THE CULT OF THE DEAD IN JUDAH: INTERPRETING THE MATERIAL REMAINS

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Both archaeological and biblical evidence attest to a cult of the dead in Judah, functioning in Jerusalem as well as in the hinterlands, throughout the monarchic period. Among the physical remains in Judahite tombs are a variety of mortuary provisions for sustenance, safety, and supplication to be used by the deceased in the afterlife. The biblical record corroborates the archaeological evidence with references to a life after death, in which the dead were thought to possess preternatural powers. The belief in the empowered dead, with the attendant practices stemming from that belief, is here interpreted as a cult of the dead.

Previous discussions of this topic have tended to focus on either the biblical[1] or the archaeological evidence.[2] The few synthetic treatments, primarily doctoral dissertations, have not fully utilized the archaeological evidence in support of their reconstructions.[3] In their recent books on the topic, K. Spronk and T. Lewis adopted a synchronic approach to the material

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[1] A. Heidel (*The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* [Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1946]), N. J. Tromp (*Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* [Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969]). J. F. Healey ("Death, Underworld and Afterlife in the Ugaritic Texts" [Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1977]), and T. J. Lewis (*Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* [HSM 39; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989]) elucidate biblical references to death in light of literary evidence from Israel's predecessors and contemporaries. H. C. Brichto ("Kin, Cult, Land and Afterlife—A Biblical Complex," *HUCA* 44 [1973]), L. R. Bailey (*Biblical Perspectives on Death* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979]), and K.-J. Illman (*Old Testament Formulas About Death* [Meddelanden Från Stiftelsens för Åbo Akademi Forskningsinstitut 48; Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 1979]) study death from an internal biblical perspective.

[2] S. Loffreda, "Iron Age Rock-Cut Tombs in Palestine," *Studii Biblici Franciscani Liber Annuus* 18 (1968) 244–87; E. M. Meyers, "Secondary Burials in Palestine," *BA* 33 (1970) 2–29; J. R. Abercrombie, "Palestinian Burial Practices from 1200 to 600 B.C.E." (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1979); R. Gonen, "Burial in Canaan of the Late Bronze Age as a basis for the Study of Population and Settlements" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1979 [Hebrew]); L. Y. Rahmani, "Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs. Part Two," *BA* 44 (1981) 229–35.

[3] R. E. Cooley, "The Contribution of Literary Sources to the Study of the Canaanite Burial Pattern" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1968); J. W. Ribar, "Death Cult Practices in Ancient Palestine" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1973); G. C. Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment* (JSOTSup 43; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985).

which precluded distinguishing developments in Judahite national and religious formation.[4]

Discussions of the cult of the dead must consider the growing body of archaeological evidence. The more than three hundred uniform, reasonably well-preserved interments from Judah examined in conjunction with the biblical testimony suggest a new reconstruction of the role of the dead in Judahite society. The material remains contribute to discussions of provisioning the dead: the reasons behind the practice, its origin and duration, and the rationale for choosing specific items. The fact that mortuary provisioning continued throughout the period of the existence of the kingdom, and into later periods, necessitates a reinterpretation of certain biblical texts regarding the "official" and "popular" practices of the Judahite cult of the dead. In the following discussion, Judahite burial types are described and distinguished from Canaanite practices. Biblical information relevant to the interpretation of the physical remains is then added to the picture. The study concludes with a historical reconstruction of the opposition to the cult which accounts for both the archaeological and the biblical evidence.

