

(see *Semikhah) which had been reintroduced by R. Jacob *Berab. Alshekh in turn ordained in 1590 Hayyim Vital, who was his disciple in *halakhah*. His major field of interest was *halakhah* but, acceding to requests to preach on Sabbaths, in the course of preparing his sermons he occupied himself also with Bible exegesis. He also engaged in the study of the Kabbalah, from which he derived the fundamentals of his religious philosophy. According to one tradition, Isaac *Luria sought to dissuade him from pursuing kabbalistic studies.

1590 Alshekh visited the Jewish communities of Syria and Turkey, and perhaps also of Persia, in the interests of Sanhedrin Jewry. He also sent an appeal on behalf of the Safed community to Italy and other countries. The last information about him comes from Damascus. He participated there in a rabbinical court session in the spring of 1593. He died soon after at a venerable age.

Alshekh reworked his sermons into commentaries to most of the books of the Bible. Several of these commentaries appeared during his lifetime: *Havazzelet ha-Sharon* (Constantinople, 1563; Venice, 1591) on Daniel; *Shoshannat ha-Amakim* (Venice, 1591) on the Song of Songs; *Rav Peninim* (*ibid.*, 1592) on Proverbs; and *Torat Moshe* (Constantinople, c. 1593) on Genesis. About 1597-98 there appeared in Constantinople Alshekh's commentary on the first Book of Psalms under the title of *Tappuhei Zahav*. This edition was criticized by Alshekh's son Hayyim in the introduction to his own edition of his father's commentary on the Psalms. Hayyim Alshekh averred that the manuscript of *Tappuhei Zahav* had been stolen from him and represented a first draft only of his father's commentary.

Between 1600 and 1607, Hayyim Alshekh reissued in Venice some of the commentaries published by his father and printed those which had remained in manuscript. They were: *Torat Moshe* on the whole of the Pentateuch, *Einei Moshe* on Ruth, *Devarim Nehumim* on Lamentations, *Devarim Tovim* on Ecclesiastes, *Masat Moshe* on Esther (all 1601); *Helkat Mehokek* on Job (1603) and *Marot ha-Zove'ot* on the Early and Later Prophets, with the exception of Ezekiel (1603 07); and *Romemot El* on the Psalms (1605).

Alshekh's commentaries, which are permeated with religious-ethical and religious-philosophical ideas supported by ample quotations from talmudic and midrashic sources, became very popular and have often been reprinted. Some of the commentaries appeared also in abbreviated versions. Hayyim Alshekh also published his father's responsa (Venice, 1605). Alshekh was the author of a dirge on the "exile of the *Shekhinah*" which became part of **Tikkun Hazot*. Never published and subsequently lost were *She'arim*, a book of a religious-philosophical nature; a commentary on *Genesis Rabbah*; and a talmudical work. The commentaries on *Avot* and on the Passover *Haggadah*, printed under the name of Alshekh, are not original works but compilations from his commentaries on the Bible.

Bibliography: Rosanes, *Togarmah*, 3 (1938), 276ff.; S. Shalem, *Rabbi Moshe Alshekh* (Heb., 1966), incl. bibl. by N. Ben-Menahem; A. Yaari, *Ha-Defus ha-Ivri be-Kushta* (1967), nos. 165, 232, 329.

[T.P.]

°**ALT, ALBRECHT** (1883-1956), German Bible scholar. In 1908 he visited Palestine for the first time as a student in the Palaestina-Institut, directed by G. *Dalman. In 1913 he was appointed as one of the directors of the Deutsches evangelisches Institut in Jerusalem. In 1921-23 he headed the German Evangelical community in Jerusalem and served as visiting director of the Institut until its activities were ended in 1938. Alt served as professor of Bible at the

of the university in that city for some time until he retired in 1953.

Alt's first book was *Israel und Aegypten* (1909). Noteworthy among his other publications are: *Die griechischen Inschriften der Palaestina Tertia westlich der Araba* (1921); *Der Gott der Vaeter* (1929); and *Die Staatenbildung der Israeliten in Palaestina* (1930). He also published many works on the geographical history of Israel during its various periods. Much of his research, published in the form of articles in the *Palastina-Jahrbuch* and in the *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palaestina-Vereins*, was collected in *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (3 vols., 1953-59). In Alt's works there can be discerned a trend toward illuminating the history of the occupation of localities, the political and administrative history of Palestine, and the role of the great powers in the Palestine area. He thereby created a scientific method that is adhered to by some of the most important contemporary researchers on ancient Israel. But the specific name "the Alt School" or the "Alt-Noth trend" generally refers to the scholars, mostly German, who subscribe to Alt's (and M. *Noth's) views on the nature of the traditions in Joshua 2-9, and on the period of the documents in Joshua 15-19. Alt prepared a revised edition of R. *Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica* (1937), together with O. Eisfeldt. Beside his many articles on the biblical period, he excelled in his knowledge of later periods of the history of Palestine down to and including the Byzantine era, and made important contributions to research on the Negev and the Roman times. A number of his books and articles were translated into English by R. A. Wilson in his *Alt's Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (1966), including *Staatenbildung...* and *Der Gott der Vaeter*.

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[M.A.-Y.]

