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TRANSLATING *BAMOTH*

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The Hebrew words *bamah* (singular) and *bamoth* (plural), when referring to cultic places, are traditionally translated as "high place(s)." Such is the translation found in several modern English translations: NIV, NRSV, NJB, NAB. The translation "high place" began with the Vulgate's *excelsus*, and then entered English translations in the Coverdale Bible of 1535. Wycliffe had used the expression "high things."[1] Formal correspondence translations in several European languages also render *bamoth* as "high places": "*los lugares altos*" (RVR), "*os altos*" (Almeida), "*les hauts lieux*" (Segond), and "*die Höhen*" (Luther).

But since the translation "high place" has zero meaning for most modern readers, some translations attempt to render the term more meaningfully. REB consistently uses the word "shrine(s)." NJV likewise nearly always says "shrines" (though see "cult places" in 1 Kgs 12.31). Other translations include "*les lieux sacrés*" (FRCL), "*i santuari sulle colline*" (ITCL), and "*die Opferstätten*" (GECL). In his commentary on 1 Kings, Simon J. DeVries consistently renders the Hebrew as "country shrines."[2]

But while the translations noted in the previous paragraph indicate that the "high places" are places of worship or sacrifice, they do not indicate that these were places where foreign gods were worshiped. Some common language translations make this explicit (and central): GNB uses a number of different expressions, most often "pagan places of worship" (1 Kgs 15.14; 22.43; 2 Kgs 12.3, etc.); but also "places of worship for false gods" (1 Kgs 14.23), "various altars" (1 Kgs 3.3), and "places of worship on hilltops" (1 Kgs 12.31). Other common language translations in various languages include "places where false gods were worshiped" (NCV), "*os lugares pagaos*" (BRCL) and "*los santuarios paganos*" (SPCL).

Two problems

Two problems must be addressed before one can arrive at a satisfactory translation of the Hebrew terms *bamah* and *bamoth*.

(1) Why was worship at the *bamoth* condemned? Despite the fact that Canaanite gods were sometimes worshiped at the "high places," it is uncertain whether the Deuteronomic (or Deuteronomistic) historians always condemn worship at high places for that reason, or for that reason alone. As DeVries states in his commentary, "...the *bamoth* were simply local shrines, whether dedicated to Yahweh or to other deities. The term is neutral."[3] The problem is further posed as DeVries continues,

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1 W. Boyd Barrick, "High Place," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (vol. 3; New York: Doubleday 1992) 196.

2 DeVries, *1 Kings* (Waco: Word 1985). DeVries writes (50-51), "From the root meaning, 'back,' traditional exegesis has developed the translation, 'high places,' but there is nothing in the passages that refer to them to justify the notion that they were necessarily on hills, were open-air sanctuaries out in the country, or were the scene of frivolity and idolatry. They were, on the contrary, located in towns and cities, but generally a distance removed from Jerusalem and its temple..., hence our translation, 'country shrines.'"

3 *Ibid.*, xxvii-xxviii.

> It may very well be that he [the deuteronomist] condemns them purely from the point of view of his own period, and it may be that by that time some *bamoth* that had once been Yahweh-shrines had now become tainted with idolatry and eclecticism. Besides this, no doubt the deuteronomist objected to them from the ideological viewpoint of the entire Deuteronomic movement of which he was a part, insisting on the sole and exclusive legitimacy of the Jerusalem temple over against every sort of local temple (Deut 12.10-14; cf. 2 Kings 23).[1]

(2) Where were the *bamoth* located? Though the translation "high places" has a long history, based on the understanding that the *bamoth* were literally built on high places such as hills, several recent studies seriously challenge that understanding. In the first sentence of her article "What's a Bamah?" Nakhai states, "Well, one thing it's *not*—or at least not *only*—is a high place."[2] Similarly Ahlström states in *The History of Ancient Palestine*, "The translation 'high-place' is not accurate because the *bamôt* were located on both high and low ground."[3]

The purpose of this article

The primary purpose of this article is the following: to consider whether the Hebrew word *bamoth* is adequately and correctly translated either as "pagan places of worship" (problem #1) or as "high places" (problem #2). The prohibitions against worshiping in the "high places" will be examined within the context of the theology of the Deuteronomic historians that God be worshiped only in "the place that the LORD will choose as a dwelling for his name." The words *bamah* and *bamoth*, used in the sense of "cultic high place," occur about eighty times in the Old Testament, especially in 1-2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. Is a single, consistent translation of this word desirable, or should it be translated in different ways, depending on the context?

Were such places of worship condemned by the deuteronomist only or primarily because foreign gods were worshiped there, as some common language translations suggest; or were they condemned because they constituted worship in illegitimate places, that is, outside of Jerusalem? Or both?[4]

A secondary purpose of this article is to consider (a) how translators should define *bamoth* (however it is translated) in Word Lists (or Glossaries) and (b) what translators should say about the centralization of worship in introductions either to 1-2 Kings or to the Deuteronomic History. The Deuteronomic historians use the destruction or lack of destruction of high places as a major theme by which kings

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1 *Ibid.*, xxviii.

