

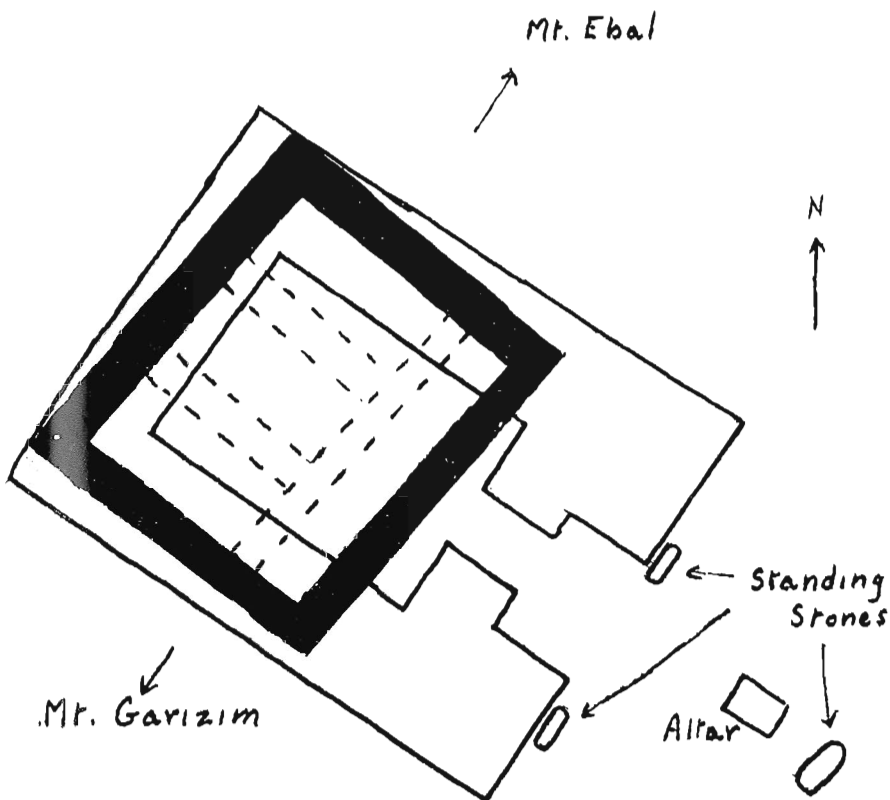
## THE FORTRESS TEMPLE OF SHECHEM AND JOSHUA'S COVENANT

E. D. Stockton, Sydney

The sacred area of Shechem has a long and complex history.<sup>1</sup> It began as a courtyard temple outside the city walls in M.B.II A (c.1800-1750 BC). Subsequently it was enclosed by city walls and underwent many changes during the next four phases, while still adhering to the courtyard-temple plan. In M.B. II C (c.1650), major changes were made both to the city and the sacred area. The city was fortified with a new "cyclopean" wall and the space between it and the old sanctuary limits was filled in to form an extensive platform. On this platform, back to the wall, was erected a new temple facing 28° S.E. across the rest of the platform which served as its open forecourt. This single-chambered temple was noteworthy for its massive walls, 5.2 m. thick out of a total area 26.3 x 21.3 m., and for the great towers flanking the entrance, hence its designation as a "fortress" temple. About fifty years later, minor changes included the addition of two stone slabs set in sockets on either side of the entrance and an altar of huwar bricks in the forecourt directly fronting the entrance. About 1550 the temple was destroyed and a smaller rebuild followed about a hundred years later. Although the massive walls of the earlier temple were used as foundations, it was obvious that considerable trouble was taken to re-orientate the new temple from 28° to 33° S.E. The forecourt was raised, a new altar erected immediately above the old and a great slab set facing the altar and the temple entrance. Evidently the earlier pair of stone slabs was retained, and with the larger new one, continued in use through another building phase until the final destruction of the temple about 1100 BC. A subsequent, four-roomed building directly above this temple is designated a "granary" by the excavators, but I do not think we should rule out the possibility of it being another shrine, in view

1. Cf. G. E. Wright, *Shechem, The Biography of a Biblical City*, New York, 1965, chapters 6-8.  
*Fields V and VI, The Sacred Area*, BASOR, 169(1963), pp. 5-26.  
*The Biblical Traditions of Shechem's Sacred Area*, id., pp. 27-32.  
 Wright argues forcibly and fully for the identification of the site with the location of the various biblical traditions about Shechem. There is no need to repeat what he says here: the main contribution of the present article is to bring into the same line of consideration the accounts of the covenant ceremony relative to Mt. Garizim and Mt. Ebal (Deut. 11, 26-32; 27; Jos. 8, 30-35), on which he is unwilling to speculate.

