” were projections from the corners. The precise significance of the horns is not known. One theory is that the original function of the horns was to aid in binding a victim to the altar. This may be given some support in Ps 118:27. Also, owing to the special sanctity of the altar, a person accused of a murder could “grasp” the horns of the altar to receive a measure of protection (but cf. Exodus 22:14; 1 Kings 2:28–30; Milgrom 1980). Jer 17:7 seems to indicate that the horns could be engraved, but the text is possibly corrupt. The cutting off of the horns is used as a symbol of the destruction in Amos 3:14. Horned altars are not unique to Israel. They are found in Canaanite contexts (Stendebach 1976: 190–92), in excavations at temples in Cyprus (cf. Karageorghis 1981; Iona 1985), and other locations throughout the ancient Near East (cf. Yavin 1949: 165–66).

Altars associated with the tabernacle were considered portable, being equipped with rings through which poles could be inserted for transport. While portable altars are known from nomadic contexts, there is no evidence that altars constructed during the period of the Israelite or the altars constructed in Judahite monarchies were normally moved. The historical Judahite monarchies were generally centered in the Judean hill country. The evaluation of the portable altars of the tabernacle is dependent on the larger historical questions surrounding the tabernacle itself.

2. Materials. The Hebrew Bible mentions a variety of materials used for the construction of altars. It appears that the ideography concerning the materials of the altar changed over time and/or from place to place. In the introductory material to the Covenant Code (Exod 20:24–25), an initial command is given that an “altar of earth” (mizbah ʿāḏāmā) be constructed. The precise meaning of this unique term is uncertain. Robertson (1948) thinks it means simply an altar of “natural” materials. Gallling (IDB 1: 97) states that it refers to an altar constructed as a “low cube of clods of clay.” The existence of mudbrick altars in this region would make it more likely that some type of earthen brick is intended (cf. Isa 65:3).

In Exodus 20:25, however, the possibility of construction of a stone altar is admitted. As might be expected in Israel, stone is the assumed building material for altars. In Exod 20:25, Josh 8:31, and Deut 27:5–7, where altars of stone (mizbah ʿāḏānim) are specified, it is commanded that these stones be unworked by iron. This command may reflect the idea that the unworked stone contained something of the “natural” presence of the deity. The three passages, reflecting an attempt at cultic reform prior to the Deuteronomist, this prescription was not universally followed since altars constructed of hewn stone were constructed in Judah (cf. Beer-sheba below). It would appear that altars which included horns could not be either of “earth” or “unworked stone” (cf. Wiener 1927: 2–3).

Exod 20:26 gives an impression of the size of an altar by commanding that the altar not be more than three steps in height. This, in order that the “nakedness” of the priest not be exposed. This command implies that steps were part of the normal construction of the altar. Altars with steps are known from early times in Canaan (cf. Megiddo below), but steps are not conspicuous in the description of altars from the period of the Israelite and Judahite monarchies (cf. Beer-sheba below). It would appear that the problem of exposure was solved differently in Exod 28:42–43, which commands the wearing of “pants” by Aaron and the officiating priests (cf. Lev 6:3–Eng 6:10).

Several types of altars constructed with metal are also prominent. Two different bronze altars are mentioned as being located in the forecourt of the tabernacle/temple. (Note the mention of bronze altars also in Phoenician KAI 1:2 #10.4 and Punic KAI 1:14 #66.1.) The altar associated with the tabernacle (Exod 27:1–8; 28:1–7) is described as constructed of acacia wood (5 by 5 by 3 cubits) and overlaid (šph) with bronze. While it is clear that the description of this altar does not derive from a “nomadic” past, the source of the description is unclear. Some scholars believe that the description of the tabernacle derives from the Davidic period but is based on a premonarchic model (Cross 1984). Others date it to Solomon’s (1 Kings 7:28–29) or even later periods. The altar in the forecourt at which the regular sacrifices were conducted was called the “altar of burnt offering” (ḏh mizbah haʾōlāh) in the Priestly source and in Chronicles (but cf. Gadgadre 1978).