2 Beth Alpert Nakhai, "What's a Bamah? How Sacred Space Functioned in Ancient Israel," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 20 (1994) 19.

3 Gösta W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1993) 198, n 5.

4 Nakhai, *op. cit.*, 20, correctly states concerning the Deuteronomistic historians that "They wanted sacred rituals to be conducted only in Jerusalem, at the Temple...and not in every village and hilltop site. They made their case so persuasively that even today *bamot* are often thought to have been sites of gross apostasy, vestigial elements of Canaanite paganism that insidiously recurred because Israelites and Judahites did not remain true to their Yahwistic faith." She further states (23), "The extent of their success is measured by the fact that the Biblical account of religion in Israel and Judah almost, but not quite, convinces us that *bamot* were *not* legitimate elements of Israelite and Judahite worship."

of Israel and Judah are all judged.[1] Mullen states the matter clearly and succinctly: "The continued failure of the kings of Israel to put aside the cultic innovations attributed to Jeroboam I and to return to the prescribed worship at one central shrine constitutes a major theme within the deuteronomistic historian's presentation of the Israelite monarchy."[2] Yet few, if any, common language translations even mention the centralization of worship as a major theme in the introductions written for Deuteronomy or for 1-2 Kings.

The Deuteronomic History

Before continuing, I will simply state my position on the Deuteronomic History rather than argue for it. Martin Noth in 1943 was the first scholar to claim that such a work existed. He argued that it consisted of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings and that it was the first continuous history of Israel using a number of older traditions. Noth identified four characteristics of this history: (1) its consistent language, (2) its use of summarizing speeches or narratives at critical points in the history, (3) its consistent chronology, and (4) its coherent theology. According to Noth, the purpose of this history, written during the Babylonian exile, was to explain to the exiled Israelite people how their history had come to find them in exile, with no king, and seemingly abandoned by their God.

Subsequent scholars have modified Noth's views at various points.[3] Most convincing to this writer is Frank Cross' theory of a two-stage redaction, the first edition having been issued during the reign of Josiah and the final redaction coming in the period of the exile.[4]

The place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name

One phrase which forms a part of the consistent language of the Deuteronomic History is "the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name" (Deut 12.11; 14.23; 16.2, 6, 11; 26.2). Very similar phrases occur in Deut 12.14, 18, 21, 26; 14.24, 25; 15.20; 16.7, 15, 16; 17.8, 10; 18.6; 31.11. This phrase also forms part of the coherent theology of the Deuteronomic History. Similar expressions occur throughout the Deuteronomic History: (see Josh 9.27; 1 Kgs 8.16, 44, 48; 11.13, 36; 14.21; 2 Kgs 21.7; 23.27).

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1 Mark A. O'Brien ("The 'Deuteronomistic History' as a Story of Israel's Leaders," *Australian Biblical Review* 37 [1989] 14-34) correctly observes that the deuteronomic editor focused on three criteria in evaluating the reigns of kings: (1) fidelity to the exclusive worship of Yahweh, (2) fidelity to centralized worship at the place chosen by Yahweh, and (3) fidelity to the word of Yahweh's prophets.

2 E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., "The Royal Dynastic Grant to Jehu and the Structure of the Book of Kings," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107 (1988), 193.

3 See the brief review of scholarship by A.D.H. Mayes, "Deuteronomistic History," *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (ed. R.J. Coggins and J.L. Houlden; London: SCM / Philadelphia: Trinity Press International 1990) 174-176; and the longer survey by Steven L. McKenzie, "Deuteronomistic History," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (vol. 2; New York: Doubleday 1992) 160-168.

4 Frank Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1973) esp. 274-289. For a recent popular presentation of Cross' view, see Friedman's *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Harper & Row 1987) esp. 101-116. For more technical studies which develop Cross' theory, see the following: R.E. Friedman, *The Exile and Biblical Narrative* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press 1981); Richard D. Nelson, *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: *JSOT* 1981); and B. Peckham, *The Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (Atlanta: Scholars Press 1985). Most recently Cross' theory of a double redaction has been supported by J. Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday 1992).

The Deuteronomic historians explain worship in Jerusalem as a fulfillment of God's decision to choose one place to be worshiped. Such a divine sanction, as it were, no doubt came after the fact. The political and economic reasons for restricting worship to Jerusalem only are not hard to discover.[1] Miller and Hayes are surely correct in stating that during the reign of Hezekiah, "the move toward centralization was a defensive maneuver," an attempt to connect Yahweh so closely and exclusively with Jerusalem that the Israelite people would fight to defend the city. And during the reign of Josiah, "the priests of Israel would have had their own reasons for favoring centralization."[2] Indeed Miller and Hayes suggest that the requirement of centralized worship in Jerusalem may have been written into the Deuteronomic materials under the influence of the priests at the time of Josiah.

High places

According to the Deuteronomic historians, Samuel offered sacrifices at a high place (1 Sam 9.12-14). During the reigns of David and Solomon, prior to the building of the Temple, sacrifices were offered at various high places (1 Kgs 3.2). The most important high place during this time was at Gibeon (1 Kgs 3.4). At the time of the divided kingdom, sacrifices continued to be offered at high places in both the northern and southern kingdoms.

