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Standing Stones in Ancient Palestine

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Standing stones (*maṣṣēbôt;* singular *maṣṣēbāh*) were well-known objects in ancient Palestinian culture and are mentioned often in the Old Testament. (Hereafter masseba and its plural massebot will be used as English words.) Jacob erected his pillow-stone as a masseba at Bethel (Gen. 28:18). Moses set up twelve massebot at Sinai before the altar at the ratification of the covenant (Ex. 24:4). Yet at a later period a very different attitude obtained. Massebot were no longer proper, but violently denounced (Deut. 16:22). King Josiah led a reformation in which these standing stones were destroyed from all the "high places" (II Kings 23).

The masseba was basically a stone "set up," as its etymological origin (from *nṣb* "to set up") indicates. In this position it served as a marker, jogging the memory. It would arrest the attention of the onlooker because it stood in a position it would not take naturally from gravity alone; only purposeful human activity could accomplish such "setting up." The study of massebot, therefore, is the study of those purposes that led to that "setting up."

Palestinian Tradition of "Plain Stones"

Biblical descriptions and the growing number of excavated massebot indicate that a wide variety of stones could be used as a masseba, ranging from any unworked natural slab to fine-hewn stones. As a rule it was a "plain stone," that is, it bore no inscription and had no relief

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Fig. 1. Byblos, Obelisk Temple with massebot in U-shaped court about central cella. From M. Dunand, *Byblos II* (1950), Pl. XXII.

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or figure inscribed on it, however nicely it may have been shaped. In this the Palestinian stones differ markedly from those of the empires of Egypt and Mesopotamia. There inscriptions and reliefs were an almost unbroken rule. Long excavation in those areas has unearthed only a small handful of "plain" stones. On the other hand, plain stones predominate by far in Palestine in the Bronze and Iron ages. The few inscribed stones found in Palestine are virtually all of demonstrably foreign origin or influence. It becomes clear, therefore, that there was a specifically Palestinian tradition of avoiding inscription or figure. It might more properly be called a Syro-Palestinian tradition, since many stones in Syria and Phoenicia were also "plain." Notable examples are the obelisks of Byblos (Figs. 1 and 3) and certain stones in the Phoenician colony of Carthage.

The causes and origins of this tradition can only be conjectured. Some sort of religious conservatism preserving the tradition of preliterate times would seem to be the key factor. Surely it was not due to lack of technical stone-cutting competence, since many of the Palestinian massebot are finely shaped and worked. This tradition may partly reflect a rejection of foreign or imperial customs, since the use of inscription and figure presumably originated and was common in the imperial cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia. The stubborn persistence of this anepigraphic tradition is all the more surprising in view of the obvious borrowing from surrounding literate cultures of the custom of carefully shaping the massebot. Whatever the origin, the "plain stone" tradition was regnant in Palestine.

Therefore, we reserve the biblical (and thus Palestinian) term "masseba" for these plain, uninscribed, unfigured stones. The term "stele" will be used technically for *inscribed* standing stones.

Interpretation of Massebot

Precisely this absence of inscription on Palestinian massebot is the prime source of difficulty hindering our understanding of the meaning and function of these stones. The inscribed stele is at least partly self-explanatory; its inscription suggests the nature of the stone's function. Massebot, unfortunately, are mute. They offer no verbal hint of their meaning to the modern scholar, or for that matter to the ancient onlooker. Indeed, without any specific indication by an inscription, different individuals could easily attach *diverse* meanings to the *same* stone. Nor would it be at all difficult for the understanding of a given masseba to change over the course of changing generations. The diverse opinions regarding massebot in the Old Testament offer a good example of this fluidity and shift of meaning. The blankness of the massebot not only

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aided this fluidity but makes the present task of recovering the sundry ancient interpretations of these stones more difficult.

We possess three basic avenues leading to an understanding of massebot. First, it is reasonable to assume that these uninscribed standing stones in Palestine fulfilled some of the same functions that *inscribed* standing stones in other countries served. An analysis of the functions of Near Eastern steles can thus form the general background of the study of Palestinian massebot. Secondly, the *archeological context* of an excavated masseba offers direct evidence of the use of that stone. Careful observation of the stone's position in relation to structures, altars, other massebot, offering vessels, and the like will suggest possible functions. Here it is crucial that excavation be done accurately — and reported completely! Finally, ancient *documents* mentioning massebot, primarily the Old Testament, show how certain ancient individuals conceived these stones. Unfortunately, many of the Old Testament authors branded them as highly improper without disclosing the significance ascribed to them by their users. One must take this disapproval into account when using this evidence.

We have here reached the most crucial point in any attempt to study massebot. What is our basic understanding of the masseba? By what principle shall one devise the categories of a typology by which we describe the uses of these stones? The decision at this point will inexorably shape what follows. In the late 19th century, some described the large rude stones known then, existing above the surface, as phallic emblems. These were said to symbolize the fertile powers of Baal, consort of the goddess Asherah, whose symbol was the sacred tree standing beside the masseba. Subsequent excavation of a host of massebot carefully shaped into flat slabs clearly disproves such phallic theories. Many scholars viewed the masseba as a *sacred* stone, the abode of some animistic spirit, either of a deity, demon, or dead man. Animism has fallen into disfavor and the sacredness inhering in a masseba is described today in terms more similar to *mana*. The stone is conceived as a medium of power, as charged with a concentration of the divine power operative in the whole sacred area. Still other scholars described the masseba as a variety of idol, a representation of the deity, effecting his presence in that place.

The present writer takes a different point of departure. (Indeed, the observant reader will note that it has shaped this discussion from the very first paragraph.) It will be assumed here that the ancient Palestinians thought of massebot as *standing stones* and that these stones served as markers, reminders, jogs for the memory. The etymology of

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the term suggests this; and, much more significantly, most excavated massebot have been shaped and worked to resemble the steles, the *inscribed* standing stones, of the surrounding countries which clearly served this function. This is the crucial assumption.

Briefly stated, the masseba may perform four functions: *memorial,* to mark the memory of a dead person; *legal,* to mark a legal relationship between two or more individuals; *commemorative,* to commemorate an event, and more specifically, to call to mind the participants in all the honor and glory of that event; and *cultic,* to mark the sacred area where the deity might be found, or more narrowly, to mark that exact point where the deity is cultically immanent, where worship and sacrifice will reach the deity. It is important to note that a single stone was not limited to a single function but often carried out several at one and the same time.

One other very important point. This typology does not intend to say that the idea of "marker" exhausts the functions of all standing stones. First of all, steles are not only standing stones but also bear inscriptions, symbols, or figures. The stele functions not only as a standing stone, but also as document and likeness. In fact, it is actually these elements which most directly execute some of the total functions of the stele! Furthermore, the plain massebot undoubtedly had other functions attached to them, functions which were actually proper to images, holy stones, or the inscriptions and figures on steles. The present writer feels that precision is best served if we speak of such functions as being *transferred* to massebot, not inherent in them. Thus while our typology is based on the masseba as *marker,* it allows that other functions were transferred. In some cases these transferred functions even became primary. Certain biblical writers, for example, considered the massebot as a variety of idols (Lev. 26:1, Micah 5:13). Cultic stones had a special tendency to assume transferred functions so that for many these stones "enabled" or "effected" the deity's presence. The precise conception of a function transferred to a plain masseba is not only difficult to recover, but likely varied considerably according to period, culture, and even individual.