The Chronicler believed that Solomon also constructed a bronze altar (20 by 20 by 10 cubits) in the forecourt of his temple (2 Chr 4:1). It should be noted, however, that the construction of this altar is omitted from the parallel description in 1 Kings 7 although the presence of a bronze altar is assumed in 1 Kings 8:64. 2 Kings 16:14–15, and Ezek 9:2. Some scholars believe that the notice of construction has been displaced from its original location in 1 Kings to Chronicles. It is possible that this altar should be differentiated from an altar of stone (note the use of bnh) built by Solomon mentioned in 1 Kings 9:25. This stone altar may
also be implied in the wording of 2 Kgs 16:14. (Additional support for the existence of two altars can be found in Gadegaard 1978: 40–41 although his interpretation of “high place” may be questioned.) This stone altar constructed by Solomon may be the one which is replaced (2 Kgs 16:10–16) with a “great altar” (hammizbëah haggadôd) modeled after an altar seen by Ahaz in Damascus. At that time the bronze altar was moved and reserved for inquiries by the king himself. The regular sacrifices of the nation and king were conducted on the new “great altar.”

Another noteworthy altar is that described in some detail in Ezek 43:13–17. At the center of the reconstructed land, Ezekiel envisions a three-tiered altar mounted by steps (12 by 12 cubits on the top tier and 16 by 16 cubits on the lowest tier). This idea may be based on a Babylonian model (Albright 1920: 139–41) or even on Ahaz’s “great altar” (IDB 1:98; Haran 1978: 194).

The normal placement of sacrificial altars in the Hebrew Bible was in the courtyard in front of the temple, although altars on the roof were also known (cf. 2 Kgs 23:12, Judg 6:26). (Note may also be made of the Ugariotic text UT Krt:73–80, which speaks of the hero offering sacrifices on a wall // tower // roof.)

There is no evidence of the use of sacrificial altars in the interior of the tabernacle or temple. In fact, sacrificial rituals are specifically excluded from the temple itself in Exod 30:9. The normal activities associated with a sacrificial altar are also indicated in Josh 22:28–29 where the trans-Jordanian tribes claim that their “altar” is in fact a “memorial” (see below). They claim their “memorial” is not intended for the normal activities of “burnt offering, cereal offering, or for sacrifice” (v. 29). Even types of offerings which might be associated with a “presentation” altar are burned (Exod 29:25). Vessels and offerings were placed “before” (lîpêñu) the altar, not upon it (cf. Deut 26:4; Zech 14:20). It is also possible that images of gods were placed near the altar (cf. 1 Sam 6:15; Ezek 6:13).

Within the interior of the tabernacle/temple were “altars” connected to the use of incense. Exod 30:1–10 and 37:25 describe an “altar” of acacia wood overlaid with gold (1 by 1 by 2 cubits) within the tabernacle. Most scholars think that this “altar” was not part of the original description since its presence is not noted in Exodus 25 or 26:33–37 as expected. This altar is paralleled by the description of an altar of cedar overlaid with gold constructed by Solomon (1 Kgs 6:20, 22). For further discussion of these altars, see INCENSE ALTARS where the “altar of incense” (mizbêah haggêfôret) and “incense altars” (hammâmarim) are treated. Ezekiel also mentions an “altar of wood” (hammizbêah ê; Ezek 41:92) found within the temple, but goes on to describe this rather as a “table” (haššulhân).

3. Activities Associated with Altars. The most common activities associated with altars in the Hebrew Bible are the burning of sacrifices upon the altar. Some passages (e.g., Gen 22:9–10) might indicate that the offering was actually slain upon the altar (cf. Gadegaard 1978: 35–36). The usual practice reflected in the text, however, is the slaying of the victim beside (‘l) or in front of (lîpêñu) the altar in order that blood could be collected for other ritual purposes.

Several verbs are used to describe the actions of cultic personnel in connection with the altar. The most common terms refer to the offering of sacrifices, “to cause a sacrifice to ascend” (’lîh) and “to burn offerings” (q’t). In addition to the obvious role of the altar in the burning of offerings to the god, the altar (especially the foundation [yêdô] and the horns) was the recipient of blood from the sacrificial victims. A wide range of terms is used to describe the application of blood to the altar, including (prominently) “to toss, throw” (zq). While blood and oil were applied to the altar, the altar did not function as a libation table as found in earlier Canaanite practice (cf. Megiddo below).