I. Canaanite and Judahite Burial Types

Throughout the Iron Age (1200–586 B.C.E.), southern Levantine burials demonstrated two distinct cultural responses to death. The first response, which consisted of an agglomeration of burial types, typically occurred along the coast, in the Shephelah, and through the Jezreel, Beth Shan, and Jordan River valleys ("Lowland Response"). The predominant burial types were pit (i.e., Azor, Tell es-Saidiyeh), cist (i.e., Tell es-Saidiyeh, Tell Zeror), and jar (i.e., Kfar Yehoshua, Tell el-Saidiyeh) burial.[5] Ordinarily, one to three clothed and cloaked (demonstrated by the presence of toggle pins and fibulae) individuals were buried together. In the twelfth and eleventh centuries B.C.E. they were typically equipped with local, Mycenaean, and Cypriot bowls, jars, pilgrim flasks, pyxides, and craters, and in the tenth through sixth centuries, with local, Phoenician, Cypro-Phoenician, and Assyrian bowls, jars, storejars, dipper juglets, cooking pots, wine decanters, amphoras, and plates or platters. The earlier burials contained a wider range of provisions than did the later burials. Amuletic jewelry included beads, pendants, bangles, rings, earrings, eyes of Horus, scarabs, and Bes figurines. Among the tools provided were

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[4] K. Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (AOAT 219; Neukirchen-Vluyn; Neukirchener Verlag; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1986); Lewis, *Cults.*

[5] Body treatment, mortuary goods, and form of the receptacle or space housing the body were the determinants of the types. Strong correlations among all the features enable labeling most types by the receptacle or space housing the body. For a discussion of all burial types found in the southern Levant, see E. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs About the Dead* (JSOTSup 123; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).

javelin heads, spearheads, blades, arrowheads, spindle whorls, flints, pins, and needles. Personal possessions included seals, combs, mirrors, cosmetic palettes, and gaming pieces.[6]

The bench tomb, which eventually became the primary Judahite form of burial, was also first attested at lowland sites. From the preceding Late Bronze Age, examples have been reported from the northern coastal site of Sarafend, the Shephelah and southern coastal plain sites of Gezer, Lachish, Tell Aitun, and Tell el-Farah (South), and from Pella in Jordan.[7] With the onset of the Iron Age, bench tombs were hewn at eleven sites along the coast, through the Shephelah, in the northern Israelite valleys, and at a single site in Transjordan.

Is it possible to identify the population exhibiting this "lowland" cultural response to death? Although biblical descriptions of the inhabitants of Canaan are often general and formulaic, several passages specify the Canaanites as the population living along the coast and through the Jezreel, Beth Shan, and Jordan River valleys. While some of these descriptions may date from as early as the tenth century B.C.E, most are incorporated into seventh-century and later Deuteronomic editions.[8] The most explicit reference is in Num 13:29, where the spies report that "Amalekites dwell in the Negeb region; Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites inhabit the hill country; and Canaanites dwell by the Sea and along the Jordan."[9] A similar view is presented in Josh 11:3: "to the Canaanites in the east and in the west; to the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, and Jebusites in the hill country; and to the Hivites at the foot of Hermon, in the land of Mizpah." Two verses in Joshua and Judges, both descriptions preserved in Deuteronomic contexts, locate the Canaanites along the littoral from the Range of Lebanon in the north to Gaza in the south (Josh 13:2–5; Judg 3:3; also Zeph 2:5).[10] Several passages relate the Israelites' failure to oust the Canaanites living in the cities of the

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[6] The full documentation is presented in Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices.*

[7] For the Sarafend tomb, see D. C. Baramki, "A Late Bronze Age Tomb at Sarafand, Ancient Sarepta," *Berytus* 12 (1956–58). Gezer Tombs 9, 10A, 58, and 59 are detailed in R. A. S. Macalister, *The Excavation of Gezer 1902–1905 and 1907–1909* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1912) 308, 321–25, 329–31. Lachish Cave 4002 with five loculi is published in O. Tufnell, *Lachish III* (London: Oxford University, 1953) 239–40. For Tell Aitun, see G. Edelstein et al., "The Necropolis of Tell 'Aitun," *Qadmoniot* 4.3 (1971) 86–67 (Hebrew). The Tell el-Farah (South) tombs 518, 529, 902, 914, 920, 921, 934, 936, and 960 are detailed in W. M. F. Petrie, *Beth Pelet I* (London: British School of Archaeology in Egypt and Bernard Quaritch, 1930) 7–8; and E. Macdonald, J. L. Starkey, and G. L. Harding, *Beth Pelet II* (London: British School of Archaeology in Egypt and Bernard Quaritch, 1932) 23–26. For the remaining tombs and a general discussion, see Gonen, "Burial," 108–219, Map 3.