Legal Stones: Marking a Legal Relationship

Certain stones were intended to call to mind *legal relationships* existing between individuals or groups. The most common examples of this category are boundary and treaty stones. These functions were known already in early 3rd millennium Sumerian city-states.

The war between the cities of Lagash and Umma began officially when the stele marking their boundary was thrown down. When king

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Eannatum of Lagash was subsequently victorious, he set up another stele at the border. This one recorded the treaty between the cities and spelled out the boundaries as well as commemorating his victory.[1] The text of the Stele of Vultures erected by Eannatum inside the city of Lagash includes lists of fields and lands such as may have been part of the text of the stele he set up out in the fields at the border. (See James Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures* [Princeton, 1954], numbers 298-302. Later references to this most useful collection of pictures will employ the abbreviation *ANEP,* followed by the number of the *picture,* not the page number.)

The *kudurru* stones of Babylon were a type of boundary stone. (See *ANEP,* 454, 518-21.) Shaped like oval boulders, they recorded (a) titles to land, often by royal grant, (b) curses on any who might destroy the stone, (c) reliefs depicting the ceremony of the king's grant, and more interestingly, (d) symbols of the gods. These symbols apparently were meant to function like the curses — to invoke the protection of the deity and so to preserve the stone, since it was dangerous, presumably, to destroy the symbol of a god. Many ancient cultures shared this concern for preserving boundaries and boundary stones by some sacred sanction. The Old Testament, for example, prohibits moving landmarks (Deut. 19:14), and the imprecatory liturgy of Deuteronomy 27:17 pronounces a curse on the boundary-stone mover.

The royal steles erected by Assyrian kings served a legal function among others. They were markers proclaiming his dominion, and when set up at the farthest point of their campaigns, noted also the limits of that control (*ANEP,* 442-44, 447).

The relief on an intriguing stele from Ugarit depicts two men with raised arms before a table with several objects on it (*ANEP,* 608). Lack of inscription renders certainty impossible, but it may well mark a contract or treaty and depict the moment of the oath confirming the contract recorded in the cuneiform tablets lying on the table.

Legal functions are well known among Old Testament massebot. Jacob and Laban set up a masseba — as well as a cairn according to the present text — at the border of Aram and Gilead on the occasion of a treaty (Gen. 31:45-52). The stone marked both the terms of the contract and the border between these lands. Moses erected twelve massebot at Sinai, one for each tribe (Ex. 24:4). We are not told whether they circled the altar of Yahweh or stood in a line. In any case, they marked both the relationship of each tribe to Yahweh and the fact that the relationship of the tribes was founded on their common commitment

1. W. King, *A History of Sumer and Akkad* (1923), pp. 126-29.

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to Yahweh. Joshua set up a "great stone" at the Shechem covenant renewal, and its function is specifically explained: "It will be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of Yahweh which he spoke to us" (Josh. 24:26-27).

The use of a plain stone to mark a legal agreement naturally depends on memory and oral tradition to preserve the precise terms of the covenant. A typologically later development of legal stones was the custom of inscribing the terms of the contract on the stone. The stone thereby serves also as a document. The covenant massebot of Shechem in Deuteronomy 27:1-8 and Joshua 8:30-35 are examples of this development; for they bore, written upon them, "the law of Moses." The 8th century Syrian stele found at Sefire bears a lengthy text of a treaty between KTK and Arpad.[2] This documentary function has become primary in the most famous Near Eastern stele of them all, that bearing the Hammurapi Code (*ANEP,* 246). The use of a stone in the shape of a standing stone as the writing material for this document ultimately reflects the legal function of steles, that of marking relationships between parties.

Memorial Stones: Stones Memorializing the Dead

Standing stones were commonly used to mark the memory of the dead and often also to mark the position of his grave. The use of memorial stones was most fully developed in the thousands upon thousands of funerary steles in Egypt.[3] Such a stele did much more than memorialize the dead and mark his grave. It marked the proper spot for funerary offerings on the offering table so often set at its base. It was covered with pictures and inscriptions: the name which would effectively invoke the deceased in ritual, a picture of the deceased which would lend him a sort of existence and form a channel of his communication with the living, and food and furniture listed and pictured for use in the other world. In short, the stone and the figures and inscriptions upon it served to supply the needs of the dead, especially by expediting his funerary cult.

Memorial stone tradition was firmly rooted in Syria-Palestine, though their functions were usually considerably less complicated. Many Phoenician and Mediterranean memorial stones bear short funerary inscriptions. In fact, almost every use of the term *mṣbt,* the Phoenician cognate of the Hebrew *massēbāh,* occurs in these funerary inscriptions, referring to the inscribed stone itself.[4] The inscriptions regularly bear

2. J. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts,* 3rd edition with Supplement, (1969), pp. 659-61.
3. For a superb comprehensive study of these steles see J. Vandier, *Manuel d'archéologie égyptienne* (1952-1958), Vol. I, 724-74 and Vol. II, 389-534.
4. C. Jean and J. Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire des inscriptions sémitiques de l'ouest* (1965), p. 164.

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the name of the deceased and usually also that of the donor. These not only memorialized the deceased, but also the donor, as well as commemorating the donor's pious care for the dead.

There was a strong tradition for memorial stones among the Arameans of early first-millennium Syria. Many bore reliefs depicting one or two deceased sitting at a banquet table, sometimes with a servant in attendance (*ANEP,* 631-33). One of these was found at a tomb beside the royal *hilani* palace at Zinjirli, marking the burial spot (*ANEP,* 630). The banquet scene suggests the importance of food for the dead and the possibility that, as in Egypt, offerings were made for the dead. One cemetery near Carchemish has in fact yielded several offering tables in addition to two banquet-scene funerary steles, though in mixed contexts.[5] Ekrem Akurgal theorizes that the Arameans borrowed these banquet scenes from the Hittites for whom they depicted offerings to the gods.[6] Perhaps the ancient Aramean did not draw so careful a distinction between them. We know the Hittites considered their kings to have been deified on death. The category of *'elōhîm,* "gods," included many sorts of more-than-human spirits. When the witch of Endor "raised" Samuel from the dead for Saul she cried out because she saw a "god" rising from the earth (I Sam. 28:13). Memorial steles with banquet scenes were still in use in the 5th century B.C. (*ANEP,* 635).

This Aramean tradition for memorial stones forms the backdrop to the two memorial stones specifically mentioned in the Old Testament. When Jacob buried Rachel, the wife he had labored for in Syria, he set up a masseba to mark her grave (Gen. 35:20). David's son, Absalom, also set up a memorial masseba; and he was born of a princess of Geshur which is just south of Syria. Absalom set up his own memorial stone while he was yet alive, "because he said, 'I do not have a son to cause my name to be remembered'; and he called the masseba after his name so they call it 'Absalom's monument' to this day" (II Sam. 18:18). Not having a son to be called "ben Absalom," he insured the continuance of his name and memory in Israel by a masseba that people would call, "Absalom's monument." This is superb indication of the basic function of a memorial masseba — to mark the memory of the dead person. A less likely alternative is that the phrase "cause name to be remembered" is a technical term referring to the use of Absalom's name in a funerary cult of some sort, such as might be fulfilled by a son.

Such *funerary* stones were not common in Babylonia-Assyria, though the memorial function of steles was well-known. (Lack of stone in the

5. L. Woolley, *Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology,* XXVI (1939-1940), Pl. III and p. 14.
6. *Spaethethitische Bildkunst* (1949), pp. 119-25, 152-53.