ALTAR (Heb. מִזְבֵּחַ, *mizbe'ah*, derived from the root *zbh*; (זָבַח), meaning "to slaughter [as a sacrifice]"), originally the place where sacrificial slaughter was performed (e.g., the sacrifice of Isaac in Gen. 22). By biblical times, however, this usage had already disappeared. Animal slaughter was never upon the altar but nearby. Moreover, the altar was not restricted to animal offerings; it also received grain, wine, and incense offerings. Thus, whatever the original intention of the word altar, it was extended to designate the place for offering all oblations. Finally, this definition does not mention all the uses of the altar, since non-sacrificial

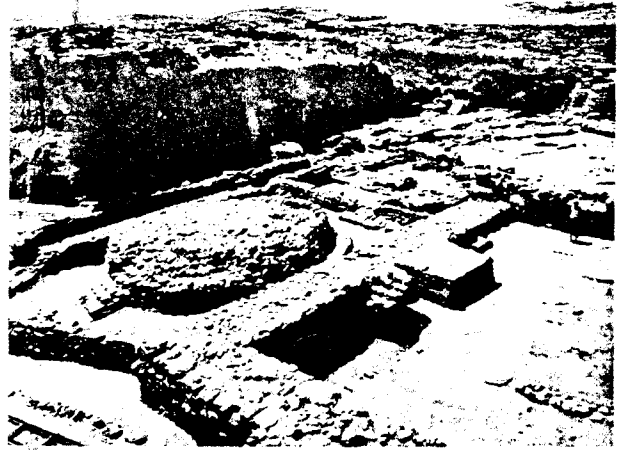


Figure 1. The Canaanite temple at Megiddo with a large oval altar and a small square one.

functions are also attested: testimony (e.g., Josh. 22:26-29) and asylum (see below).

Typology. Altars are found everywhere in the ancient Near East. They were constructed from three kinds of material: stone, earth, and metal. The choice depended on such factors as permanence, cost, and, in Israel, on whether the altar was alone or attached to a sanctuary. This discussion will naturally be limited to Erez Israel.



Figure 2. The Canaanite brick altar, c. 15th century B.C.E., uncovered at Beth Shean, has two steps leading up to it.

Stone altars are not corroded by time and archaeological excavations have unearthed abundant pre-Israelite specimens. Their form ranges from unworked, detached rocks, to slightly hollowed surfaces, to hewn natural stone, and to completely man-made structures. Some undisputed examples are at Gezer, Hazor, Megiddo (figure 1), Nahariyyah, and Arad. At Arad, the Israelite sanctuary contains an altar three cubits square and five cubits high (the exact dimensions of the Tabernacle altar in Ex. 27:1) and is built of earth and small unworked stones (in accordance with Ex. 20:22; see below). The Bible also speaks of the same types of stone altars, namely, natural rock (Judg. 13:19 20:1 Sam. 6:14; 14:33-35; 1 Kings 1:9) and artificial heap (Gen. 31:46 54; Josh. 4:2 8, 20ff.; 1 Kings 18:31-32). All biblical altars, with the exception of those in sanctuaries, seem to have been built of stone.

Altars of earth are explicitly commanded in Exodus 20:24 (cf. II Kings 5:17), but none have been found since they could not survive the ravages of time. Nor, for that matter, were any of the altars mentioned in the Bible built of earth. These, the simplest and least pretentious of all altars, were exclusively the creation of the common folk. Brick, technically also earth, so common a material in Mesopotamia, is not evidenced in Israel: a Canaanite brick altar (figure 2), however, has been found (*Beth-Shean, stratum IX).

The shape of the Israelite stone and earth altars thus far discussed seems to have been simple, no doubt because of the prohibition against the hewn stone and steps (Ex. 20:22-23). The Arad altar, though in a sanctuary, is indicative of this simplicity (figure 3). It is a square structure. In contrast to stone and earth altars, metal altars, associated exclusively with the central sanctuary of Israel, differ profoundly in shape and function.

THE TABERNACLE. Israel's desert sanctuary had two altars: the bronze, or burnt-offering, altar standing in the courtyard and the gold, or incense, altar within the Tent. The courtyard altar was for sacrifices. Its name, *'olah* ("whole-offering"), is taken from its most frequent sacrifice, required twice daily (Ex. 29:38-43) and on every festival (Num. 28 29); it was also the only sacrifice entirely consumed upon the altar (see: *Sacrifice). The name "bronze" stems from its plating. Actually, it was made of

acacia wood and its dimensions, in cubits, were $5 \times 5 \times 3$. Its form is minutely described, though the meaning of all the terms used is not certain (Ex. 27:1-8; 38:1-7).

The most important feature of the bronze altar was its *keranot* (*qeranot*) or "horns," small altars found in Israel (figure 4). Refugees seeking asylum seized the altar horns. The altar was purified by daubing the blood of the *hatt'at*, or "purification offering," on the altar horns (Ex. 30:12; Lev. 4:25-30). Horns were an essential element of all the altars in the Jerusalem Temple. The origin of the horns is still unknown.

Beneath the horns was the *karkov* ("rim" or "border") which seems to have been a projecting rim, and is exemplified by many small altars in Erez Israel (see figure 4). The *mikhbar* ("net" or "grating") was a bronze mesh that covered the upper half of the altar beneath the rim but neither its appearance nor its function is understood.

Since the altar was part of a portable sanctuary, it was fitted with four rings and two staves. Moreover, it was hollow and hence not burdensome. The altar was only a portable frame, since, in contradistinction to the incense altar (Ex. 30:3) there is no mention of a roof, and at each encampment it would, therefore, be filled with earth and rocks (in actual conformity with Ex. 20:21ff.). The same system of hollowed altars is known from some Assyrian samples.