SUCCESSIVE STRUCTURES IN FIELD V, SHECHEM



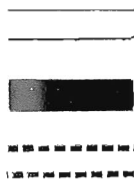
Mt. Garizim

Mt. Ebal

N

Standing Stones

Altar



Wall of Fortress Temple (1650-1550)

Wall of rebuilt Temple (1450-1100)

Inner walls of "Granary" (1100- )

of the long history of cult on the site and of the similarity between the plan of this building and a plan now being recognised as cultic.<sup>2</sup>

An interesting problem arises from the obviously deliberate re-orientation of the temple by 5° about 1550 BC. The excavators suspect that this was done in connection with a solar cult, so that at the time of the equinox the rising sun would shine full into the temple. (The writer was one of a party intending to test this in 1967, but continuing bad weather thwarted the attempt.) I would like to tender another suggestion. The front and back walls of the fortress temple are roughly parallel to a line drawn between Mt. Garizim and Mt. Ebal, so that the two masseboth in the forecourt could be fittingly made to represent the sacred mountains for cult purposes. The slight but deliberate change in orientation could arise from a different impression of what constituted the true alignment of the two mountains, e.g., the difference between a cartographer's view, connecting peak to peak, and a worm's-eye-view, connecting main mass (peak obscured) to main mass. In any case it is significant that the rebuilt fortress temple reverted to the orientation of the earlier courtyard temples, while continuity between the two is further evidenced by the fact that the forecourt altar of the one is directly above the focal point of the other. That the two mountains have always been important religiously to Shechem is clear from its long history and from the possibility that these "shoulders" gave the city its name. This is forcibly realised if one approaches Shechem from E.S.E.—the city nestles in the valley and with perfect symmetry the great broad round masses rise above the plain on either side; a picture of awesome serenity. What could be more natural, granted the religious significance of the mountains, than that they be given cultic representation within the forecourt of the temple?

The story of Abimelech (Jud. 8, 33-9, 49), with its reference to Migdal-Shechem, Beth-Millo (a remembrance of the fact that

---

2. Cf. G. R. H. Wright. *The Bronze Age Temple at Amman*, *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1966, pp. 351-357. *The Archaeological Relationship of the Amman Temple* (to be published). This temple plan is small and square, with a central square cella. As far as can be judged from the 1926-27 excavation of Sellin at Shechem, the central room of the "granary" would appear to have been not square, but oblong and extending to the back wall, though it is surrounded on the other three sides by long, corridor-like rooms, as at Amman, Susa, Persepolis, Eshnuna, etc. An oblong cella extending to the back wall is evidenced at Warka and Tepe Gawra.

the temple was built on a great fill?), and the Temple of Baal-Berith, fit in with the archaeological evidence, as G. E. Wright has pointed out. Did the covenant character of the shrine stem from the covenant of Joshua, or was it part of the earlier Canaanite cult, to which, as the text suggests, the people had reverted?

Two covenant ceremonies conducted by Joshua at Shechem are described in Jos. 8, 30-35 (cf. Deut. 27) and Jos. 24, but one may be the doublet of the other. "The sanctuary of the Lord" (Jos. 24, 26) need not have been that excavated at Shechem, though it is hardly likely that the one place boasted two shrines, both connected with covenant, at the same time.

The second account makes mention of a single great stone in the sanctuary which stood as "a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord which He spoke to us" (Jos. 24, 27). It is tempting to see in this the great slab found in the forecourt of Shechem's temple, facing the altar and the entrance.

In the first account, half the people are facing (*'el-mul*) Mt. Garizim and the other half facing Mt. Ebal. The version in Deut. 27, 12-13 has six tribes standing on (*'al*) Mt. Garizim for the blessings and six tribes on (*b<sup>e</sup>*) Mt. Ebal for the curses, a formidable liturgical exercise. It would make sense if the names of the mountains designated the respective sides of the temple forecourt, or were even applied to the masseboth flanking the entrance (cf. the names of the entrance pillars of Solomon's temple). The two groups could be arranged either facing each other, in choir fashion, or facing the temple, each group before its respective masseboth. The latter arrangement would allow priority for the group on the left-hand side in both versions.

Deut. 27, 1-8 mentions the setting up of an unspecified number of stones at Shechem, coating them with lime and writing on them the words of the Law.<sup>3</sup> The location is variously designated Mt. Ebal (T.M.) or Mt. Garizim (Samaritan versions), but it is easy to see the Samaritan dispute reflected in both readings: the original might have referred to both mountains. The same observation might be made about Jos. 8, 30 which contrasts strangely with 8, 34. As suggested above, the names of the mountains probably

---

3. The 1967 excavations at Deir 'Allah, in the Jordan Valley, brought to light in the sanctuary area a plaster-covered stone bearing writing, which is still, as far as I know, the object of study. It could well illustrate what is described in Deut. 27, 1-8.

designated the respective sides of the forecourt. Whether these stones could be identified with those found at Shechem (either the two or the three) is impossible to say, but I suspect that the detail about their origin and inscription reflects the religious feeling at the time of redaction, when the use of masseboth in cult had come into disfavour. It would have been difficult to expunge mention of the stones from a long-standing tradition, but they might have been rendered harmless by substituting a functional significance for the original religious one.

An interesting possibility emerges. If Wright's dating of the fortress temple and its successor (1650-1100) is correct, if it always had the specifically covenantal character implied in the title Baal-Berith, and if its standing stones played a part in Joshua's covenant, it appears that what Joshua did was a continuation or a Yahwistic adaptation of a long-standing Canaanite cult.