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alluvial plain of Babylonia limited the use of costly standing stones to those few of considerable means.) The Assyrian royal steles had the explicit secondary function of proclaiming the famous memory of the king beyond his death. One of the most remarkable set of steles in the Near East was found at Assur.[7] More than 130 stones were set in two rows facing one another just within the city walls. One memorialized kings, the other important officials. These steles differ from most steles in this area (which are regularly covered fully by figure and inscription) in that they bear only a brief inscription, "Image of NN," set within a small niche on the stone. In addition to the obvious memorial function, these rows were apparently meant to serve as a sort of "walk-in calendar." Not only were the stones arranged in a generally chronological order from east to west, but the individuals memorialized were those named in the eponym lists, the lists used by the Assyrians for computing dates.[8]

Commemorative Stones: Commemorating an Event and Honoring the Participants

A large proportion of steles extant serve a *commemorative* function. There are two aspects to this function. One or the other may be more prominent, but both are present. The stone commemorates an event, yet not for the sake of event in itself, but for the significance it lends to the participants. Most often the stone serves primarily to honor an individual or individuals by marking them in the distinction and glory they bear because of the part they played in the event commemorated.

The most obvious example of this function is the victory stone, commonly set up all over the Near East by monarchs to remind posterity of their accomplishments. Several have been found in Palestine, erected there by campaigning conquerors: Pharaohs Seti I and Ramses II at Beth-shan (*ANEP,* 320-21), Shishak at Megiddo, and Sargon the Assyrian at Ashdod.[9] King Saul set up a victory stone at Carmel after victory over the Amalekites (I Sam. 15:12). The biblical author judges this to be a bad thing, apparently because he set it up "for himself" rather than giving the credit for the victory to Yahweh. Samuel, on the other hand, is not chided for erecting the stone named "Ebenezer," "stone of help," after the rout of the Philistines. The name of the stone is clarified as meaning "Hitherto Yahweh has helped us" (I Sam. 7:12), though a case can be made that the original text read "It will be a witness that Yahweh has helped us."

7. W. Andrae, *Die Stelenreihen in Assur* (1913).
8. E. Ebeling and B. Meissner, *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* (1933), II, 412.
9. H. Tadmor, *Eretz Israel,* VIII (1967), 241-45, 75*.

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The royal Assyrian steles, mentioned twice above, were primarily commemorative. The figure of the king in relief was bigger than life, and the text reinforced this impression by recounting his conquests and accomplishments. The king's gods, at whose command he conquered, were thereby also honored; and their symbols were included in the relief (*ANEP,* 442-44, 447).

To this class also must be assigned those stones set up in sacred precincts to commemorate a sacrifice or some other ritual act. First-millennium Phoenician colonies of North Africa and the Mediterranean islands have yielded a whole series of steles commemorating *mlk*-sacrifices,[10] known in the Old Testament as sacrifices to "Molech" (Jer. 32:35; II Kings 16:3). Since these involved the sacrifice of an infant or some substitutionary animal, we can understand why this cultic event was worthy of commemoration! Other examples are offered by two simple steles from Ugarit. They are nicely hewn but bear only a short inscription noting the sacrifices (*ANEP,* 262).

"Votive" steles form an important group of steles commemorating cultic acts. The term "votive" is here used in a technical sense of those stones erected specifically in fulfillment of a vow (*ndr*) and/or in answer to prayer. The vow was a well-known religious practice of the Syro-Palestinian area, including ancient Israel. When seeking a certain boon from the deity, the worshipper would promise that upon the granting of this boon he would "repay" his vow by offering a sacrifice, erecting a stele, or some such appropriate act of thanksgiving (Psalms 54:6, 66:13).

A close study of the *form* of votive stele inscriptions is informative. Typical is that of the Bar-Hadad stele (*ANEP,* 499): (the brackets indicate illegible portions)

> A stele which Bar-[Ha]dad, son of [. . .], the king of Aram, set up for his lord, for Melqart, which he vowed to him, and (then) he heard his [voice].[11]

This illustrates the five main parts of the votive-inscription form, to which a sixth is often appended.

1. Name of the object offered and inscribed: "Stele"
   (Relative clause) "which"
2. Verb: "vowed" [in above case, "set up"]
3. Name of donor, with identification (lineage, position, etc.): "NN, son of N, X"

10. For convenient secondary sources see R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (1961), pp. 444-46 and D. Harden, *The Phoenicians* (1963), pp. 94-104.

11. H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften* (1962-1964), pp. 203-04.

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4. Deity to whom offered: "for N"
   (Added clauses)
5. Benevolence commemorated: "because he heard his voice"
6. Prayer for future benevolence: "may he bless."

This analysis indicates two fundamental functions for the votive stele. First, it commemorated the benevolent action of the deity, his answering the donor's prayer. The stone proclaimed the deity's mercy before the community in the sanctuary. Characteristically, the specific benevolence is not spelled out. Not the details of the event but the glory which it lends to the deity is the issue. Secondly, the votive stele commemorated the ritual act of the donor's repayment of his vow. It marked the donor as a pious and thankful servant of his divine master.

The third function of these votive steles is signaled by the prayer "may he bless." The stele calls for *future* benevolence. It does this by standing before the deity as a constant reminder, commemorating both his earlier attitude of mercy towards this donor as well as the donor's piety and devotion. In effect the stone draws out and perpetuates the value of the donor's original ritual act of sacrifice and prayer.

This third function may also be said to be a *transferred* function. For it is the proper function of a "dedicated" gift to call for the deity's benevolence. A "dedicated" gift often bears a dedicatory inscription quite similar to the votive inscription. It names the object offered, the donor, and the deity and includes the crucial part, a petition; but there is no mention of a vow or answer to prayer. The dedicated object is a gift intended to foster the deity's goodwill.

Now it is a striking fact that in the two best-known collections of North-west Semitic inscriptions[12] the overwhelming majority of votive inscriptions is on *steles*. On the other hand, simple dedicatory inscriptions are not found on steles, but always on other objects. Why was the stele especially suited as a votive gift? Perhaps the Old Testament practice of vows supplies the answer. The Israelite repaid a vow by reciting a "thanksgiving psalm" in the sanctuary. Thanksgiving psalms emphasize the duty of repaying God by proclaiming his goodness to the worshipping community. This is precisely the function for which the stele was fashioned! It is a *marker*. It was a *public* monument, marking the answer to prayer, thereby glorifying the deity before the worshipping community.

On the other hand, the dedicated gift was not intended for the community, but to gain the god's favor. Size and visibility to human

12. G. A. Cooke, *A Textbook of North Semitic Inscriptions* (1903) and H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften* (1962-1964).

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eyes were not crucial, but rather proximity to the sacred precinct and usefulness and value to the deity. Thus dedicated gifts tend to be objects of cultic furniture — altars, statues, etc. — and are often made of precious materials, gold, silver, marble, etc.

To sum up then: this third function of the votive stele, that of calling for a future benevolence, may be viewed also as a transferred function. The stele is not only a marker but also a gift dedicated to his further favor towards the donor.

Sir Flinders Petrie discovered a curious series of small tablets in the Temple of Ptah in Memphis, inscribed with from one to as many as 376 human ears.[13] Inscribed petitions, adoration scenes, and figures with upraised arms suggest that these are "stones of petition," that is, steles raised in the sanctuary to commemorate a petition and continue the suppliant's appeal for aid. The multiplication of ears appears to be an attempt to effect a positive hearing. Their size is striking. The smallest stone measures less than 2 cm. high (one inch is 2.54 cm.), and all but one are less than 30 cm. high. Now a stele only 2 cm. tall is remarkable on any theory! Yet the size suits their "private" function. Since the petition was not a public matter and the stones were meant only for the eyes of the god, a miniature stele was sufficient.