SOLOMON'S TEMPLE. In the account of the building of the First Temple (I Kings 6 7), there is no mention of the sacrificial altar although the building of an altar, $20 \times 20 \times 10$ cubits in size, is mentioned in II Chronicles (4:1). There are also allusions to the sacrificial altar in the construction account (I Kings 9:25) under the name of "the bronze altar" (I Kings 8:64; II Kings 16:14-15). However, the silence of I Kings 6-7 is hard to explain. It has been conjectured that Solomon did not build an altar but utilized the one used or made by King David (II Sam. 24:21) for his tent sanctuary (*ibid.*, 16:17).

More is known about its replacement, the altar constructed by King Ahaz (II Kings 16:10-16). It was a copy of the altar in the main temple of Damascus, probably that of Hadad-Rimmon (5:18). It was called the "great



Figure 3. Two stone incense altars found in the Holy of Holies in the Arad temple.

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altar" (16:15), and was therefore larger than Solomon's altar. It had to be ascended (16:12); it was not made of bronze, since that name was reserved for Solomon's altar. It may have been the model for Ezekiel's altar (below). Ahaz had Solomon's altar moved to the northern part of the courtyard, where it was reserved for his private use (16:14, 15b).

EZEKIEL'S ALTAR. Ezekiel's vision of a new temple (Ezek. 40:48) comprises a minute description of its sacrificial altar (43:13-17). It consists of four tiers, each one cubit less per side than the tier below. Since the uppermost tier had a horizontal 12×12 cubits, the ones underneath were respectively 14×14 , 16×16 , and 18×18 cubits. The height of the respective tiers, from top to bottom, are given as $1 + 2 + 4 + 4$, to which another cubit must be added for the horns (*ibid.*, 43:15). Thus, the total height of the altar is 12 cubits. Because the long cubit is used (app. $20\frac{1}{2}$ inches), the altar was about $20\frac{1}{2}$ feet tall, even higher than the altar attributed to Solomon by the Chronicler (II Chron. 4:1). It was ascended by a flight of stairs on its eastern side. The edges of two of its tiers were apparently shaped into troughs for collecting the sacrificial blood, the one at the base being called "the *heik* [heiq; Heb. $\pi\eta$] of the earth" and the other, in the middle, "the *heiq* of the ledge" (Ezek. 43:14, 17). Their purpose was to collect the blood of the *hatta't*, which was daubed at these points (43:20; see below). If rabbinic tradition for the Second Temple holds good for Ezekiel, then even the remaining *hatta't* blood was collected into the middle gutter, for it was dashed on the upper part of the altar walls (see Mid. 3:1).

It has been suggested that Ezekiel's altar corresponded to the one he remembered from the First Temple, in which case it would be an exact description of Ahaz' altar. Supporting this view is the Syrian-Mesopotamian influence upon certain of its features. It is known that Ahaz copied a Damascene altar. Its storied structure resembles the ziggurat temple-tower. The uppermost tier is called **ari'el* or *har'el*: the latter means "God's mountain" and may be related to the Akkadian *arallu*. Perhaps Isaiah's symbolic name for Jerusalem, *Ariel*, has its origin in this altar (Isa. 29:1-2, 7).

Ezekiel also envisions inside the Temple an incense altar, which he calls "the table that is before the Lord" (41:22). That it is of wood may reflect the reality of 597 B.C.E., when Nebuchadnezzar stripped all the Temple cult implements of their gold (II Kings 24:13).

Sanctity and Theology. Though functionally the Israelite altar resembles its counterparts throughout the ancient Near East, it is important to note two fundamental limitations. Though temple services clearly originate in the notion of caring for and feeding the resident god, there is absolutely no trace of this notion in Israel. Only rare linguistic fossils survive, e.g., the sacrifices are called "God's food" (Lev. 22:25) and "a pleasing odor to the Lord" (Lev. 1:17). The altar is also called "the Lord's table" (Ezek. 41:22; 44:16; Mal. 1:7, 12), but only in later texts, never in the early ones. Perhaps this is a result of the propaganda war fought in Israel's early history against the widespread pagan notion that the altar was the banquet table of the god; only a later generation could feel free to indulge in such a pagan metaphor. The second limitation is that the altars of YHWH after the conquest are legitimate only in the Promised Land. This is not because the power of Israel's God is spatially limited—He controls the destiny of all nations and can be addressed in prayer everywhere (e.g., I Kings 8:33ff.)—but because of the basic concept of the sanctity of Israel's territory: it is the Holy Land. This principle underlies the argument against the erection of a Transjordanian altar (Josh. 22:19), as well as the legal

fiction of taking Israelite soil abroad, adopted by the Aramean Naaman (II Kings 5:17) and, perhaps, by his Israelite townsmen (cf. I Kings 20:34). The sanctity of the altar is evidenced by the theophany which concluded the week-long consecration rites for the Tabernacle: "The presence of the Lord appeared to all the people. Fire came forth from before the Lord and consumed the whole offering and the suet pieces on the altar. And all the people saw, and shouted, and fell on their faces" (Lev. 9:23-24). It is an assumption common to biblical tradition that a sanctuary is not fully consecrated—or is not divinely sanctioned—unless it has a tradition of a theophany upon its altar (I Kings 18:38; II Chron. 7:1), or that its altar is built on the site of one. Later sources, however, in keeping with a more abstract concept of God, play an interesting variation on the altar theme. Since God does not dwell in His sanctuary, but only causes "His Name" to be there, the altar can no longer be the scene of a theophany.