In the northern kingdom, Jeroboam I built high places at Dan and Bethel (1 Kgs 12.31, 32); and high places were built in all their towns according to 2 Kgs 17.9 (see also v 32).

In the southern kingdom, high places existed during the reigns of Rehoboam (1 Kgs 14.23), Asa (1 Kgs 15.14), Jehoshaphat (1 Kgs 22.43), Jehoram (2 Chr 21.11), Joash (2 Kgs 12.3), Amaziah (2 Kgs 14.4), Uzziah (2 Kgs 15.4), Jotham (2 Kgs 15.35), Ahaz (2 Kgs 16.4), and Manasseh (2 Kgs 21.3). These high places were found both in Jerusalem and in other towns of Judah, from Geba to Beersheba (2 Kgs 23.5, 8).

What kind of worship occurred at these high places? Are the high places of worship "pagan places of worship" as in several common language translations? Is specifying "pagan" places of worship for "high places" justified? Since the Deuteronomic historian is so concerned about centralization of worship in

1 See J. Lundquist, "The Legitimizing Role of the Temple in the Origin of the State," *Society of Biblical Literature, 1982 Seminar Papers* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press 1982) 271-297; and Carol L. Meyers, "Jachin and Boaz in Religious and Political Perspective," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45 (1983) 167-178. Meyers (169) expresses the relationship between Israelite religion and politics as follows: "Religion and ritual are not to be seen as isolated or compartmentalized features of Israelite life. Rather, the cultic ceremonies and sacred structures of ancient Israel must be seen as part of the political ideology of the realm." For an analysis of the *bamoth* that combines both study of the social structures and study of archaeological discoveries, see the thoroughly convincing study by Nakhai, *op. cit.*

2 J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press 1986) 399. Rainer Albertz (*A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period* [vol. 1; "The Old Testament Library"; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press 1994] 207) has similarly noted that for the Jerusalem priesthood "the centralization of the cult offered the practical possibility of a monopoly with marvellous privileges."

Jerusalem (as Deuteronomy 12 requires), he has unqualified praise for Hezekiah and Josiah, who abolish high places where Yahweh was worshiped outside of Jerusalem (see 2 Kgs 18.22 and 23.8a).[1] Though he praises Asa (1 Kgs 15.11-14),[2] Jehoshaphat (1 Kgs 22.43), Joash (2 Kgs 12.2-3), Amaziah (2 Kgs 14.3-4), Uzziah (2 Kgs 15.3-4) and Jotham (2 Kgs 15.34-35), saying that they did what was right in God's sight, yet he then adds in each case the negative comment that they did not remove the high places where people offered sacrifices. Is the referent here in each case perhaps Yahwistic shrines rather than "pagan shrines"? If they had tolerated shrines to foreign gods, would the Deuteronomic historians have been so lavish in their praise? Given the writers' concern for centralization in Jerusalem, it seems that they could just as easily be condemning Yahwistic shrines outside of Jerusalem as condemning "pagan" shrines.

Part of the difficulty for the historian today is that the theological perspective of the deuteronomists has almost certainly distorted their presentation of the historical situation to some degree. Miller and Hayes express a widely held view in contemporary scholarship: "It must be remembered, however, that the editors wanted to glorify Josiah's actions and thus may have exaggerated the non-Yahwistic features associated with earlier monarchs as well as the 'purges' of Josiah."[3]

Such historical questions cannot be ignored by the serious student of the Hebrew scriptures, but the more central question for the translators is this: how did the author/editor intend for the references to "high places" to be understood? The notes in several recent study Bibles provide different answers.

NJB (1985) has the following note on 1 Sam 9.12:

> The 'high place' was a shrine *set on a hilltop* [emphasis mine] near a town. In these originally Canaanite sanctuaries, the Israelites substituted Yahweh for Baal, Jg 6:25seq., and the high places were for many years tolerated by official Yahwism, 1 K 3:4seq., until their prohibition by the law imposing a single sanctuary, Dt 12:2b.

This note in NJB is written from the critical perspective that the laws of Deuteronomy were not written at the beginning of Israel's history, but rather were formulated after the founding of the monarchy. Such a note, without further explanation, may well confuse the non-specialist who assumes that Moses gave the Israelites all of these laws before they entered the Promised Land. Further, this note

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1 Roland de Vaux (*Ancient Israel* [2 vols.; New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co. 1961] 337) writes, "the text [2 Kgs 23.5, 8-9] shows quite clearly that it refers to sanctuaries and to priests of Yahweh, for they are called to join their 'brothers' in Jerusalem." Richard D. Nelson ("The Role of the Priesthood in the Deuteronomistic History," *Congress Volume: Leuven 1989*, ["VT Sup 43"; ed. J.A. Emerton; Leiden: Brill 1991] 132-147) finds five separate priestly groups in 2 Kgs 23.5-9: (1) priests of the Jerusalem Temple (v 4); (2) Northern Yahwistic priests, who were killed (v 20); (3) Judahite idolatrous priests (v 5); (4) Judahite Yahwistic priests who served at high places (v 8); and (5) Judahite Yahwistic priests not connected with high places (implied in v 9 as those who were assigned duties in the Temple at Jerusalem).