The significance of the preposition (‘l) used with these verbs is unclear. In some instances it seems to indicate that the action takes place “upon,” i.e., on top of, the altar (e.g., 1 Kgs 9:25). In other cases, it denotes proximity (e.g., 2 Chr 1:6). The clear picture seems to be that wood was placed on the top of the altar. The sacrifice was then placed upon the wood. The precise function of a bronze grating mentioned in connection with the tabernacle altar (cf. Exod 27:4) is not known. As discussed earlier, the altar is assumed to be large enough and high enough to need steps. The verb “to descend” is used when Aaron leaves the altar in Lev 9:22. (Note might be taken of the similar Ugariotic use of mdbht with the verb yrd, “to go down,” in UT 1:20.)

Although the tabernacle altar is described as hollow (nêbôt), in no case are actions described which indicate that the sacrifice was burned within the altar. It may be that the altar was filled with earth in order to dissipate the heat generated in the burning of sacrifices. Several examples of altars constructed with a fill of ash or earth/rubble are noted by Yavis (1949: 62–63, 84, 97, 100, 111, 115, 129, 154, 169, 175–76, 178–80, 204, 207–13). This method of construction might answer the principal objection to the use of these altars as burnt-offering altars made by Gadegaard (1978). This method was suggested earlier by the rabbis but rejected by Robertson (1948: 17–18).

In several cases it appears that the normal usage of mizbêah has been extended. The only apparent reference to a “presentation altar” is in Ezek 41:22 where an “altar of wood” (2 by 2 by 3 cubits) is described as “a table which is before Yahweh.” It also seems that the altar located within the tabernacle/temple was used only for the burning of incense, not other sacrifices (see above). It is more likely that the understanding of the term “altar” has expanded to include these cases rather than an otherwise unknown ancient use of the term having been preserved.

The term mizbêah is also used for another type of construction which serves primarily as a “memorial” within the Hebrew Bible. Several “altars” are given names, often in connection with some unusual event (cf. Gen 33:20; 35:7; Exod 17:15; Josh 22:10–34; and Judg 6:24). In none of these cases are sacrifices actually offered upon these “altars.” Whether these constructions were memorials which the author calls “altars” or whether they were altars which later authors attempted to legitimize by assigning an acceptable function is not clear (cf. Snaith 1978; Van Seters 1980: 232). A similar case of a rock being designated as a named “memorial” is found in 1 Sam 7:12, but without the term mizbêah being used.

Altars did have other functions. Altars were built to mark the territory associated with the deity (cf. 1 Kgs 18:17–40; 2 Kgs 5:17) although altars in foreign territories
were also known (e.g., Elephantine, cf. Wiener 1927: 8–9). As noted above, within Israel the altar also served as a place of asylum.

There are differences among the various "authors" of the Hebrew Bible in their portrayal of altars. The Yahwist assumes Levitical distinctions for the altars even in the pre-Mosaic period. The Priestly author does not allow Levitical distinctions before Sinai. He assumes the existence of only one altar since Sinai but in some senses has reduced its sanctity compared to earlier ideas (e.g., it no longer provides asylum; Milgrom 1980). The Deuteronomist (Deut 12:15–24) loosens the connection between the altar and the slaughter of animals prescribed in earlier writings (Lev 17:1–7).

B. Archaeological Evidence

A survey of the literature would seem to indicate that the archaeological evidence for altars is quite extensive. In fact, from an archaeological perspective, there is little agreement on the type of installation to which the term "altar" is applied. It is used for everything from large platforms to somewhat smaller installations with evidence of burning in courtyards of temples to numerous types of flat surfaces with "cup marks" found in a wide variety of contexts (cf. Kittel 1908: 98–146). These later examples are extremely difficult to evaluate archaeologically since they often occur outside of obvious cultic contexts and are impossible to date with any confidence. It may even be questioned whether their function is cultic rather than practical. It is clear that cultic activities took place within the context of wine and olive pressing and threshing floors (cf. Ahsström 1982: 25 n 89). It is doubtful, however, that these installations should be termed "altars" on the basis of the usage of the term in the literature of the Hebrew Bible.