Cultic Stones: Marking the Cultic Immanence of the Deity

Cultic stones mark the place where the deity is in some manner immanent so that worship offered there reaches him or her. They may mark this immanence either generally, by being placed at the entry or boundary of the holy place, or more specifically, by being set beside the altar or offering table, the exact spot of cultic intercourse between worshipper and deity. The small stele-with-offering table, bearing a sun disc symbol of the deity (Fig. 2g), from Ugarit is the clearest example of such a cultic function for a figured stele.

Royal Assyrian steles also fulfilled cultic functions. The Bronze Gate of Balawat depicts sacrifice before a royal stele (*ANEP,* 364 and p. 292). A small altar was found before a royal stele at Nimrud.[14] Presumably the symbols of the deities regularly found on royal stones served as the focus of the worship. In fact, the worshipper probably conceived himself to be joining the king in his worship, (and recognizing his rule!), since the king is himself depicted in an attitude of devotion towards these symbols of the deities (*ANEP,* 442-44, 447). Thus these royal Assyrian steles could serve all four basic functions: legal,

13. W. M. F. Petrie, *Memphis I* (1909), pp. 7 and 19, and Pls. IX-XIII.
14. H. R. Hall, *Babylonian and Assyrian Sculpture in the British Museum* (1928), Pl. XIII and p. 14.

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memorial, commemorative, and cultic. The many Egyptian funerary steles also served a cultic function in the mortuary cult, marking the spot where offerings to benefit the deceased pictured on the stone should be offered.

The cultic function is perhaps less common among steles than the other three functions, memorial, legal, and commemorative. Presumably these extra-Palestinian cultures focused their ritual more often on images. There is, however, a notable series of steles in north Syria and surrounding areas which served cultic functions. They bear a large figure of the deity in relief, often without any inscription (*ANEP,* 489-92, 532), but sometimes with a dedicatory or votive inscription such as

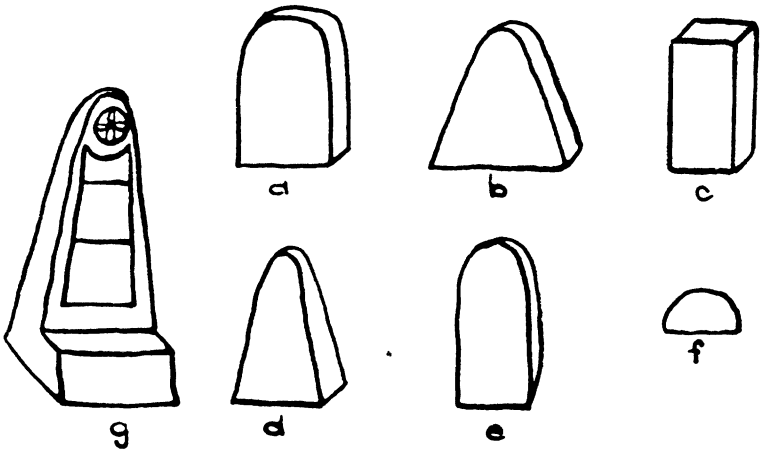

Fig. 2. Typology of the form of standing stones. a. slab, "arched" or "round-topped;" b. slab, tapering; c. square; d. obeliskoid; e. round-with-face; f. cross-section of round-with-face; g. stele-with-offering table from Ugarit, sun disk symbol on stele, about 35 cm. high.

the one quoted above from the Melqart stele. Such a large figure of a deity on display surely marked his cultic immanence in the area and could easily serve as a focus of worship. The stone at Jekke had this function, for its inscription states that this stone *and an altar* were dedicated together by the king (*ANEP,* 500). Unfortunately, the precise archaeological context of these stones is rarely known. They were often abused by invaders and provided prized building material for later generations. Enough have been found in debris around temples or entryways, however, to assure a cultic function generally.

It is intriguing to note that these figured stones, usually without any inscription, are most common in Syria on the fringes of the plain stone tradition. It is tempting to see in these stones a fusion of the tradition for plain cultic massebot with the artistic traditions of Meso-

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potamia and Egypt which filled the stele with figure and inscriptions carefully using all space. The depiction of the deity on the stele would thus explain the significance of unfigured cultic massebot. They were stones proclaiming the deity's cultic immanence. This same end was accomplished rather differently, of course. The stele did this through the likeness or image. The masseba was not a likeness but a marker, and likely enough also a medium of the divine power. What other functions were transferred to them by those who worshipped before them at various times and places is difficult to determine.

This northern tradition of figured steles may have found its way into Israel among those Canaanite traditions imported by Jezebel and Ahab. In the temple of Baal in Samaria Ahab erected a masseba defined with curious precision as "the masseba of Baal," which is probably one of these figured steles (II Kings 3:2; 10:26-27). Perhaps Hosea refers to such a relief when he complains that Israel "improved" their massebot (Hos. 10:1).

Cultic markers were common at the entryway of temples. There were of course many other kinds of furniture there to aid in the activities at this busy place. All this offered real opportunity for transferral of function. The pillars before Solomon's temple (called *'ammûd,* not *massēbāh*) may well have had transferred to them the cultic function of marking the sacredness of the area. If their names, Jachin and Boaz, are actually the first words of dynastic oracles inscribed on them, one may say they also had the legal function of marking the relationship of Yahweh and the Davidic dynasty (I Kings 7:21.)

Jacob set up the classic cultic masseba at Bethel to mark the presence of Yahweh there who appeared in the dream. "Surely Yahweh is in this place. . . . how fearful is this place. This is the very house of God; this is the gate of heaven" (Gen. 28:16-17). The other account of the erection of this stone also stressed communication between God and man: "Jacob set up a masseba in the place where he [God] had spoken with him" (Gen. 35:14). Jacob anointed the stone, presumably to dedicate it, and poured out a libation before it, the only ritual before a cultic masseba ever explicitly mentioned in the Old Testament (Gen. 28:18; 35:14). In addition, the stone served other functions. It commemorated the theophany. There is also a hint that it had some votive significance: "I am the God of Bethel where you anointed a masseba and made a vow to me" (Gen. 31:13; cp. 28:18-22). Presumably the stone served as the focus of the ritual of Jacob's vow, but the close connection of stone and vow hints at an Israelite custom of votive massebot, perhaps even used as "stones of petition."

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Interest has usually centered on Jacob's description of this masseba: "This stone, which I have set up as a masseba, will be a house of God" (Gen. 28:22). "House of God" is the usual term for "temple." Just how far are we to press this term in understanding massebot? In some way this stone symbolized or was a temple in miniature. Now some ancients probably did conceive of the deity "dwelling" in the stone in the literal sense of the term. Yet in this context it is also a pun on the name of the place, Bethel, which means "house of God." Likewise, since the stone was the only object here, it is true in a sense to say that it *was* the sanctuary/temple.

Fig. 3. Byblos, obeliskoid masseba with offering table and vessels on a street. From M. Dunand, *Byblos* II (1950), Pl. XXXVI, 1.