Nonetheless, the altar does not lose its mediating powers; it may not bring God to earth but it enables man, through his worship, to reach heaven. This is nowhere more evident than in Solomon's dedicatory prayer for the Temple, when he proclaims that even in a foreign land Israel's armies or exiles need but turn to the Temple and their prayer will travel to God along a trajectory that passes through their land, city, Temple and then, at the altar, turns heavenward (I Kings 8:44, 48; cf. 31, 38). The altar, then, is the earthly terminus of a Divine funnel for man's communion with God. It is significant that later Judaism carried the tradition that the air space above the altar was an extension of its sanctity. The sanctity of the altar is evidenced by the asylum it provided anyone who "seized its horns" (e.g., I Kings 1:50-51). An early law, however, stipulated that this privilege was not to be extended to murderers (Ex. 21:14). On this basis, the altar provided no safety for Joab (I Kings 2:28-34); even then, Solomon tried at first to remove Joab who "seized the altar horns" (verse 34) from the altar before he had him killed (verse 30). The altar is consecrated with the "oil of anointment" (Ex. 40:10), it is the only object outside the Tent to fall into the category of the "most sacred" (Ex. 29:37), though not to the same degree as the Holy of Holies inside it. For example, the nonpriest is prohibited from viewing the inner sancta (Num. 4:20), but is only barred from touching the altar (Ex. 29:37); the disqualified priest is barred from contact with the sanctuary Holy of Holies, but in regard to the altar, as the verb *karav* (*qrv*) or *niggash* ("encroach") shows, he is forbidden only to officiate at it but is free to touch it (Ex. 28:43; 30:20; Lev. 21:23). The composition of the Holy of Holies also bespeaks this sanctity differential: the inner sancta are plated with gold, the altar with bronze; in transit the former are covered with a blue cloth, the latter with a purple cloth (Num. 4:4-14). Laymen were permitted access only to a corridor within the sanctuary enclosure to perform the required preliminary rituals with their animal oblation (the presentation, laying of hands, slaughter, and flaying of the animal; Lev. 1:3-6), and to assemble there as spectators (Lev. 8:3-4; 9:5). Only the high priest may bless the people from the altar (Lev. 9:22, "and he descended"). Solomon, who performed this function, did so in front of the altar (I Kings 8:64-65).

The sacrificial altar must not only be consecrated by an application of the anointing oil but by a week-long ceremonial, during which the altar horns are daubed with the blood of a purification offering (Lev. 8:15) each day of the week (Ex. 29:36-37). The meaning of this consecration can be deduced through a series of analogies with other uses of sacrificial blood, such as the purification rite of a healed leper (Lev. 14:14-17, 25-28); the investiture of new priests

Ex. 29:20; Lev. 8:23-24); the reconsecration rites for defiled altars (Lev. 4:25, 34; 5:9); and the smearing of the lintel and doorposts with blood of the paschal sacrifice (Ex. 12:7; 22). The things which receive the blood are extremities; i.e., the very points of the object which a hostile force would strike first in attacking it. In the ancient Near East, temples were periodically smeared with magical substances at precisely the same vulnerable points, in order to expel the malefic power from the object and to protect it against future incursions. The blood rites therefore had a purgative and an apotropaic function. It is not too difficult to deduce that in Israel these rituals originally had the same dual purpose; i.e., to purge the altar of any uncleanness and to protect it from future evil influence. The verbs used in regard to purification apply to the altar but never to man. The blood for each stems from a different sacrifice: for the altar the *hatta't* is used but not for man. Indeed in the case of man the ritual purification has already taken place by previous ablution (for the leper, Lev. 14:2-9; for the priest, Ex. 29:4). The function of the blood rite therefore is to ward off evil; it is an apotropaic act (cf. the paschal sacrifice, Ex. 12:23). The consecration of both priest and altar was performed, however, by the anointing oil (Ex. 29:21; Lev. 8:11).

The absence of apotropaic terminology and the emphasis upon consecration in the Law are significant Israelite changes: the existence of forces independent of God cannot be countenanced. Moreover, even the theme of sanctification is imbued with the monotheistic drive: "I will sanctify the Tent of Meeting and the altar and I will consecrate Aaron and his sons" (Ex. 29:44). The anointment oil and all other rites have no intrinsic powers: consecration is the will of God.

The blood of sacrifices must terminate on the altar, if not on its horns, then upon its walls and base. This leads to another equally significant function of the altar: the blood prohibition. Man—all men, not Israel alone—is constrained from eating blood, because it is the life of the animal (Gen. 9:4). He must drain it and return it, as it were, to the Creator. There is only one legitimate place where this can be done: at the altar of the central sanctuary. The altar, then, is the instrument by which the animal's life is restored to God. Indeed, in Leviticus occurs the clear, unambiguous statement that whoever slaughters an ox, sheep, or goat elsewhere but at the sanctuary altar is guilty of murder (Lev. 17:3-4). Man may have meat for his food, he may kill to get it, but he may not tamper with the blood; he must return it to God via the altar, if the animal is sacrificeable, and via the earth if he brings it down in the hunt (Lev. 17:13-14). Thus, the sanctuary altar legitimizes animal slaughter; it is the divinely-appointed instrument of effecting expiation for taking animal life (Lev. 17:11).