An example of these difficulties can be seen with an "altar" found at Sar'ā east of Jerusalem. There is found a large, stepped stone block (2.16 by 2.16 by 1.3m) on which is a series of channels and cup marks (Kittel 1908: 104–8; IDB 1: 100). Many scholars have related this installation to the offering of Manoah reported in Judges 13. It must be noted, however, that the date of this installation is unknown, and also that the term "altar" is only indirectly applied to the rock upon which the offerings were made in the Judges account. Whether there is, in fact, any connection between these two pieces of evidence is unknown.

1. Early Altars in Canaan. There existed in Canaan a long tradition of altar construction prior to the Israelite period. Already in the Chalcolithic period there is evidence that altars were in use. In a broadroom sanctuary at Ein Gedi, directly opposite the entry, a horseshoe-shaped altar composed of large stones was found. Bones and broken clay figurines were found within the ashes of the altar (Usishkin 1971: 29).

The tradition of broadroom temples with raised platforms opposite the entry may be carried on into the Early Bronze Age (cf. Megiddo XIX Temple 4050 and Megiddo XV Temples 5192 and 4040, although no evidence of sacrifice is present). One of the most impressive altars discovered in Canaan was unearthed at the site of Megiddo (Structure 4017). Located in an area surrounded by temples, this large, nearly circular stone altar (8m diameter) stands 1.4m high and was mounted by a flight of steps. The altar and surrounding enclosure was in existence through at least four phases during EB III–IV. The surrounding area was littered with bone and pottery fragments and the top had indications of burning (Loud 1948: 61–64, 70–84). (Concerning the Early Bronze Age "temples" and associated altars claimed for Ai [et-Tell], cf. Ottothon 1980: 128–30 n 2.)

Structures similar to the circular altar at Megiddo have also been found at a temple dated to MB II B–C at Naharaiyah. A three-phase circular stone structure (14m diameter) with two steps was found in the courtyard of the temple. Among the stones of this structure was organic material which may have been the remains of offerings. About 4m distance from the circular structure the excavators discovered a small stone installation they described as an altar. However, they give no evidence of its use. Finds from the courtyard include ash, bones, figurines, and pottery associated with cultic activity. Ottothon's conclusion that the circular structure may have functioned as an altar is more likely than the smaller installation indicated by the excavators (Ottothon 1980: 99–101; Dothan 1974: 14–25). Cf. also the circular structures dated to MB IIIB–LB I at Tell Kittan (Eisenberg 1977: 77–81).

A later level (VIII) at Megiddo also reveals evidence of a small (1.10 by 1.10 by .55m), lime-plastered mudbrick "altar" or "table" in court 5020. Although no evidence connects this building to cultic activity, its similarities to the Acropolis Temple at Lachish might be noted. If this connection is valid, the strong Egyptian influence at Lachish would make identification as a "table" or "presentation altar" more likely since blood sacrifice was apparently not part of the Egyptian ritual at that time. No direct evidence of burning or sacrifice is mentioned on or near the structure (Loud 1948: 113–14).

Galling has related this structure to others found at Tell 'Ajul and Shechem (IDB 1: 99). It would seem, however, that these latter examples are altars in courtyards in front of the temple while the example from Megiddo is differently located within an internal court. The altar from Shechem may have been founded in the courtyard of the migdal-type Temple Ia and was prominent in its position directly in front of the entrance of Temple 2. It is constructed of mudbrick and stone (2.2 by 1.65 by .35m?).

Late Bronze Age Hazor also has an example in Area H of a centrally located altar in front of a temple which was used through several levels. In the forecourt of the temple of Stratum 2 (LB I) containing ash and bone remains, a large (3.5 by 2 by .3m?) altar (2534) and nearby a smaller one (2554) were found. In the course of time the courtyard was enclosed (but remained unroofed?). It seems likely that the installation (2218) in a similar position in front of the later Temple IA (LB II) is the remains of an altar carrying on the same tradition.