2 Note that 1 Kgs 15.11-13 says that Asa cut down idols, etc., but v 14 says he did not remove the *bamoth*. Does this suggest that *bamoth* were not pagan shrines? In fact, GNB imports the words "pagan places of worship" into v 12, but they are not there in the Hebrew. Note also that in 2 Kgs 3.1-3 it is said that Joram (Jehoram) tore down the pillar of Baal which his father Ahab had built, but he "clung to the sin of Jeroboam," that is, he continued to worship at cultic centers outside of Jerusalem. A distinction is made here between worship of pagan gods and worship at illegitimate shrines.

3 *Op. cit.*, 398.

does not even suggest that the high places are explicitly identified with worship of idols in some contexts (see for example, 1 Kgs 11.7).

The Catholic Study Bible (1990), based on the NAB, has the following lengthy note on "high places":

> The deuteronomistic writers introduce the story of Solomon's confirmation as king with a reference to high places. These high places were Canaanite sanctuaries and were used as such by Israel when they came to occupy the land of Canaan. High places were *located on tops of hills* [emphasis mine], and were equipped with an altar, stone pillars and trees or wooden poles. These pillars and trees/poles represented the fertility deities of Canaan. Though worship at high places is repeatedly condemned by the deuteronomistic writers, they were *probably for the most part local centers for authentic worship of the LORD* [emphasis mine]. It is with the centralization of cult (that is, formal worship) in Jerusalem at the time of Josiah that these centers are viewed with suspicion and condemned. Though Solomon worships at high places he is not condemned, because the Temple has not yet been built.

The notes in the NIV Study Bible (1985) define the nature of the worship at the *bamoth* depending on the context. These notes make a distinction between Yahwistic high places and pagan high places in order to avoid the apparent contradictions in passages such as 2 Chr 14.3 and 15.17, and 2 Chr 17.6 and 20.33. The note on 1 Kgs 3.2 indicates that the Law permitted worship at a variety of places (see Ex 20.24) as long as pagan altars and high places were not used (Num 33.52; Deut 7.5; 12.3), and that worship at a number of locations was apparently acceptable prior to the building of the Temple (see Judg 6.24; 13.19; 1 Sam 7.17; 9.12-13). The note on 1 Kgs 15.14 states, concerning the high places which Asa did not remove, that "the reference...is to those high places where the LORD was worshiped... When 2 Chr 14.3 indicates that Asa removed the high places, it is to be taken as a reference to the high places that were centers of pagan Canaanite worship (see 2 Chr 17.6; 20.33 for the same distinction)." The notes on 2 Kgs 12.3 (Joash), 14.4 (Amaziah), 15.4 (Uzziah), and 15.35 (Jotham) similarly state that the high places which were not removed were places "where the LORD was worshiped rather than pagan deities." The note on 2 Kgs 18.4 states that "Hezekiah was not the first king to destroy high places...but he was the first to destroy high places dedicated to the worship of the LORD...."

Bamoth and archaeological discoveries

Few certain examples of "high places" have been found by archaeologists. One such place dating to the time of the judges has been discovered on a high ridge in the northern Samarian Hills. It consists of large stones laid out in a circle about twenty meters in diameter. On this site was a bronze statuette of a bull about 0.18 meters long. Mazar thinks that the bull was regarded either as a symbol of the god of Israel or as its pedestal (recalling the function of the Cherubim in the Jerusalem temple).[1]

Another "high place" dating to the period of the monarchy has been discovered

1 Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible: 10,000—586 B.C.E.* ("The Anchor Bible Reference Library"; New York: Doubleday 1990) 350-352. Mazar (353-355) recognizes the difficulties in determining the ethnic identities of settlements in Iron Age I (ca. 1200-1000 B.C.), yet he thinks the bull figurine "was probably used by Israelite settlers."

outside the city of Samaria. It includes a trapezoidal ditch, about 3.5 meters deep and 4-6 meters wide, surrounding an inner flat area 26 x 30 meters.[1]

Excavations at Dan during the past twenty-five years have located the ritual center built by Jeroboam I (see 1 Kgs 12.26-33). Among the constructions discovered was a podium which was initially identified as a *bamah*; but further study has led some to conclude that the podium was the foundation for a temple rather than a "high place" of worship.[2]

What were *bamoth*?