The prohibition of making steps on the altar "that your nakedness be not exposed upon it" (Ex. 20:23) is another evidence for the sanctity of the altar. Therefore, for this reason the priests were required to wear breeches (Ex. 28:42-43). It is to be noted, however, that the altar of the Israel sanctuary at Arad is constructed with a step to it (see figures 3 and 5).

Incense Altar. All the biblical accounts of the sanctuary speak not only of the sacrificial altar but also of an incense altar within the sanctuary building. The incense altar of the Tabernacle is described in detail (Ex. 30:1-10; 37:25-28). Its dimensions were 1x1x2 cubits. Like the sacrificial altar, it contained horns, rings, and staves for carrying, and was made of acacia wood. However, it differed from it in being plated with gold, not with bronze; also, the plating extended over the top for it was solid and had a roof, in contrast to the sacrificial altar.

Its place was directly in front of the curtain, flanked by the two other golden objects, the candelabrum (Ex. 25:31ff.), and table (23ff.). Incense was burned upon it twice daily at the time of the *tamid*, or "daily," offering. No other offering but the prescribed incense was tolerated (9b).

Reference to the incense altar of Solomon's Temple is found in the construction account (I Kings 6:20-22; 7:48) and in the incense offering ascribed to King Uzziah (II Chron. 26:16). In this blueprint for the new Temple (Ezek. 41:22), Ezekiel may have been thinking of the incense altar he saw in the Temple (as a priest, he had access to it).

The historicity of these accounts has been called into question since the critical work of J. Wellhausen in the late 19th-early 20th centuries on the assumption that the burning of incense was not introduced into Israel until the Second Temple (see I Macc. 1:54). However, many small altars have been found in Erez Israel dating back to the Bronze Age, too small for animal offerings. Some actually approximate the dimensions of the Tabernacle altar and are even equipped with horns, e.g., at Shechem and Megiddo (see Figure 4). Thus, the incense altar was standard equipment for Canaanite temples and cannot be denied to Israel.



Figure 4. A stone horned altar of the late Israelite period from Megiddo.

Since there is no reason to deny that there was an incense altar in Solomon's Temple, there remains only the question of the incense altar ascribed to the Tabernacle. Scholars have been nearly unanimous in declaring it an anachronistic insertion based upon the Temple. Their suspicion is strengthened by the placement of its description not in the text containing the rest of the inner sancta (Ex. 26), but after the description of the entire Tabernacle and its

paraphernalia (Ex. 30:1-10)—an afterthought, as it were. The objection is fallacious. The fact that it is not found in its "logical" place is in itself reason to suspect that another kind of logic obtained there. Indeed, it can be shown that the description of the Tabernacle is divided in two parts: Exodus 26:1-27:19, the Tabernacle in blueprint; and Exodus 27:20ff. and 30:38, the Tabernacle in operation. Since the incense altar is described functionally (Ex. 30:7-8), it therefore belongs in the latter section. Furthermore, the use of the candelabrum (27:20-21), the investiture of those qualified to service it (28:1-29:37), the *tamid* offering (29:38ff.), and the incense offering are all part of a single cultic activity to be conducted twice daily by the high priest. Further evidence is that other cultic instruments, i.e., the laver and the anointment oil, are mentioned even later, when their use is described (30:17-21, 23-30). Therefore, there is no evidence, either textual or archaeological, to deny an incense altar to the Tabernacle. With the appurtenances of illegal worship in Israel the term *hamman*, mistakenly translated as "Sun Pillars," is mentioned (Lev. 26:30; Isa. 17:8, 29:9; Ezek. 6:4; II Chron. 14:4; 34:4, 7). According to II Chronicles 34:4, its place was on the altar and thus could not be very large. Its connection with incense was verified by the appearance of the word in a number of Nabatean and Palmyrean inscriptions, one of which is engraved on a small altar whose other side contains a bas-relief of two figures burning incense. Excavations at Lachish have produced small elongated objects whose cup-shaped upper portion bears traces of fire; plausibly these, too, may be classified as *hamman*. [J.M.]

In Halakhah. In talmudic sources the word "altar," when unqualified, refers to the outer altar (Yoma 5:5), which stood in the *Temple Court in the open, a distance of 22 cubits from the corner of the porch (Mid. 5:1). Most of it was in the southern sector (Yoma 16a; but see the opinion of R. Judah, *ibid.*, see also Zev. 58b). For building the altar for the Second Temple prophetic testimony was needed to determine the exact required location (Zev. 62a). This altar is also called "the altar of bronze" because of its bronze cover (Hag. 3:8) and "the altar of the burnt-offering," because daily burnt offerings and other sacrifices were offered upon it (Men. 4:4).