In the main room (2113) of this same temple, several "libation" and "offering" tables were found. Other finds also imply that liquid offerings were important in this sanctuary (cf. Ottothon 1980: 32). This is also evident in the placement of a "libation altar" in the passageway just outside the forecourt of the Stratum 1B temple. Also during Stratum I in Area F, a large stone block (2.4 by .85
by 1.2m) with two depressions was found. Although there were finds of pottery and bones around this “altar,” it differs from the other “altars” in that there is no clearly related temple. If this was an altar, it is not evident what type of offerings were associated with it. The prominence of libation installations in Area H might indicate that this “altar” also functioned as a libation table (cf. Yadin 1972: 100–1 and fig. 25). A similar large stone was found at the MB II–LB “High Place” at Gezer in front of the monoliths. Its function is also unknown.

A recent study of the mudbrick “altars” from the Beth Shan IX has found little support for their designation as altars (Ottosson 1980: 63–66). The “altar” associated with the Fosse Temple at Lachish may better be termed a dais since this building was clearly roofed and the installation would not have functioned for burning sacrifices.

2. Altars from the Israelite Period. A series of Philistine temples from Iron Age I have been excavated at Tel Qasile. In the courtyard (111) of the Stratum X temple, a low (1.3 by 1.5 by .1m) stone foundation for an altar was discovered. The floor of the courtyard contained sherds, animal bones, and ash. A less well preserved altar (108) may be found in the following Stratum IX courtyard (Mazar 1980: 40–41, 51).

Also dated to the early Iron Age is an installation located on Mt. Ebal near ancient Shechem (Zertal 1985, 1988). This installation has been connected to the altar described in Josh 8:30–35 by the excavator. Others have claimed that the ruins are a house/watchtower (Kempinski 1986). The main structure is approximately 9 by 7m and is preserved to a height of 3.27m. It contains a fill of pottery, ash, and bones. According to the excavator, the structure is approached by ramps, one of which is 1.2m wide. The structure is surrounded by an inner courtyard which contains numerous “installations” with ash, animal bones, or clay vessels. The entire area is surrounded by an enclosure wall (250 by 52m). The “altar” complex was preceded by a circular stone structure (2m diameter) also filled with ash and bones.

Within the Judahite fortress at Tel Arad, a shrine was discovered including an altar which continued in use over several periods. It is reported by the excavator that a hearth near a square stone altar in an open area of the lowest level were pits with burned bones. During the following periods, the sanctuary was constructed with a square earth and fieldstone altar (5 cubits) centrally located in the courtyard. A large flint slab was found on top of this altar. In later strata the altar was rebuilt in the same location, but an addition of a wall to the north of the courtyard meant that it was no longer centrally located. According to the excavator, the altar was not in use in the final temple complex, a fact which is attributed to the “reforms” of Hezekiah (Aharoni 1968: 2–32). Problems with the stratigraphy and reporting of the evidence from Arad make these historical conclusions difficult to verify. It is likely that the altar(s) of this shrine should be dated to the 7th century B.C.E. (cf. Usishkin 1988: 142–57).

Similar controversy surrounds the discovery of a large (1.57m high) horned altar at Tel Beer-sheba. This altar, made up of a number of dressed stones, was found reused in the walls of a storehouse from Stratum II just east of the gate. The excavators believe it was part of a now destroyed sanctuary of an earlier level (Aharoni 1974: 2–6). Yadin has argued that it belongs to a sanctuary of Stratum II (reconstructed in Building 430 to the west of the gate). He believes that the steps of this room originally led to the top of the altar (Yadin 1976: 5–14). Since there is no evidence of burning on the stones of the altar, its actual function is unclear. Because its form is similar to that of numerous smaller incense altars, it may be that it was used for incense rather than burnt offerings.

Generally, the conclusions from the archaeological evidence confirm those reached from textual evidence. Altars for burnt offerings stood in the forecourt of the temple. Only incense altars were found within the interior. (cf. Ottosson 1980: 117, 119 n.14). Altars were constructed primarily of stone, although mudbrick and stone-and-earth constructions were also known. As would be expected, no altars constructed with precious metals have survived.

C. Altars in the NT

The LXX and NT generally distinguish between legitimate (θυσιαστήριον) and illegitimate (βόμος) altars. The latter term is the common word for altar in classical Greek. For study of the archaeological evidence for Greek altars, cf. Yavis (1949).