Jacob's phrase apparently echoes a Semitic idiom, however. Curiously, it is one best attested in late classical literature. The Greek *baitylion* is transparently derived from a Semitic word for "house of God," such as *bēt 'il*. It occurs in accounts of Syro-Phoenician (!) stones of meteoric origin, which have remarkable powers of locomotion and of working wonders.[15] This is a far cry from the simple standing stones of the Bronze and Iron ages! One might write off as pure coincidence any connection beween Jacob's stone and these *baitylia,* save for the lone Aramaic attestation of the phrase "houses of the gods," used of

15. G. F. Moore, *American Journal of Archaeology,* VII (1903), 198-208.

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the steles bearing the treaty inscriptions at Sefire.[16] Whatever connection there is in terminology, there is clearly a great development in meaning.

Many French and some English writers use the term "betyl" to refer to venerated sacred stones, especially of certain stones and symbols of stones in reliefs from Syria, Petra, and Carthage.[17] There are continuities between these "betyls" and Bronze and Iron age standing stones, but the discontinuities are also impressive. These "betyls" date to a period of massive extra-Semitic cultural influences which brought great opportunities for transferral of functions. An extreme example is the omphaloid *"idole bétylique"*[18] which was clothed in garments and jewelry and transported in procession, treatment typical for an idol but hardly a standing stone. Furthermore, these "betyls" tend to be squatter, more block-like, which suggests a certain loss of feeling for them as standing stones. In sum, these later betyls deserve a special study of their own to define more precisely their functions and relationships with earlier standing stones.

Typology of the Form of Massebot

Paul Lapp was the first to attempt a broad typology by which to describe the forms of massebot.[19] Enlarging on his work, five categories may be distinguished: *rude,* either in a natural state or only roughly worked; *slab,* of uniform thickness, the most common form, often with rounded top and sometimes tapering (Figs. 2a and b); *round,* usually with a single flat face, as if to receive an inscription (Figs. 2e and f), vary rarely a true cone; *obeliskoid,* common at Byblos, with all four faces tapering, yet not exactly equal, so not a true obelisk (Fig. 2d); *square,* rare, with width equal to or only slightly greater than the thickness (Fig. 2c).

Unfortunately, as clear as these categories of form appear, no significant correlation between form and function suggests itself. One geographical distinction is to be noted. The obeliskoid form is limited to Byblos (Figs. 1 and 3). It is hardly surprising that the earlier stones, such as those of the Middle Bronze alignment at Gezer (Fig. 9) and the earlier stones known from Transjordan, tend to be larger, rough-hewn "rude" type. Presumably this is due to more primitive quarrying tools.

Excavated Massebot

The very beginning of archaeological work in Palestine at the turn of the century uncovered rows of standing stones. Excavators were eager

16. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts,* p. 660, (Sefire II C).
17. H. Cazelles and A. Feuillet, *Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément* (1966), VII, Fig. 701, 3 and 5, p. 954 and S. Moscati, *The World of the Phoenicians* (1965), Pls. 14, 24, 26, 28.
18. H. Seyrig, *Syria,* XL (1963), 17-19 and Pl. I.
19. P. Lapp, *BASOR,* No. 173 (Feb. 1964), p. 36.

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to claim that these stones were sacred massebot — though in a surprising number of cases they had to admit that the stones had been "reused" structurally, rebuilt into later walls.[20] This eagerness was partly due to ideas about primitive religion popular then which made much of "sacred stones." According to the theory of animism, primitive men believed that spirits and demons "dwelled" or "had their abode" in

Fig. 4. Hazor, slab masseba broken in 13th century with offering before it, and two "miniature" tapering massebot beside it. Courtesy of Y. Yadin, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

such massebot. Another popular theme was that of evolutionary development to higher stages. Massebot neatly suited this theory: early (primitive) Israel used sacred stones but later proscribed them under the influence of (higher) ethical monotheism. Further excavation, however, led to a recognition that Israelites often used lines of stones structurally to support ceiling and roof. Most of the early excavators' "massebot" were not sacred pillars but structural posts! In fact, "From Pillar to Post" was the happy title Millar Burrows gave his 1936 article de-

20. F. J. Bliss, *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement*, XXXI (1899), 322-23 and E. Sellin, *Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien: Philosophisch-historische Klasse*, Band LII (1905), 18-19, 104-05, and Fig. 10.

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tailing the scholarly reanalysis of these "massebot!"[21] Recent excavations have proven much more productive, however, yielding many genuine massebot.

We begin our discussion of massebot excavated in Palestine and Syria-Lebanon with the single obeliskoid stone from Byblos (Fig. 3). By good fortune offering vessels were found still in place on the altar or offering table before it. Thus far we have only the report that this was found "on a street."[22] We eagerly await the excavator's final report, but even that will not answer all the questions that rush to mind. This was clearly a cultic stone, marking the offering place. But did it also function as a commemorative or legal stone? What was the nature of the offerings — and other cultic acts here? To which deity were they offered? Why was it set up here? For a semi-private cult or for official acts? Were the buildings in the vicinity private or public? All this illustrates the difficulty involved in interpreting massebot.

Fig. 4 shows a cultic basalt slab at Hazor.[23] Erected in stratum XIV, it was reused in the last Canaanite stratum, XIII, which was presumably destroyed by invading Israelites. Note the broken top (Deut. 7:1-5) ! An offering still sits before this cultic stone and two small massebot beside it, likely commemorating some offering or petition. The group stood beside the entry of a fine "palatial building," subtly proclaiming the piety of the occupants and the importance of the area. In the likely case that this was a public building, we can imagine that the stone figured in oath ceremonies for contracts and other administrative business.

The pair of stones (Fig. 5) flanking the entrance of a temple at Shechem (quite likely the temple of Baal-berit, "lord of the covenant," Judges 9:4, 46) served an additional cultic function. They marked the border and entrance to the most sacred area. Undoubtedly they also formed the focus for much of the ritual we know took place in the court at the entrance of the temples. (Psalms 24, 95, and 118:19-20 are examples of psalms rehearsed at the entrance to the Jerusalem temple court.)

The striking broken slab in the court of this same temple (Fig. 5) is the largest slab masseba excavated in Palestine. The large altar which once stood between it and the temple suggests a cultic function. On the other hand, it is difficult to avoid associating this splendid stone in some way or other with the "great stone" of Joshua 24:26-27. This

21. M. Burrows, *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*, XIV (1934), 42-51.
22. M. Dunand, *Byblos II* (1950), pp. 272-73 and 475.
23. Y. Yadin, *Israel Exploration Journal*, IX (1959), 76 and Yadin *et al.*, *Hazor III-IV* (1961), Pl. IX, 1-4.

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Joshua erected as a legal stone after the Shechem covenant ceremony as a witness "because it had heard all the words of Yahweh." Intriguingly, the excavators date the erection of this masseba to this period, namely sometime after 1400 and before 1100 B.C.[24] Unlike most other massebot, this stone does not stand against a wall but alone in an open court. A large group of worshippers could thus stand about the stone as they would likely do in covenant renewal ceremonies. Such possible identification with Joshua's stone lacks proof, of course. Yet it may be

Fig. 5. Shechem, temple with great broken slab masseba reerected in forecourt and two sockets (see arrows) for massebot flanking entrance. The socket on the left still holds a broken slab. Courtesy of Shechem Excavation.

worth noting that of all excavated massebot, this stone can lay the strongest claim, weak as it is, to being an actual stone mentioned in the Old Testament.