According to talmudic sources the altar was ten cubits high (but Jos., Wars. 5:225 has 15 cubits). It was a structure of stones joined together with earth (Mekh. SbY. Yitro 20: Epstein, ed., 156) and consisted of four square layers formed of stones, plaster, and a filling of mortar (Zev. 54a), the wider stones being placed below and the narrower above, as described later (Suk. 45a; Mid. 3:1; Zev. 54a). These dimensions made the altar four cubits larger on all



Figure 5. The sacrificial altar found in the outer courtyard of the Arad temple. Like the altar in the Tabernacle, it is four cubits square and made of unhewn stone (Ex. 20:22).

four sides than the altar of Solomon's Temple (II Chron. 4:1; Mid. 3:1). The first layer was 32 × 32 cubits (according to Jos., *ibid.*, 50 × 50), and one cubit high. The second layer was 30 × 30 cubits and five cubits high. The lower projection of one cubit each on the north and at the northeast and southwest corners, which were one cubit higher than the ground (Tosef., Zev. 6:2; Mid. 3:1), was called the base. There was no base in the southeast corner (Zev. 54a). In the southwest corner there were several narrow apertures through which the blood flowed down to the water channel, and from there to the brook of Kidron (Mid. 3:2; Yoma 5:6). Five cubits from the ground, i.e., in the middle of the altar, a red line, the "*hut shel sikrah*," encircled it, indicating the place for the upper and the lower sprinkling of the blood (Mid. 3:1; Tosef., Zev. 6:2). The third layer was 28 × 28 cubits, and three cubits high. The cubit-wide projection which encircled the middle of the altar was called the *sovev* ("surround"). The priest walked along it, to offer up the burnt offering of a bird (Zev. 6:5), and to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifices upon the altar with his finger (Zev. 5:3). The fourth layer constituted the "horns" of the altar. They were four stones, one cubit by one, placed at the four corners of the altar. After deducting the breadth of the horns (one cubit) and another cubit within, used as a path for the priests (*karkov* "border" Tosef., Shek. 3:19; Zev. 62a) when removing the ashes, an area of 24 × 24 cubits remained which was assigned as the place of the fire. The larger fire was in the southeast corner (Tam. 2:4) and the smaller, for incense, opposite it in the southwest corner (Tam. 2:5). Although open to the sky, it is stated that the rain never extinguished the wood fire, nor did the wind disturb the column of smoke (Avot. 5:5). In the center of the altar there was an enormous heap of ashes called *tappu'ah* ("apple"), because of its round shape (Tam. 2:2).

According to R. Meir, the dimensions of the projections of the base, of the surround, and of the horns, were measured by the larger cubit, which was six handbreadths (Kelim 17:10; Tosef., Kelim, BM 6:12-13; see Men. 97b). On top of the altar there were two bowls, either of silver or limestone, into which the water and the wine of the water libation were poured during Tabernacles (Suk. 4:9). During the rest of the year the wine libation was poured into the bowl on the east (Tosef. Suk. 3:14; Sif. Num., Shelah, 107). From the bowls the wine flowed through a gutter in the floor of the court (Tosef., Suk. 3:14) into the pits (foundations of the altar) in the southwest corner (Mid. 3:3). The wine was absorbed in the pit or congealed inside the pipe between the porch and the altar, and the pipe consequently had to be cleaned. In the opinion of R. Yose, the pit penetrated to the abyss (Tosef. Suk. 3:15; Suk. 49a).

The stones of the altar were smooth (Zev. 54a), taken from the virgin soil of the valley of Beth ha-Kerem (Mid. 3:4). The use of iron was forbidden in its erection. The stones were plastered over twice yearly, at Passover and at Tabernacles, and, according to Judah ha-Nasi it was plastered with a cloth every Sabbath eve (Mid. 3:4; Maim., Yad. Beit ha-Behirah, 1:16). In the times of the Hasmoneans the Syrians placed the "Abomination of Desolation" upon the altar (I Macc. 1:54). When the Temple was subsequently cleansed they were doubtful whether it could be used, and hid the stones (*ibid.*, 4:44; Meg. Ta'an. 9; Av. Zar. 52b) in a chamber in the *Bet ha-Moked* (Chamber of the Hearth; Mid. 1:6). The dedication of the altar (I Macc. 4:53-59) became the central feature of the festival of *Hanukkah. One reason given for the Hanukkah celebration lasting eight days is that it took this much time to build the altar and plaster it (Meg. Ta'an. 9 25th Kislev). At the southern side of the altar

there was a stone ramp, 32 cubits long and 16 wide, enabling the priests to reach the top of the altar without transgressing the prohibition, contained in Exodus 20:26 (Mekh. Yitro, Ba-Hodesh, 11; see above). There was a space between the end of the ramp and the altar (Zev. 62b).

Altar and ramp together were 62 cubits long (Mid. 5:2), the ramp overhanging the lower part of the altar. From the large ramp two smaller ones branched off, one on the east side in the direction of the surround, and the other on the west in the direction of the base (Zev. 62b and Rashi *ibid.*). The existence of a ramp to the surround is mentioned explicitly only by the *amora* *Judah b. Ezekiel. Usually one ascended the altar from the right-hand side of the ramp and descended from the left one (Zev. 6:3).

Lack of precision in the aforementioned dimensions of the altar and the ramp did not disqualify them from use (Tosef., Men. 6:12), but the absence of the horns, the base, the surround, the ramp, the lack of a square appearance, or the slightest flaw in the altar would disqualify the sacrifice (Tosef., Suk. 3:16; Zev. 62a and 59a).

Only the slaughter of birds took place on the actual altar (Zev. 6:4-5); other sacrifices were slaughtered to the north of it (Zev. 5:1-2; Mid. 3:5). If the slaughtering took place on the altar, however, the sacrifice was acceptable (Zev. 6:1).

During the Second Temple period no fire descended from heaven (Yoma 21b) as it did in the First Temple (Zev. 61b). A tradition was preserved that the fire of the First Temple was concealed in a well and was brought out in the days of Nehemiah (II Macc. 1:19-24).