Analyses of the discoveries mentioned above assume that these were *bamoth* because they were in some sense literally "high," that is, they were located on hilltops or they were constructed objects of some elevation.[3] It is on this basis that archaeologists have attempted to identify *bamoth*. A word of caution, however, has been expressed by D.R. Ap-Thomas, who has written that "given our present very incomplete knowledge of what a bamah really was and looked like, we need to find an edifice actually labelled 'bamah' before we can be sure."[4]

Schunck similarly expresses caution against assuming that all *bamoth* were located on hilltops or elevated ground. He notes that some *bamoth* were located in valleys (Jer 7.31; 19.5-6; 32.35), and many were located in settlements (e.g., 1 Kgs 13.32; 2 Kgs 17.9, 29; 23.5, 8). According to Schunck, "...the translation 'high place sanctuary,' which frequently occurs, does not give an adequate picture of the real nature of a *bamah*. On the basis of archaeological and biblical evidence, it would probably be best to translate *bamah* as 'a small elevation for cultic use' or 'cult place.' "[5]

Barrick[6] argues that the *bamoth* were man-made. According to the biblical texts, they are "built," "made," "torn down," and "burned." He also rejects the widely held assumptions that *bamoth* were mostly built in the rural areas on hilltops or high ground or that they were elevated constructions.[7] Barrick further argues that since the Hebrew preposition *b* (in) rather than the preposition *'al* (on) is most often used in connection with the *bamoth*, the activity at the *bamoth* took place *within*. One should note also that 2 Kgs 16.4 appears to make a distinction between

1 *Ibid.*, 500-501.

2 See Avraham Biran, "Dan," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (vol. 2; New York: Doubleday 1992) 15; and Mazar, *op. cit.*, 492-495. In the article on the city of Dan in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Biran claims that the platform discovered was a *bamah*. The most recent entries included in Biran's bibliography are two of his own 1986 articles on excavations at Dan. Since then, he has published articles in 1987 and 1989 in which he concludes that the platform was the foundation for a temple. For excellent photos of this platform at Dan, see Nakhai, *op. cit.*, 18-19. On a map of the Promised Land, Nakhai (21) includes almost twenty sites where different types of *bamoth* have been found by archaeologists; but there is considerable debate as to whether all of these places should be identified as *bamoth*.

3 See the [no longer acceptable] descriptions of "high places" cited above on pages 6 and 7 from the NJB and NAB Study Bibles. J. Alberto Soggin (*Introduction to the Old Testament* [rev ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster 1980] 200) more accurately states that they [Canaanite sanctuaries] are "called 'high places' because they stood above the level of their surroundings, not because they were necessarily on peaks or in hill-country." Whether these "high places" were always Canaanite sanctuaries is, however, open to question.

4 Quoted by Barrick, "High Place," 197.

5 K.-D. Schunck, "*bamah*," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (vol. II; ed. G.J. Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1975) 141.

6 W. Boyd Barrick, "What do we really know about 'high places'?" *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 45 (1980), 50-57.

7 They are said to be located in the cities of Judah (2 Kgs 23.8; cf. vv 5 and 2 Chr 14.4), in the city of Gibeon (1 Chr 16.39; 21.29; 2 Chr 1.3, 13), in all the cities of the northern kingdom (2 Kgs 17.9), and in the cities of Samaria (1 Kgs 13.32; 2 Kgs 17.29; 23.19).

bamoth and places of worship upon the hills and under the trees (see also 2 Kgs 17.9-11 for the same distinction).

Barrick reasons that interpreters have been misled by equating the orders in Deut 12.3 ("destroy all the places where the people worship their gods on high mountains, on hills, and under green trees") with the Deuteronomic reforms of Josiah in 2 Kings 23. This equating of the "cult places" (*hammeqomot*) in Deuteronomy with the *bamoth* in 1-2 Kings is unjustified according to Barrick. He states, "Reconstructing history of Israelite religion and literature by linking the cult 'places' of Deuteronomy 12 with the *bamoth* of 1-2 Kings and then using that reconstruction as the basis for interpreting the 'Deuteronomistic' meaning of the word [*bamah*] is a circular argument."[1]

But despite the common assumption that *bamoth* were in some sense "high," numerous questions remain unanswered. Barrick points to the circular arguments in which the meaning of the Hebrew word is explained on the basis of a hypothetical verb root meaning "to be high," then Akkadian and Ugaritic cognates are defined from the Hebrew, and then these cognates are used to confirm the meaning of the Hebrew.[2]

Perhaps all that can safely be said at present is that the *bamoth* were the location of cultic activity and that such activity was condemned in the Deuteronomic History. Whether the *bamoth* were always, or even usually, high places and whether they should be identified with the places referred to in Deut 12.3 remains an open question. Mullen states, "While the exact nature of the *bama* is somewhat obscure, it is apparent that it was a cultic sanctuary, known to both Israel and her neighbors."[3] Elsewhere Mullen writes, "The evidence regarding the *bama*, though scanty, suggests that this installation should be understood in architectural terms as a temple-like structure *in* which certain activities were performed."[4]

After surveying the archaeological evidence and the relevant biblical texts, Lowery draws the following conclusions:[5]

> In the Bible, 'high place' has different levels of meaning. At a predeuteronomic level, 'high place' probably referred to open-air altars, as opposed to roofed temples. It apparently came to mean any altar, open-air or roofed, which supplemented the religious-political functions of the central temple. In Judah, that meant any royal sanctuary other than the Jerusalem temple. In the North, it would have referred to sanctuaries supplementing the 'temples of the realm' at Bethel and Dan. In deuteronomic literature, 'high place' refers to every Yahweh shrine other than the Jerusalem temple.

