

be readily explained, and also the Assyrian *asirtu* plur. *asrati* (*esreti*), defined in the syllabaries as meaning 'high place, oracle, sanctuary.' In any case, *asherah* is a *nomen unitalis*, and its gender has no other than a grammatical significance.

The same author has spoken of the *asherahs* in his article on Idolatry (§ 7, History), which reads as follows :

"The Israelites when they invaded Canaan brought with them the common ideas of the nomadic Semites; they had their holy mountain (Horeb), holy wells (Beer-sheba), and fountains (Kadesh); the standing stone or stone-heap (altar) represented the deity in sacrifice; domestic idols were probably not unknown. They found in Canaan a people of kindred race, possessed of an agricultural civilisation which the newcomers adopted. The Canaanite high places became Israelite sanctuaries, and the *massebahs* and *asherahs* beside the fire-altars and beneath the holy trees were taken over with them; if new sanctuaries were founded, they were furnished with a similar apparatus. The prophets and prophetic historians regard the idols also as adopted from the Canaanites; and, speaking generally, this is doubtless true. The Baals and Astartes, the gods of the land, were worshipped by the side of Yahwe. The founding of the national kingdom gave rise to international relations and led to the introduction of foreign religions (Phœnician, Moabite, Ammonite 1 K. 11), which were externally much like that of Israel. The worship of the Tyrian Baal in the reign of Ahab, however, provoked a reaction which overthrew the dynasty of Omri. The larger political horizon in the eighth and seventh centuries, and especially the long-continued friendly relations of Judah with Assyria, opened the way for the introduction of many foreign cults, among which the worship of the Host of Heaven, the Queen of Heaven, the Moloch-worship, and the rites of mourning for Tammuz are the most important; 2 K. 23, ff. shows us the state of things in Jerusalem and its suburbs in 621.

"The reforms of Josiah made no permanent change, as is evident from the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel; the latter gives us glimpses of the strange rites which were introduced or revived in the last years of the city (Ezek. 8). In the Persian period the strongest foreign influence was Aramæan; this is seen not only in the gradual displacement of Hebrew by the Aramaic vernacular, but also by the allusions to Syrian cults such as those of Gad and Meni (Is. 65<sub>11</sub>). Under the successors of Alexander, the Jews in Palestine as well as in Egypt and Syria were brought under the spell of Hellenic civilisation, and the liberal party, especially strong among the priestly aristocracy, showed no prejudice against the Greek religions,<sup>1</sup> until the violent measures of Antiochus Epiphanes provoked an equally violent reaction."<sup>1</sup>

P. C.

## SYNEDRIUM OR PRETORIUM?

*To the Editor of The Open Court:*

In the year of the crucifixion of Christ—33—did the Roman officials of Judea represent unfettered power?

Was not the mighty Sanhedrin the important governing body?

<sup>1</sup>The older literature is cited under Ashtoreth [q. v.]. For recent discussion see We. *CH* 281 f. note; St. *GVI* 1458 ff., cp. *ZATW* 1345, 4293 ff., 6318 ff.; G. Hoffmann, *Ueber einige phön. Inschriften*, 26 ff.; WRS, *Rel. Sem.*(2) 187 ff. On the other side, Schr. *ZA* 3384. Reference may be made also to Baethgen, *Beitr.* 218 ff.; and to Collins, *PSBA* 11291 ff., who endeavors to show that the *asherah* was a phallic emblem sacred to Baal.

<sup>2</sup>See Scholz, 419 ff.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted from *Encyclopædia Biblica*, Vol. II., 2157.

When the imperial sovereign of Rome declined all interference with the rule of the Sanhedrin over Jerusalem, considering it policy to court the senate of elders rather than provoke hostilities, did it lie within the office of the procurator to rescind a sentence passed by the leading authorities of Jerusalem on an apostate from Israel?

A review of the political and religious aspect of the brief period of Christ's messianic activity leads to the conclusion that to the sway of the highest native tribunal, the Sanhedrin, the imperium of Rome lent official aid. The issue being that if the Procurator did not act in co-operation with the Holy Senate he was the one the crafty Tiberias went against: as instanced by the three recorded rebellions of the Jews under Pontius Pilate when in each case he was compelled to yield in consequence of the Jews' appeals to the Emperor. From such conditions were begotten Pilate's political peril and the weakness of his situation; the sequence being that not as the accomplice, but as the implement of the priestly aristocracy, he was coerced cravenly into ratifying the decree of the Jewish council, giving up to its authority one whose righteousness he declared himself convinced of. Overcome by the outrage of the Jews he yielded his name to the scourge of history while casting upon the priest-led Jewish mob the whole reproach of the death of "This Just Man, He in whom I find no fault,"—a responsibility which was accepted with cries of "Let his blood be upon us."

Was it Tiberias who was guilty of the death of Jesus?

Was it Pilate?

Was it not rather the old Mosaic law represented by Hanan? A law which assigned the penalty of death to all attempts to change the Hebrew faith.

How many death sentences dictated by priestly intolerance have forced the hand of the civil power! Sacerdotal cruelty has ever shielded itself behind the secular arm.

Christ had made the first step towards incurring the hatred of the rabbis, and the condemnation of those who disputed the right of individual judgment in the sphere of religion, when as a little child he had stood amongst the doctors in the Jewish hall pondering on problems, and hearing and asking questions; with an early introversion seeking through outward forms for the subtle essence of eternal verities. That day he had taken the first step towards the agony of Gethsemane. That day he had set his face all unconsciously towards the dread shadow of the Mount of Golgotha.

"Socrates was the glory of the Athenians who would not suffer him to live amongst them. Spinoza was the greatest of modern Jews and the Synagogue expelled him with ignominy. Jesus was the glory of the people of Israel who crucified him." Thus wrote an Oriental scholar of the past on the subject of the crime committed upon Calvary. "Jesus was crucified by the Romans, not by the Jews," thus writes one of our great scholars of to-day. In the presence of such conflicting literary statements, will *The Open Court* treat considerately the foregoing suggestions cast forth by one of its constant and earnest students? GEO. AULD.

BASSETTERRE, ST. KITTS.

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### THE JUDGES OF JESUS, AGAIN.

*To the Editor of The Open Court:*

In the number of *The Open Court* for June you answer the question of Mr. George Auld in terms which are technically correct. Undoubtedly the sentence of