Whenever the altar was not in use for regular sacrifices additional burnt-offerings were offered (Tosef., Shek. 2:8). These are referred to as the *keiz ha-mizbe'ah* ("summer fruit" of the altar; Shek. 4:4). A special regulation "for the benefit of the altar" was enacted to ensure continual sacrifice on the altar (Git. 5:5; Git. 55a). The altar fire continued to burn even at night so that the portions of the sacrifice which it had not been possible to burn during the day would be consumed (Ber. 1:1; Tam. 2:1). The priests would rise early in the morning and undergo ablution in order to be privileged to remove the ashes (Tam. 1:2; Yoma 1:8, 2:1). After ascending to the top of the altar they cleared away the ashes (Tam. 1:4) and shoveled them on to the ash heap (*ibid.*, 2:2). When the heap was overfull the ashes were removed, but during the three Pilgrim Festivals they remained there as they were considered ornamental (*ibid.*).

Priests alone were permitted to approach the altar and minister (Zev. 116b) and proof that a person had "stood and ministered at the altar" (Yev. 7:6) was accepted as evidence of his priestly lineage (Kid. 4:5; cf. Ter. 8:1; Jos., Ant., 9:160). The altar and ramp made sacred whatever was prescribed for them. Even if disqualified sacrifices were placed upon them, they were not removed (Zev. 9:1-7; Tosef., Mak. 5:4; and Tosef., Tem. 1:14). A vow made "to the altar" was considered as referring to the altar sacrifices (Ned. 1:3; Tosef., Ned. 1:3).

In the talmudic era the principle that the altar because of its sanctity served as a refuge for murderers who seized hold of its horns was restricted (Mak. 12a; Num. R. 23:13; cf. TJ, Kid. 4:1, 65c).

The altar played an important role in the festival ceremonies. During Tabernacles a daily circuit with palm branches or willow branches (Suk. 43b) was made of the altar and verses of *Hallel were recited. On the seventh day the circuit was made seven times (Suk. 4:5), and the people took their leave of the altar with expressions of

Laudation, Beauty & Praise to Altar
ibid.

During Passover, so large was the number of paschal lambs sacrificed in the Temple court, that the sprinkling of the blood against the base of the altar was performed by successive rows of priests (Pes. 5:5). The *omer was waved on the east side of the altar and offered on the west side (Men. 5:6). So also with the waving of the two loaves on Shavuot (*ibid.*). The baskets of first fruits were placed at the side of the altar (Bik. 3:6; Tosef., Sanh. 3:6).

The golden altar (Yoma 5:5), also called the inner altar (Tam. 3:1), stood in the center of the center of the sanctuary (Yoma, 33a-b), opposite the *parokhet* ("curtain") which separated the sanctuary from the Holy of Holies (Tosef., *ibid.*, 2:2). Incense was burnt (Men. 4:4) and the sacrificial blood was sprinkled upon its sides (Men. 3:6; Lev. 5:1-2; Yoma 5:7). The measurements of the golden altar were the same as those used in the Tabernacle of Moses (Ex. 30:1-10) except that the larger cubit of six handbreadths was used (Kelim 17:10).

In the Aggadah. The altar as a symbol of atonement recurs again and again in rabbinic literature (Tosef., BK 7:6). Johanan b. Zakkai explains the prohibition against the use of iron in erecting the altar, because the sword (iron) represents catastrophe, and the altar, atonement (*ibid.*), its whole (*shelemot*) stones "bringing peace (*shalom*) between Israel and their Father in Heaven" (*ibid.*, 7; Mekh. end of Yitro). In line with this *homily*, the Mishnah taught: "It is not right for that which curtails life to be lifted up against that which prolongs it" (Mid. 3:4). The word *mizbe'ah* ("altar") is interpreted as suggesting, by assonance, the four words *mezi'ah*, *mezim*, *mehabbev*, *mekhapper* ("removes evil decrees, sustains, endears, atones"; Ket. 10b); or as a **notarikon*, its four letters being the initials of *Mehilah-Zekhut Zikkaron Berakhah-Hayyim* ("forgiveness-merit (memorial) blessing-life"; Tanh. Terumah 11). Because of the merit of the altar, blessing accrued to Israel (Tosef., Ma'as Sh. 5:29), and because of it, the Holy One blessed be He will punish the kingdom of Edom (Tanh. Terumah, 11). Its dimensions and its parts are also interpreted symbolically (*ibid.*, 10; Mid. Tadshe 11).

According to one aggadic opinion, Adam was formed from earth taken from the site of the altar, in order that the site of his atonement should give him power to endure (Gen. R. 14:8; TJ, Naz. 7:2, 56b).

According to a late aggadah the altars of the ancients - Adam, Cain, Abel, Noah - were erected on the site of the altar where also Isaac was bound (PdRE, 31) and it was from them that Jacob took the stones that he placed at his head at the ford of the Jordan (Gen. 35).

According to R. Isaac Nappaha the fact that the Temple was built on the site of the **Akedah* (Zev. 62a) is the basis of the saying that "whoever is buried in the land of Israel is as if he were buried beneath the altar" (Tosef., Av. Zar. 4:3; ARN¹ 26:41; S. Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (1950), p. 163). The idea of the Sanctification of the Divine Name implicit in the binding of Isaac also gave rise to the metaphorical use of "building an altar" as an expression for such an act (Lam. R. 1:16, 50; Git. 57b). The more usual metaphor is "... as if he built an altar," used with reference to one observing the commandments of Judaism (Ber. 15a; Suk. 45a b; Men. 110a).