The questions nevertheless remain: (1) Was worship at the *bamoth* condemned in every instance because Canaanite gods were worshiped or because they constituted unauthorized places in which Yahweh was worshiped? (2) And since the Deuteronomic historians condemn kings for permitting worship in the *bamoth*, why are Samuel and other prophets not condemned for offering sacrifices there? (see 1

1 Barrick, "High Place," 198.

2 *Ibid.*

3 E. Theodore Mullen, Jr. "The Sins of Jeroboam: A Redactional Assessment," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987) 218, n 18.

4 Mullen, "Crime and Punishment: The Sins of the King and the Despoliation of the Treasuries," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 54 (1992) 234, n 8.

5 R.H. Lowery, *The Reforming Kings: Cults and Society in First Temple Judaism* (*JSOT*Sup 120; Sheffield: *JSOT* 1991) 80.

Sam 9.12, 13, 14, 19, 25; 10.5-13.[1]) Mullen answers the second question as follows:[2]

It is the deuteronomistic interpretation and utilization of the command to centralize worship (Deut 12.1-14) that constitute the source of the rejection of the *bamoth* as legitimate places of worship. We would suggest, therefore, that the *bamah* represented a legitimate place of cultic activity for the Deuteronomic History *prior to* 1 Kings 8, the dedication of the temple; afterwards, such places are interpreted as direct violations of the deuteronomic code.

As for the first question, whether the *bamoth* were Yahwistic or pagan, it appears that each usage must be determined by the context.[3] Unfortunately, the context is usually quite ambiguous. In fact, to pose the question in such opposite terms as "Yahwistic" or "pagan" probably distorts and simplifies the historical reality. Adopting Donner's term "poly-Yahwism," Albertz argues convincingly that in the pre-state period of Israel's history, Yahweh was worshiped at local shrines in different forms. He states, "Alongside his overarching function as 'national god' (god of Israel), Yahweh took on features of a local god who was worshiped in different sanctuaries in different ways and was responsible for particular regions in a special way."[4]

As noted above, the writers of the NIV Study Bible notes explain away contradictory statements that certain kings both destroyed and did not destroy the high places by claiming that the reference in one instance is to pagan shrines and in the other to Yahwistic shrines. While this solution removes certain contradictions in the text, there is no real exegetical support otherwise.[5]

It does seem probable, however, that some references to "high places" are to local shrines in which Yahweh was worshiped. For this reason, it is better to avoid the translation "pagan places of worship," unless the context shows unequivocally that such is intended.

To quote Lowery again:[6]

> 'High place' now [in the Deuteronomic History] includes a variety of cult places whose chief characteristic is that they are not the Jerusalem temple. In deuteronomic literature, 'high place' describes sanctuaries that are illegitimate and inferior, that is, all sanctuaries other than the Jerusalem temple.

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1 Many translations do not follow the Masoretic Text (he [Saul] entered the *bamah*) in 1 Sam 10.13, but rather follow a conjectural emendation to read "he went home" (so NRSV, REB, Anchor Bible, Word Biblical Commentary).

2 Mullen, "The Sins of Jeroboam," 218-219, n 18.

3 As noted in p 313 footnote 1 above, the *bamoth* in 2 Kgs 23.5 appear to refer to places where pagan gods were worshiped, but the *bamoth* in 2 Kgs 23.8 seem to refer to places where Yahweh was worshiped.

4 Albertz, *op. cit.*, 83. On the term "poly-Yahwism", coined by H. Donner, see "Hier sind deine Götter, Israel!", *Wort und Geschichte, FS K. Elliger* (AOAT 18, 1973) 45-50, which is cited by Albertz.

5 Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor (*II Kgs* ["The Anchor Bible"; New York: Doubleday, 1988] 186) claim that use of the piel of the verbs *zbh* and *qtr* indicates illicit worship at the shrines and use of the qal of *zbh* and hiphil of *qtr* indicates legal cultic worship. Such a distinction does seem justified in many instances, but the exceptions raise serious questions about whether the distinction in form alone is a sufficient criterion for making such judgements. In 1 Kgs 3.2-4, for example, *zbh* in the piel occurs in vv 2 and 3; but the qal form occurs in 3.4, with no obvious distinction. In 1 Kgs 8.5 the piel of *zbh* surely refers to legal sacrifices, but the piel of the same verb in 1 Kgs 11.8 definitely refers to pagan gods. The hiphil of *qtr* in 1 Kgs 11.8 clearly refers to illicit worship, not to legal worship of Yahweh.

6 *Op. cit.*, 78.