The entry to cities and buildings was a favored spot for massebot. First of all, the masseba could serve as a boundary marker to remind one of the nature of the area to be entered. For example, a warning at the boundary of a sacred area would be quite useful. Secondly, as a marker the masseba was meant to be seen. Therefore men tended to set

24. G. E. Wright, *Shechem* (1965), pp. 82-87 and Figs. 36-40, 56.

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them in large open public areas frequented by crowds and affording a good view. Open squares were rare within the precious space inside city walls except perhaps before a governor's palace and regularly at the gateway. Everyone had to pass through the gate to enter the city and much business was transacted here. It is not surprising then that the fragment of the only possible Israelite *stele* ever found was discovered near the Samaria gateway.[25]

A single square masseba was found at the gateway of the once capital city of Tirzah.[26] The excavator, the late Père de Vaux, associates it with a basin installation set directly within the entryway in several phases of the gate. This puzzling position is best explained by the fact that this was the border of the city. It would have been useful for oath rituals in the business and judicial transactions "at the gate" so often mentioned in the Old Testament (Ruth 4:1, Gen. 23:18). Considering its position, squarely in the center of the narrow entry of the city, de Vaux suggests those passing it may have poured a libation to invoke the protection of the deity as they entered this new sphere.

Yohanan Aharoni unearthed a series of Israelite sanctuaries at the Judean border fortress of Arad.[27] Preliminary reports indicate that on the site of a pre-Solomonic open-air sanctuary, Solomon built a citadel fortress which was later rebuilt by several Judean kings. The room shown in Figure 6 measured only 5 by 6 feet, yet apparently was the central shrine, the Holy of Holies. The round-with-face masseba was found thrown down but presumably stood in this central position. It may have stood there already in the earliest phase of the sanctuary; for in that stratum a socket, very shallow but suitable for this stone, stood at this central spot.[28] In this position the masseba surely functioned as a cultic stone, the focus of the worship there, such as the sacrifices offered on the two incense altars. It might also have been a commemorative stone, marking the victories granted by Yahweh to the garrisons here. Considering the patriarchal traditions connected with Arad and the pre-Solomonic sanctuary, one may even wonder if this stone, like the one at Bethel, did not commemorate a theophany to the partiarchs.[29]

Close examination of Figure 6 will reveal what appear to be two flint massebot built into the right and rear walls. One can imagine that these were commemorative or votive stones in an earlier phase, were considered too important or holy to destroy, and so were rebuilt into the walls that they might remain near the holy place.

25. G. E. Wright, *BA*, XXII (1959), 77, Fig. 17.
26. R. de Vaux, *Revue Biblique*, LVIII (1951), 428 and Pls. VI-VIII.
27. Y. Aharoni, *BA*, XXXI (1968), 18-32.
28. See the plan, Y. Aharoni, *BA*, XXXI (1968), Fig. 12, p. 18.
29. B. Mazar, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, XXIV (1965), 297-303.

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Fig. 6. Arad, raised holy place of the Israelite sanctuary. The round-with-face masseba is re-erected in center. To its right a square masseba was built into the wall. Another square masseba was built into the wall beside the incense altar on the right. Courtesy of Y. Aharoni.

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Kathleen Kenyon has uncovered two slender rectangular or "square" pillars in a room at the base of the slope of Ophel at Jerusalem (Fig. 7).[30] She notes that these must be massebot since the area of the compartment is so small that roof supports are unnecessary. This is an intriguing suggestion, for the Old Testament reports there are a number of sanctuaries and massebot just outside Jerusalem in this very area which Josiah and Judah were constrained to destroy (II Kings 23).

Fig. 7. Jerusalem, Israelite constructions at the base of the Ophel ridge. Two "massebot" in lower foreground, the door opening to bedrock scarp just above the lower figure, the "altar" structure in upper center, and cave to lower left. Courtesy of K. Kenyon.

The context is curious. This compartment continued a narrow doorway opening to the rock scarp behind it, just 10-30 cm. away (see Fig. 7). One could hardly walk through it, and Miss Kenyon suggests it was intended to supply access to the rock for some ritual such as pouring libations. In that rock scarp below was a shallow cave with a cache of pottery vessels of about 800 B.C. (but not bones), and yet another cache and cave was just to the south. The hollow installation set on the scarp just above the room (Fig. 7) has been interpreted as an altar, though this is by no means certain. All of this surely suggests a cenotaph, a memorial installation with two massebot memorializing deceased persons, perhaps parents of an important family.

30. K. Kenyon, *Jerusalem* (1967), pp. 64-66.

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Still, these nearly two-meter-high pillars are unique among massebot. They are the tallest massebot known in Palestine since the Middle Bronze age. They are the only *pair* yet discovered (perhaps this is only coincidence?). They are of very rare, rough-hewn, almost square form (perhaps they were quarried as posts but later pressed into service as massebot?). They are set peculiarly, with their wider faces in different planes, unlike any other known group of massebot. Could it be that they are after all strengthening structural posts on this precarious slope, like the posts higher up the slope?

Fig. 8. Taanach, three miniature massebot from the 10th century Cultic Structure (scale in centimeters). Courtesy of Concordia-ASOR Excavation at Tell Ta'annek.

Miniature Massebot

Recently the existence of "miniature" massebot has come to light in the small 15-35 cm. (6-14 inches) high stones from cultic contexts in Hazor[31] and Tell Ta'annek.[32] Though shaped like their larger counterparts, they were too small to function simply as standing stones, that is, to catch the attention of on-lookers from a distance. These miniature massebot are clearly secondary, derived, and symbolic in function. Their small size rendered them cheaper, portable, and easily reusable. Presumably they were for private or individual worship. Size was important for public cult but not when they were meant only for the eyes of the worshipper and more important the deity.

Their possible functions are many. A likely guess sees them as cultic stones for private or small cultic installations. One found at Hazor

31. Yadin, *Hazor III-IV*, Pls. CCXCIV, 12-14 and CCCXXXIII, 2-8.
32. Lapp, *BASOR* No. 173 (Feb., 1964), pp. 35-36.

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was in a small cultic installation at the gateway. Another was on a smaller offering table just inside the Hazor Area H temple and a third was inside the same temple.[33] They are notable for their very careful shaping into conical or round-with-face shapes. Three roughly-cut arched slabs were discovered in the storage room of the cultic structure at Taanach (Fig. 8). We may imagine that all these were used to "make" a sanctified spot, to form a focus for worship and prayer, much as a crucifix or menorah today is set up to form a devotional center. Or they may have been left as "stones of petition," after an urgent petition or vow was made. (Is this the function of the two miniature stones in Figure 4?) The Egyptian stones of petition mentioned above were also noted for their small size. It is possible, too, that these miniature stones were used in imitation of the practice of setting up larger permanent stones at the fulfillment of a vow. Here especially the cost factor may be significant. One can well imagine poorer, lower classes appropriating in simpler, less costly form, the practices of those of a higher economic and social status.

Alignments

Most intriguing of all massebot are those in multiple alignments. Rows of huge rude stones have long been known to exist in Transjordan at Lejun, Ader, and Bab edh-Dhra'. Rows of massebot have been excavated at Gezer, Hazor, Byblos, and now near the copper mines at Timna. Why more than one stone? Scholars have not seriously advocated that they represent a "council" of a number of deities. Alignments are understood rather as memorials in a mortuary cult or a series of commemorative votive stones. In an important recent contribution, Eugene Stockton has argued persuasively that such stones were intended to serve as surrogates for individuals who wished to be represented continually before their deity in the sanctuary.[34] W. F. Albright has argued that the massebot of the "high places" denounced in the Old Testament were used in a mortuary cult. While other peoples apparently had such cults, the minimal evidence for (or polemic against!) a cult of the dead in the Old Testament renders this doubtful.[35]

The Gezer stones[36] are the most striking, for several stand over ten feet high (Fig. 9)! Originally ten in number, they stand in a gentle arc 100 feet long, rising above a pavement just inside the Middle Bronze IIC city wall. Quite happily, after excavating these stones in 1903, Macalister covered them over again "till the remote time when a national

33. Yadin, *Hazor III-IV*, Pls. CXXIX, 1-2 and CXLII, 2.
34. E. Stockton, *Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology*, I: 3 (1970), 59.
35. W. F. Albright, *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, IV, pp. 242-58.
36. R. A. S. Macalister, *The Excavation of Gezer* (1912), II, 381-406.