By interpreting scriptural verses the aggadists coined such expressions as, "as if an altar was erected in his heart" (*Otiyyot de-Rabbi Akiva*, 8), "the altar shed tears" (Sanh. 22a). Plagues afflicting a person are merely "an altar of atonement for all Israel" (Ber. 5b, see Rabbinovicz, DIK, 50F, 1, 14).

As for the destruction of the Temple. A Jew's table is regarded as taking the place of the altar.

Josef Sot
15:11-13), and it was said "Now that there is no altar, a man's table atones for him" (Ber. 55a; Men. 97a). The halakhic authorities explain many table customs on this basis (*Shibbolei ha-Leket*, Buber's ed., 141; *Sefer Hasidim*, 102). [B.M.L.]

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ALTARAS, Spanish family which originated in Castile, and spread to Italy, Turkey, and Erez Israel. To MOSES (c. 1500) was attributed probably erroneously, a Ladino translation of the Shulhan Arukh, printed in Latin characters under the title *Libro de Mantenimiento de la Alma* (Venice, 1609, 1713). Apparently it was written for the Marranos who could not read the work in the original. According to Steinschneider this work was written by a certain Meir, and Altaras was merely its patron. Three generations of this family were printers. SOLOMON ALTARAS THE ELDER supervised the publication of the Sephardi prayer book which appeared in Venice in 1685. His son, DAVID B. SOLOMON, known as *Devash* ("honey"), an acronym of his name, lived in Venice between 1675 and 1714. He wrote *Kelalei ha-Dikduk* ("Principles of Grammar") which was printed at the beginning of the Venice edition of the *Mikra'ot Gedolot* (1675-78). From 1675 he printed Hebrew books, including a prayer book (1696) and the Mishnah with annotations (1756-60). His signature appears on a variety of halakhic rulings along with those of other rabbis of Venice, and he gave approbations to various books. His last will and testament and an elegy on his death appear in *Zuf Devash* (Venice, 1714). In an addendum to his testament "*Devash*" he emphasizes "that one must conspire craftily and with cunning in order to fear God and observe his commandments." David's son SOLOMON published books in Venice during the 18th century, among them a prayer book containing the *minhag* ("custom") of Corfu, entitled *Leket ha-Omer* (1718).

Bibliography: Steinschneider, *Cat Bod.* 1777, no. 6432 (on Moses); 3029, no. 9082 (on Solomon the Elder); 856, no. 4787; 2869, no. 7969; Ghironi-Neppi, 83 (on David b. Solomon); S. D. Luzzatto, *Prolegomena to a Grammar of the Hebrew Language* (1836), 60; H. B. Friedberg, *Toledot ha-Defus ha-Ivri* ... (1956); Zedner, *Cat.*, 45. [Y.Ho.]

ALTARAS, JACQUES (Jacob) ISAAC (1786-1873), French merchant, shipbuilder, and philanthropist. Born in Aleppo, Syria, Altaras spent his early years in Jerusalem, where his father was a rabbi. In 1806 Altaras settled in Marseilles, and there prospered in shipbuilding and the Levant trade; he became an influential member of the Marseilles Chamber of Commerce. A member of the French Consistoire and president of the Marseilles Jewish community, he founded a Jewish school in Marseilles and was a member of the Legion of Honor. In 1846 Altaras

Bibliography: S. Dubnow, *Neueste Geschichte des juedischen Volkes*, 2 (1920), 206. [J.O.R.]

ALTARAS, JOSEPH (16th century), *hazzan* and poet. Born in Damascus, he settled in Aleppo. He was praised by the Hebrew poet Israel *Najara as the "... highest of heavenly heights above all his contemporaries in the sweetness of his voice" (*Zemirot Yisrael*, 142-144, 147.) Najara also praised his poetry. Joseph's son Nissim was also a poet. It may be assumed that the poems attributed to "Joseph" and "Nissim" scattered throughout the *siddur* of Aleppo (Venice, 1520, 1560) were written by these two. These poems are also included in the collection *Shirei Yisrael be-Erez ha-Kedem* (1921).

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AL-TARĀS, SĪDĪ IBN (end of 11th century), Karaite scholar in Castile. According to Abraham ibn Daud and Joseph b. Zaddik, Al-Tarās went in his youth from Castile to Erez Israel, where he became a pupil of the Karaite Abu al-Faraj (probably *Jeshua b. Judah). When he returned to Andalusia, he brought back his teacher's book with him and not only attempted to circulate it among the *Karaites, but also tried to gain adherents for Karaism among the *Rabbanites. After Al-Tarās' death, his wife, who is referred to by the Karaites as *al-Mu'allima* ("the teacher") and was considered by them an authority on religious practice, continued to spread the tenets of Karaism. Abraham ibn Daud indicates that their propaganda prompted the leaders of the Rabbanites to vigorous action, and Joseph *Ferrizuel "Cidellus" (Alkabri), a Jewish favorite of Alfonso VI, obtained authority to expel the Karaites from all the Castilian towns except one.

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ALTENBERG, PETER (pseudonym of Richard Englaender; 1859-1919), Austrian author. The son of a merchant, Altenberg studied law and medicine in Vienna and worked briefly in the book trade. Eventually, he chose



Peter Altenberg.
Drawing by Mopp.

the life of a Bohemian and became a frequent contributor to the