

It is also known as Beth-baal-meon (Josh 13:17) and Beth-meon (Jer 48:23). It is generally identified with Khirbet Ma'in, about 8 km southwest of Madaba. However, no Iron Age remains were found in the course of excavations there. Baal-meon's exact location has yet to be found.

II. Baal-meon was an Israelite town which was conquered by Mesha, king of Moab, in the third quarter of the ninth century BCE. Mesha rebuilt the town and made a reservoir there (lines 9, 30 of his inscription). From that time and until its destruction Baal-meon was a Moabite town (Jer 48:23; Ezek 25:9).

The name Beth-baal-meon indicates that the town has a temple dedicated to "the Lord/Baal of Meon". Who was 'the Lord' of the town? In the light of the analogy to Beth-peor (Deut 3:29; 4:46; 34:6; Josh 13:20), where the local manifestation of the Baal, →Baal of Peor, was worshipped, we may assume that Baal-meon was likewise the cult place of a local →Baal, who gave his name to the town (see also →Baal toponyms).

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N. NA'AMAN

BAAL OF PEOR בעל פעור

I. This local god, mentioned only in the OT, is associated with the mountain Peor in the land of Moab (Num 23:28) and the place Beth-Peor (Deut 3:29; 4:46; 34:6; Josh 13:20). He probably represents there the chthonic aspect of the Canaanite god of fertility, →Baal (SPRONK 1986:231-233). The name Peor is related to Heb פֶּרַע, 'open wide', which in Isa 5:14 is said of the 'mouth' of the netherworld (XELLA 1982: 664-666). According to Num 25 the Israel-

ites participated in the Moabite cult honouring this god. This incident is recalled in Num 31:16; Deut 4:3; Josh 22:17; Hos 9:10; and Ps 106:28 (MULDER 1973:720).

II. A connection may be assumed with the Canaanite deity Baal as known in Ugaritic mythology. In the cycle of Baal (*KTU*² 1.1-6) it is told that in the struggle for dominion Baal is temporarily defeated by →Mot, the god of death. Baal has to descend into the netherworld to reside with the →dead. In *KTU*² 1.5 v:4 this is described as Baal going down into the mouth of Mot (*bph yrd*). It was believed that this coincided with the yearly withering of nature in autumn and winter. In the ritual text *KTU*² 1.109 we see that this had its repercussions on the cultic activities. In the offering list Baal is mentioned among gods who were supposed to be in the netherworld and who received their offerings through a hole in the ground (l. 19-23) (SPRONK 1986:147-148; *TUAT* II/3 316-317; DEL OLMO LETE 1992:183-186).

III. Num 25 describes the cult of the Baal of Peor as a licentious feast to which the men of Israel were seduced by Moabite women. In Ps 106:28 attachment to the Baal of Peor is specified as 'eating sacrifices of the dead' (LEWIS 1989:167). In later Jewish tradition the cult of the Baal of Peor is related to the Marzeah (*Sifre Num* 131 and the sixth century CE mosaic map of Palestine at Madaba). In the OT Heb *marzēah* is attested in connection with mourning (Jer 16:5-7) and excessive feasting (Amos 6:4-7). So it unites the different elements of Num 25 and Ps 106:28. This is even more clear in the ancient Ugaritic texts about the Marzeah, though its connection with the cult of the dead remains a matter of dispute (SCHMIDT 1994:265-266; PARDEE 1996).

The sexual rites connected with the cult of the Baal of Peor have to do with the aspect of fertility. As this cult is addressed to Baal, who is the god of nature, it is hoped to contribute to his bringing new life out of death. It can be related to the myth of Baal describing how (the bull) Baal during his stay in the netherworld makes love to a

heifer, mounting her up to eighty eight times (KTU² 1.5 v:18-21).

The name of Peor in itself already points to a relation with the cult of the dead, especially when it is observed that it shares this association with other place names in this region east of the Dead Sea (SPRONK 1986:228-229): Obot (Num 21:10-11; 33:43-44), which can be translated as '→spirits of the dead', Abarim (Num 21:11; 27:12; 33:44-48; Deut 32:49; Jer 22:20), 'those who have crossed (the river of death)' (cf. →Travellers), and Raphan (1 Macc 5:37), which can be related to the →Rephaim. It is also interesting in this connection to note that, according to Deut 34:6, →Moses was buried in the valley opposite Bet-Peor. It is added that no one knows the precise place of his grave. This has been interpreted in midrashic tradition as a "precaution, lest his sepulchre became a shrine of idolatrous worship" (GOLDIN 1987:223). Indeed, within this region this would not have been unlikely.

In Num 25:18; 31:16; and Josh 22:17 the Baal of Peor is indicated with the name Peor only. This may suggest reluctance to use the name of a pagan deity. On the other hand, the name Peor with its clear association to (the mouth of) the netherworld already indicates the nature of this cult as a way to seek contact with divine powers residing there.

IV. Bibliography

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K. SPRONK

BAAL-PERAZIM בַּעַל-פְּרָזִים

I. A location south of Jerusalem, on the way to Bethlehem, where David won his first victory over the Philistines (2 Sam 5:18-20; 1 Chr 14:9-11). In the story the naming of the place is assigned to David and explained thus: "Yahweh broke (*pāraš*) through my enemies before me, like a bursting flood (*peres māyim*)" (v 20). Since the name Baal-perazim is directly combined with the divine help of →Yahweh, it is clear that the element 'Baal' was understood by the author as a honorific title of Yahweh (compare Hos 2:18). Whether the site had a cult place for Yahweh is not clear. Its name should best be translated 'Lord of breaches' or even 'Lord of (divine) outburst'.

II. The Philistine onslaught apparently antedated the conquest of Jerusalem by David and was conducted from north to south, penetrating via the Valley of Rephaim to Bethlehem, David's ancestral town (2 Sam 23:13-17). Baal-perazim must be sought on the way to Bethlehem, and might be identified with the Iron Age I site excavated near modern Giloh. The site is located on the summit of a prominent ridge overlooking the Valley of →Rephaim and is a reasonable candidate for Baal-perazim.

III. Baal-perazim is called mount Perazim (*har pērāšim*) in Isa 28:21: "For the LORD will rise up as on Mount Perazim, he will be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon". The prophet alludes to David's two victorious battles against the Philistines related in 2 Sam 5:17-25 and 1 Chr 14:8-16: the one waged at Mount/Baal Perazim and the second waged in the valley near Gibeon. By interchanging the nouns, the author deliberately avoids the combination of Yahweh with a place whose name has the element