Translating and defining *bamoth*

Given the evidence from recent archaeological and literary studies that *bamoth* were not always located on hilltops or high places, translators should no longer state so confidently in notes or Word Lists that the *bamoth* were literally "high" places of worship. A definition along the lines of that by Lowery (see above p 316) seems preferable to one which states without qualification that the *bamoth* were set on hilltops.[1]

Word List definitions should also state clearly that Yahweh was often worshiped at the *bamoth* and that condemnation was based not only on the fact that foreign gods were worshiped at these places but also on the fact that they were not the official place of worship. Historically, many of these *bamoth* seem to have been "royal sanctuaries" located at administrative centers and fortress cities.[2] The historical situation is perhaps correctly summed up by Nakhai, who writes that the *bamoth* in the tenth century B.C. were built as part of a deliberate plan by the monarchy to place religious practice in important centers under the supervision of the royal administration in order to help create solidarity in the newly created nation-state.[3]

There is evidence to suggest that from early times the bamoth were institutions of the state. Later kings of the southern kingdom, especially Hezekiah and the Josiah, turned against the local bamoth in their efforts to strengthen the authority of Jerusalem. The efforts of these later kings is supported by the Deuteronomic historians. Ahlström is no doubt correct in claiming that "the idea of illegitimacy

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1 The following lengthy glossary notes on "santuario" and "Opferstätte" are taken respectively from the ITCL and GECL translations. Each needs some modification in light of the conclusions of this paper, but both are useful models from which to begin a glossary note.

*Santuario: Indica uno spazio sacro riservato a Dio e al suo culto. La parola si riferisce molte volte al *tempio di Gerusalemme (vedi *Tempio), alcune altre all'abitazione celeste di Dio (ad esempio Salmo 102.20). In molti casi, però, santuario indica uno degli altri luoghi sacri degli Israeliti (ad esempio Betel, Silo, ecc.) oppure luoghi di culto delle popolazioni non israelitiche. Sono importanti quelli che, nella nostra traduzione, vengono di solito chiamati santuari sulle colline (in altre traduzioni possono essere detti, ad esempio, "alti luoghi"o "alture"). Si tratta di piccoli rilievi del terreno, naturali o artificiali [emphasis mine], sui quali praticavano già il culto le popolazioni cananee. Anche gli Israeliti, soprattutto prima dell'epoca del re Giosia (2 Re 22), avevano santuari di questo tipo, dedicati a Dio [emphasis mine]. A causa di alcune somiglianze con i santuari dei Cananei, essi rappresentavano un pericolo di idolatria. Per questo il culto nei santuari sulle colline è spesso condannato soprattutto dai *profeti. Infatti i Cananei praticavano nei loro santuari riti per ottenere dagli dèi il dono della fecondità, talvolta con la partecipazione di prostitute addette al santuario. Inoltre collocavano in questi santuari, normalmente all'aperto presso un grande albero, i simboli delle loro divinità: un palo che significava la dea Astarte o Asera e una stele di pietra che indicava il dio Baal.*

Opferstätte: Im 5. Mosebuch [Deuteronomium 12] wird vorgeschrieben, daß Israel nur an einer einzigen Stätte im Land seinem Gott Opfer darbringen darf. Aus dem Alten Testament läßt sich erkennen, daß diese Vorschrift erst in späterer Zeit befolgt wurde, und zwar nach der Auffindung eines "Gesetzbuches" unter König Joschija (2 Könige 22), das eben diese Vorschrift enthielt. Vieles spricht dafür, daß dieses Gesetzbuch kein anderes als das 5. Mosebuch selbst war oder doch maßgebliche Teile daraus enthielt. Von dieser Zeit an ist die Darbringung von Opfern außerhalb Jerusalems verboten [emphasis mine], während das Schlachten von Tieren von der Opferhandlung getrennt an jedem beliebigen Ort freigegeben wird. In älterer Zeit war jedes Schlachten zugleich ein Opfer für Gott. Dieser alte Opferbrauch erscheint von da an im Rückblick (wie ihn die Königs- und Chronikbücher bieten) als reiner Götzendienst, was er der Absicht nach nicht war: die Opfer auf den Altären des Landes wurden nicht Baal, sondern dem Herrn dargebracht [emphasis mine]. Allerdings war mit dem alten Brauch die Gefahr einer Vermengung mit kanaanitischen Bräuchen stets gegeben. Die Landpriester verloren mit der Reform Joschijas ihre Funktion und wurden zu einem Priesterstand "zweiter Klasse" (Leviten).

2 See Ahlström, *op.cit.*, 522-538.

3 *Op. cit.*, 29.

is that of the biblical writers."[1]

This brings us back to the statement on page 313 above, that the central question for translators is not the historical reality about the origins and functions of *bamoth* but rather the question of how the authors or editors of the biblical texts intended for the references to *bamoth* to be understood. A translation such as "country temple" should be avoided, lest readers think that there were temples in the rural areas similar to that in Jerusalem. DeVries' translation "country shrine" is perhaps a good neutral expression, but perhaps the best translation in English is "illegitimate places of worship,"[2] at least in those places where worship is condemned there. In some languages "illegitimate places of worship" may be rendered something like "places where people were not supposed to offer sacrifices."

In 1 Sam 9.12-14, it may be more appropriate to say "country shrine" since there is no indication that Samuel's sacrifice there was considered wrong. 1 Kgs 3.2-4 presents a difficult case since v 2 explains why the people sacrifice at the "high places" and seems to approve, but v 3 seems to criticize Solomon for doing so. For this reason, many interpreters regard v 2 as a later addition to the text. But even v 2 appears to suggest that what the people did was not entirely appropriate and justifies their practice by explaining that the Temple had not yet been built in Jerusalem. So even here in 1 Kgs 3.2-4, the translation "illegitimate places" seems appropriate.