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pride in monuments of antiquity such as this shall have been developed locally." This enabled their restudy in 1968. A remarkably planned and executed excavation of the remaining bits of stratified material was able to show that the stones had been erected simultaneously, not in series, and dated them to MB IIC, *ca.* 1600 B.C.[37] Furthermore the child burials nearby seem not to be directly associated with the alignment. (Intramural child burial was a common MB practice.)

This grand alignment has received a host of interpretations. Scholars have judged them to be victory monuments, sacred pillars of a "High

Fig. 9. Gezer, the Great Alignment. Eight huge rude massebot and two broken stubs, with large "socket" at left center of alignment, just within the MB IIC city wall, visible at far left. Photo by T.A. Rosen, courtesy of HUCBAS Gezer Excavations.

Place," and memorials of ancestors or other notable persons. The present writer suggests another view. They were legal massebot, erected to mark a treaty or covenant relationship between ten groups, either clans inhabiting Gezer or cities in a wider league in the area.

On this interpretation a whole series of data falls neatly in place. The huge size of the stones and of the precious intramural space devoted to them dictates some public, city-wide function. Since they were intended to function as a unity of ten members, they were erected simultaneously. The Gezer excavators have suggested that the new prosperity evident at Gezer in MB IIC, the period of the founding of the alignment,

37. W. G. Dever, H. D. Lance, and G. E. Wright, *Gezer I* (1970), p. 3.

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may reflect the formation of this league.[38] In any case, the alignment remained in use for a relatively long period into the Late Bronze Age, unchanged except for the repaving of the area. (In fact Macalister found most of them still erect, *in situ!*) The curious large, hollowed-out, socket-like block before the alignment (see Fig. 9) may well have served as a blood altar for covenant sacrifices, just as the altar before the twelve massebot of the Sinai covenant ceremony (Ex. 24:4-9). On the other hand, it may have served as a socket for an emblem of the deity of the covenant and league. The dimensions of the socket fit perfectly an eleventh masseba found by Macalister nearby. This stone was more carefully hewn than any of the other ten which would occasion no surprise if indeed this was the emblem of the deity in this treaty alignment.

This primary legal/treaty significance would of course allow for secondary functions. Each stone might also have memorialized the eponymous ancestor of a clan or even have marked some historical event in which the ten groups participated. The obvious paradigm for such an understanding of the Gezer alignment is the 12-stone group at the Gilgal sanctuary (Joshua 4). These marked the unity of the tribes of the Israelite confederation and commemorated their common historical experience, the crossing of the Jordan.

Finally it should be noted that Macalister's reporting does not supply firm enough evidence to decide just how much sacrificial activity was carried on here or to what extent this sanctuary was much used for individual worship as well as public.

Figure 1 depicts the magnificent obelisk temple at Byblos, dating from the first centuries of the 2nd millennium B.C.[39] More than forty obeliskoid and slab massebot, ranging in height from one foot to a rather impressive eleven feet, stand in the U-shaped court. It is to be noted that the stones were arranged both singly and in groups. Several groups are symmetrically arranged (far left and center in Fig. 1), indicating some relationship. Quite a few had offering tables before the stones, showing some cultic function. The raised platform or cella in the center presumably housed some emblem of the deity. The excavator suggests that the huge block (square masseba?) in the court (right in Fig. 1) was somehow displaced from its original position in the cella.

Only one fine obelisk in the Byblos temple (to right of cella in Fig. 1) bore an inscription, in hieroglyphic Egyptian. This broken text

38. William G. Dever, *et al.*, "Further Excavations at Gezer, 1967-1971", *BA*, XXXIV (1971), 124. See also the discussion of covenant ceremonies, p. 123, within the detailed treatment of the "High Place."

39. M. Dunand, *Byblos II* (1950-1958), pp. 643-53, Fig. 767, and Pls. XX-XXXV.

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mentions a deceased person as well as a deity possibly to be identified with Canaanite Reshef, an underworld deity. These clues suggest that these are memorial massebot set up before the temple of some deity. Thus the offering tables before the stones were for mortuary offerings. The abundant cultic furniture in the court, the basins for libation and lustration, the *naoi* or shrines, need not all have been used in funerary ritual but surely suit it. Drink offerings for the dead in their dry and dusty underworld are well attested, and *naoi* are known from Egypt. In fact, the strong Egyptian influences here — the *naoi,* the obeliskoid shaping, the hieroglyphic inscription — encourage a memorial interpretation since the funerary cult was so important in Egypt. Of course the Semites in this area also used memorial standing stones. One of the reasons why Dan'el in the Ugaritic epic wished a son was precisely that he might perform the filial duty of "setting up the stelae of the ancestral spirits in the holy place."[40]

The stones of this temple probably had additional functions. Worshippers might well offer petition or vows before the stones memorializing revered ancestors of the clan. The stones at the entryway (foreground of Fig. 1) presumably had a cultic purpose. Finally, the excavator notes that several of the long stones built into the cella appear to be old massebot! This calls to mind the reuse of massebot in the Arad sanctuary.[41]

Hazor ranks second only to Byblos in number of massebot produced and is unrivaled in the variety and significance of its stones. Altogether forty have been found in at least ten different loci, all from the Late Bronze age. The most important group is that discovered in Shrine 6136.[42] This is worth consideration in some detail both for its intrinsic interest and as an example of the ambiguities involved in understanding massebot.

This unpretentious shrine of one room, probably unroofed, was built originally in the lower city in Stratum IB (14th century). In its earlier phase the room had benches, two offering slabs, a small niche in the western wall, and a number of massebot. One was found in debris filling the room, and seventeen round-with-face stones were found flung on the nearby slope in destruction debris of this stratum.

Figure 10 shows some of the ten massebot and the statue found in the niche of the last phase of the shrine when it was rebuilt in the 13th century. The focus of attention is the stele incised with a disk and

40. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts,* p. 150, Aqhat, A i 27.

41. Stockton, *Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology,* I: 3 (1970), 66, 80.

42. Y. Yadin *et al., Hazor I* (1958), pp. 83-92, and Pls. XXVIII-XXXI; CLXXX-CLXXXI, and *Hazor II* (1960), pp. 97, 105, 111 and Pls. XXXVII, 6, and CCVIII-CCIX.

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crescent with tassels, the symbol of the deity, and two upraised arms. These small massebot range in size from 22 to 65 cm. They were probably erected over the course of time and not simultaneously, for there are evident groupings; and one at least is set in front of another (the seventh from the right in Fig. 10). The small basalt seated figure holding a goblet in his right hand has on his breast an inverted crescent symbol reminiscent of the incised stele. This attitude is very common and thus ambiguous. It is used of deities, kings, and deceased persons. Two roughly

Fig. 10. Hazor, niche of Late Bronze Shrine 6136, with offering table before ten small round-with-face massebot and an enthroned figure. Courtesy of Y. Yadin, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

shaped stones less than 20 cm. high, a small anthropoid statuette, and another enthroned figure must also be noted.