The term βόμος is found only once in the NT in Paul's speech in Athens (Acts 17:23). The basis for his speech is the observation of an altar dedicated to “The Unknown God.” There is evidence both from archaeology and from ancient authors to indicate that this type of altar may have been known in Athens. This evidence includes an inscribed altar from 2d century C. E. Pergamum probably reading “to unknown gods” (IDBSup, 19).

A number of references in the NT refer back to altars (θυσιαστήριον) within the accounts of the Hebrew Bible (cf. Matt 23:35, Luke 11:51, Rom 11:3, Jas 2:21). Another group (Matt 23:18–20, 1 Cor 9:13, etc.) refer to the contemporary altar in the temple of Herod. This altar is described by Josephus (JW 5.5.225) as large (50 by 50 by 15 cubits) with a ramp approach. These measurements are somewhat larger than indicated in the Mishnah (30 by 30 by 5 cubits; Mid. 3:1).

The reference in Luke 1:11 speaks of Zechariah's service at the altar of incense within the temple. A group of passages in Revelation also imply the existence of a golden horned altar (probably for incense) within the heavenly temple (cf. Rev 9:13).

The only direct reference to a Christian altar is in the metaphor found in Heb 13:10, and its significance is disputed. Some think that the reference is to the cross, others to the communion table, etc. (cf. IDBSup, 19–20; TDNT 3: 183). For a survey of the ideology of later Christian altars, cf. EncRel 1: 225–26.

Bibliography


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ALTARS, INCENSE. See INCENSE ALTARS.

ALUSH (PLACE) [Heb ʿēlūš]. A place in the Wilderness of Sin (Num 33:13) where the Israelites camped after leaving Egypt. It is located somewhere in the area between the Wilderness of Sin and that of Sinai. It may possibly be identified with Wadi el-ʿEshsh (cf. Numbers WBC, 355). The Samaritan Pentateuch reads “Alish.”

GARY A. HERNZER

ALVAH (PERSON) [Heb ʿalawā]. Var. ALIAH. One of the tribal chiefs of Edom/Esau, according to the list of tribal chiefs in Gen 36:40–43 (= 1 Chr 1:51b–54). The variant forms of this name (ʿalwā in Gen 36:40; ʿalaw in 1 Chr 1:51 [but note Qere ʿalaw!]), along with the two variant forms of the name of the first son of Shobal (Alvan/Alvan in Gen 36:23 = 1 Chr 1:40), all refer to the same Seiritic-Horitic clan belonging to the tribe of Shobal. See ALVAN (PERSON). The derivation of the name is based on Hurrian (Feiler 1939; Ginsberg and Maisler 1934) and can be verified. Rather, it seems to be derived from a Semitic root: *tāw (Arabic) or *ṭāw (NW Semitic), meaning “to high/lofty/elevated” (cf. Arabic ṣūṭ; Sabean, Liyam, Safaitic ṣāṭ). Aluh/Alvan probably represents the Edomite form of the name (while Aliah/Alvan conveys the “braided” form), formed according to *Paḥl with “Bildungssuffix” -ā and -ān (Weippert 1971: 244, 260).

Bibliography

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ALVAN (PERSON) [Heb ʿalawān]. Var. ALIAN. A clan name mentioned in the genealogy of Seir the Horite (Gen 36:23). These clans, not to be confused with Hurrian groups in Mesopotamia, are mentioned as the original inhabitants of the land of Edom (perhaps as cave dwellers). Alvan is listed as one of the five sons of Shobal and Heth, and is thus the grandson of Seir. The name in this form only appears in Genesis 36, but an alternate form, Alvan, does appear in the matching genealogical clan list in 1 Chr 1:49. This variant may be due to the confusion between waw and yod. (But see discussion in ALVAH.) See Deut 2:12–22 for mention of the dispossession of the Horite clans in the region of Seir (Edom) by the encroaching “sons of Esau.” This conquest is paired in the text with the conquest by the Israelite tribes of Canaan.

VICTOR H. MATTHEWS

ALTAR OF WITNESS. See WITNESS, ALTAR OF (PLACE).