The notes in NIV may well be correct in passages such as 2 Chr 14.3 (Asa took away the high places) and 15.17 (Asa did not remove the high places). The first passage may refer to places where other gods were worshiped, and the second may refer to places where Yahweh was worshiped. But even if this interpretation is correct, problems remain. 2 Chr 15.17b says that Asa's heart was blameless all his days. But the Hebrew word rendered "nevertheless" here in RSV suggests that Asa should have removed these high places. So even if "high places" in 2 Chr 15.17 refers to places where Yahweh, not other gods, was worshiped, the writer still indicates that worship should not have occurred there. The translation "illegitimate places of worship" or "places where people were not supposed to offer sacrifices" is appropriate in both 2 Chr 14.3 and 15.17.

Centralization of worship and introductions to 1-2 Kings

As noted above in footnote 1, page 311, O'Brien points to three criteria by which the deuteronomist evaluated kings: fidelity to exclusive worship of Yahweh, to centralized worship in Jerusalem, and to the words of the prophets. Introductions to many translations of 1-2 Kings draw attention to only one or two of these criteria. GNB, for example, states, "...each ruler is judged according to his loyalty to God..." Similarly FRCL says, "*Ce livre* [1 Kings] *souligne avec insistance combien il est nécessaire que le roi soit fidèle à Dieu.*"

Unlike the introductions in GNB and FRCL, the introduction to 1 Kings in ITCL takes the next step and specifies what constitutes fidelity to God's will: "*La*

1 *Op. cit.*, 198.

2 On the basis of 2 Kings 23, de Vaux (*op. cit.*, 288) argues that some of the places of worship outside of Jerusalem were sanctuaries of Yahweh, but that syncretistic worship also occurred in many of these *bamoth*. The syncretistic worship led to indiscriminate condemnation of all *bamoth* by the Deuteronomistic historians "so the word *bamoth* became a synonym for pagan sanctuaries, or, at the least, for unlawful sanctuaries. The Deuteronomic editor of the Books of Kings takes the word *bamoth* in this sense of 'illegitimate sanctuaries'...."

colpa che più viene rimproverata ai re infedeli è il culto reso a divinità pagane..." This comment, however, does not go far enough. It refers to the criterion of exclusive worship of Yahweh but still does not make explicit the criterion of exclusive worship in Jerusalem.

Better yet, the introduction in TOB (*nouvelle édition revue* 1988) points to all three criteria by which kings are evaluated. Of importance for this article is the fact that TOB states very clearly the importance of centralized worship for the writer of 1-2 Kings.[1]

The introduction states,

> *Très imprégneés de la pensée deutéronomiste, les Livres des Rois attribuent une place considérable à Jérusalem et au culte célébré dans le Temple....Pour l'auteur, offrir des sacrifices ailleurs qu'à Jérusalem est une désobéissance si grave, qu'elle suffit à entraîner un jugement global de condamnation sur le règne d'un roi, même si celui-ci témoigne par ailleurs de sa fidélité au Seigneur en renversant les autels du Baal (voir 2 R 3.1-3).*

Translators who write introductions to biblical books will naturally want to highlight the theological teachings that have relevance for readers today, for example, that God requires obedience to his will and that disobedience will bring punishment. But we must not neglect to highlight those theological teachings that stand at the center of a writer's theology even if that teaching has no direct relevance today, such as the requirement that God be worshiped only in Jerusalem! Though the introduction to 1-2 Kings in TOB is longer than that provided in many translations, its statement concerning "*Jérusalem et le Temple*" is a good model—one which, in abbreviated form, may be recommended to translators in other languages.

C. JOHN COLLINS

"DEATH WILL BE THEIR SHEPHERD" OR "DEATH WILL FEED ON THEM"? *māwet yir'ēm* in Psalm 49.15 (EVV v 14)

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Introduction

Psalm 49.15a [ET v 14a] reads *kaṣṣō'n lišĕ'ôl šattû māwet yir'ēm.* The English versions generally agree in rendering the opening phrase "like sheep they [the careless rich] are appointed for Sheol" (RSV; see also NIV, NASB, NRSV, Jewish Publication Society of America (JPSA); the KJV and NKJV have "like sheep they are laid in the grave."

1 The introduction to 1-2 Kings in *Nueva Biblia Española* (1975) is also very clear on this point:

La fidelidad exclusiva toma al principio la forma de veneración y culto exclusivos al Señor... Muy pronto la fidelidad exclusiva se encuentra amenazada en los santuarios locales... En ese momento la fidelidad exclusiva al Señor toma la forma de culto en un solo templo. El autor toma el hecho final y lo erige en criterio de interpretación y valoración de la historia precedente. Es un juicio anacrónica, porque proyecta hacia atrés una ley reciente; es un juicio simplista, porque simplifica los hechos...