Two basic interpretations have been offered of this shrine. Galling suggested that these stones memorialize *personae nobiles* of the city.[43] The seated statue represents some leader, perhaps the founder of the ruling dynasty, or the ancestor of the group memorialized. The small rude stones and figures memorialize lesser individuals. The present writer takes the less-than-royal dimensions and construction of the shrine to indicate that it came from the middle or lower class of Hazorite society, but this by no means rules out Galling's suggested memorial function. In

43. K. Galling, *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*, LXXV (1959), 5.

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fact, the parallels to the *Totenkultraum* in Tell Halaf are striking. There is a large statue of a king/deity, a monumental statue of a seated couple, and no less than 16 small rude statues of seated and standing figures.[44]

Yigael Yadin suggests that Shrine 6136 is an early antecedent of the shrines of the cult of Baal Hamon and Tannit known in Carthage and other Mediterranean sites some 800 or so years later.[45] It is surely intriguing that hundreds of these Punic commemorative steles include a disk and crescent as well as hands as symbols of the deities. These Punic stones are clearly commemorative/votive, marking *molk* sacrifices and calling for further blessing. Whether or not the same deities are involved, Yadin's comparison is suggestive. One can well imagine these Hazor stones being erected at the marking of vows as "stones of petition" and/or later as stones marking the beneficence of the deity and piety of the donor on the occasion of the fulfillment of vows or some other sacrifice. This location would then become a most logical location for further supplication and worship since it contained the reminder of previous happy relationship between deity and suppliant.

Stockton nuances this comparison of the Hazor and Punic stones by emphasizing that these stones were set up in a shrine before the deity in order to enhance a favorable relationship with the deity.[46] Indeed, this cuts across the memorial and votive interpretations. The stones had this purpose whether they memorialized the dead before the deity or commemorated the piety and devotion of the living and prolonged the value of his prayer and sacrifices here. In this connection Stockton draws attention to a disk-shaped slab (not yet visible, still under the dirt in foreground of Fig. 10) and suggests it was a base for some emblem of the deity which the massebot were meant to face. On this view one can see the massebot (of the dead?) and the living worshippers joining, ranged together in "worship" about the emblem of the deity.

Were the massebot of Shrine 6136 intended to memorialize the dead or to commemorate individuals and their pious vows and sacrifices before the deity? The plain fact is that we do not yet possess sufficient knowledge of the beliefs and practices of these Canaanites to enable us to decide confidently. There is no compelling reason either to reject the one interpretation or to embrace the other.

This same ambiguity besets the interpretation of the five identical low square stones found set in a row before the altar of the sanctuary

44. R. Naumann, *Tell Halaf*, II (1950), pp. 159-61 and 357-60, and B. Hrouda, *Tell Halaf*, IV (1962), pp. 6-7.

45. Y. Yadin in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. J. A. Sanders (1970), 199-231.

46. Stockton, *Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology*, I: 3 (1970), 68-69.

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at the Timna mining center.[47] Whether intended as memorial or commemorative stones, it appears that it was desired that these individuals be marked in the holy place.

A final note about alignments: the legal function of marking a relationship is latent in the very idea of an alignment or grouping of stones. This possibility must be most seriously considered when a group is erected simultaneously, as at Gezer, or set in a single symmetrical unit, as with some groups at Byblos, or when the stones are obviously intended to be identical, as at Timna.

Prohibition of Massebot

Finally we consider briefly why the massebot which seemed to be legitimate in earlier Israel were later prohibited in the strongest terms (Deut. 16:22; II Kings 23:14). It should be remembered that the Deuteronomic reformation of Josiah aimed at limiting all sacrifice to the single central sanctuary at Jerusalem and destroying all other cult places. Therefore, as the emblem *par excellence* of the cult place, the masseba would have been unpopular among the reformers even if it had not been considered improper for other reasons.

The development may be hypothesized as follows. In early Israel the legal, memorial, and commemorative functions were apparently more significant, relatively speaking, than in later Israel. (In any case, later writers were more concerned about their cultic use.) The non-commital blankness of the massebot enabled many in Israel to interpret them as commemorative of Yahweh's theophanies and historical acts, while their Canaanite neighbors used them in accord with their religious conceptions. But the waves of foreign cults and influences that swept over Israel had a marked effect. First the cult of the Tyrian Baal under Jezebel, then the Aramean and Assyrian influences as Israel and Judah became vassal states, led Israel to use the massebot "like the nations" — to quote the repeated phrase of the Deuteronomic writers (I Kings 14:23-24; II Kings 17:8-11). Unfortunately we do not understand as clearly as we would wish just what ritual and which cults of foreign deities this phrase "like the nations" involved. The biblical writers often considered them unmentionable. This produced guilt by association, if not also by practice.

In addition, the massebot easily took over the transferred function of image, since they were the focus of ritual. At any rate, later biblical writers consider massebot to be a variety of "image" (Lev. 26:1; Micah 5:13). This probably reflects both a sharpened and more sophisticated

47. B. Rothenberg and A. Lupu, *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*, LXXXII (1966) 125-127 and Taf. 11 and 12; and *Museum Haaretz: Bulletin*, IX (June, 1967), 53-70.

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religious consciousness as well as an increased popular use of massebot as "images." Thus the massebot fell under the prohibition of the second commandment (Ex. 20:4) which prohibited the "magic" use of images or any such attempt to coerce or control the deity in worship. Thirdly, though massebot were standard furniture in the local sanctuaries or "high places," there is not a single masseba clearly attested in the Jerusalem temple! Therefore, the condemnation of the local sanctuaries and the substitution of the Jerusalem temple simply undercut the use of cultic massebot.[48]

Introducing H. Darrell Lance

I am delighted to announce that Professor H. Darrell Lance has joined me as co-editor of the *BA*; indeed the fact that the last two issues have been so full has denied me the opportunity to introduce him before he actually began working! Dr. Lance's name will be known to *BA* subscribers, because he was one of the contributors to the December 1971 issue on Gezer. He was the associate director of the Gezer dig from 1966 to 1971 when the "first phase" of American operations came to a close, and continues his association with Gezer work both as a member of the Board of Advisors to "Gezer, phase II" and as a key man in the preparation of the excavation reports. With W. G. Dever and G. E. Wright he is author of *Gezer I* (Jerusalem, 1970).

Dr. Lance began his archaeological career at Shechem in 1962, when he was a graduate student at Harvard, en route first to his MA in 1965 and then to his PhD in 1971. Now he is associate professor of Old Testament Interpretation at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, which is part of the Rochester, New York "cluster" including Bexley Hall and Crozer Seminary. Dr. Lance received his BD degree from Colgate-Rochester in 1961 after a BA *summa cum laude* from Wabash College. He has held Fulbright and Danforth fellowships, and the W. F. Albright Fellowship of ASOR; he will spend 1973-74 in Jerusalem at the Albright Institute as Annual Professor. He is an active member of the Albright Institute's Board of Trustees, and serves as chairman of its Dig Evaluation Committee.

A few words about what this association in editing will mean: Dr. Lance and I are determined to deliver on the *BA*'s promise to be a "readable, non-technical yet thoroughly reliable account of archaeologi-

48. This development is discussed in greater detail in the writer's unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Studies in *Maṣṣēbôt*," Harvard University, 1969. This also contains a fuller series of Near Eastern steles and a hopefully complete catalogue of excavated Palestinian and Near Eastern "plain" massebot.

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