[8] M. Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1968) 101, 107; A. Soggin, *Joshua: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia; Westminster, 1972) 67; A. D. H. Mayes, *Judges* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985) 10–13.

[9] Biblical translations are from *Tanakh—The Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988).

[10] R. Boling, *Judges* (AB 7; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975) 30; Soggin, *Joshua*, 151.

Jezreel and Beth Shan valleys (Josh 17:11–12, 16; Judg 1:27, although "Canaan-ite" is also used in the general sense in this chapter as in v. 9). Biblical writers used "Canaanite" to refer to the heterogeneous lowland population with a cosmopolitan material culture, and variant societal features such as burial practices. This "lowland" culture persisted in contradistinction to the highland "Israelite" culture throughout the Iron Age; therefore biblical references to "Canaanites" in seventh-century B.C.E. biblical passages need not be considered fabrications or anachronisms.[11]

The second, notably homogeneous cultural response to death prevailed in the highlands of Judah and Israel. The burial types were the closely related cave and bench tomb burial. From late in the eighth century B.C.E. through the fall of the southern kingdom in 586 B.C.E., the bench tomb was the characteristeric Judahite form of burial, as demonstrated by its virtually exclusive use at twenty-four sites throughout Judah including Jerusalem. The only sites in the highlands and Shephelah from which variant burial forms have been reported are the cosmopolitan centers of Jerusalem and Lachish.

Geology and topography might be argued to be the determining factors in choice of burial type, to account for the virtually exclusive use of cave and bench tombs in the foothills and highlands, as opposed to the multiplicity of types employed along the coast and through the valleys. Certain burial plans were more easily executed and better preserved in particular soils or rock types. For this reason, pit graves predominated in sandy regions and caves or hewn tombs prevailed in the softer rocks of the highlands. However, there are sufficient examples of pit graves cut into bedrock (Lachish, Megiddo) and bench tombs hewn in coastal kurkar with pillars added to support the ceiling (Ashdod-Yam, Nahshonim) to demonstrate that culture and not geology was the determining factor in choice of burial type.

The few recorded interments from the northern kingdom of Israel indi-cate a more complex picture than that of Judah. Israel encompassed the coast and the Jezreel, Beth Shan, and Jordan River valleys, whose populations employed "lowland" forms of interment throughout the Iron Age. However, the extremely small number of reported northern highland burials were cave and bench tombs, similar to their southern counterparts.

The critical interface between the highland and lowland practices was in the Shephelah, the lowlands and foothills between Judah to the east and Philistia to the west. Several significant, characteristic features of Judahite burial initially appeared in the coastal and Shephelah tombs of Tell el-Farah (South), Tell Aitun, Lachish, and Gezer. First and foremost was the bench tomb plan, but also specific mortuary provisions. To account for the spread of burial features from the lowlands into the highlands, either highland Judahites adopted the bench tomb from the Shephelah, or Judah was settled at least in part by former Shephelah residents who brought the bench tomb

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[11] So Noth, *Numbers*, 101, 107; and Boling, *Judges*, 30.

with them, or both. Israelites and Judahites may have had more intimate relations with Canaanites and Philistines than the biblical record indicates.

Both Judahite cave and bench tomb burials remained consistent in plan,
body treatment, and categories of mortuary provisions throughout the Iron
Age. There was no significant change in highland burial practices from the
twelfth century B.C.E. through the fall of the southern kingdom. The only
variations were in relative wealth, and beginning in the ninth century B.C.E.,
a limited number of lavish individual tombs were cut in Jerusalem and
Gibeon,[12] probably for civic and religious high functionaries. From Judah,
the total number of reported tombs are 24 cave tombs and 81 bench tombs
from the tenth through the third quarter of the eighth century B.C.E., and 17
cave and 185 bench tombs from the late eighth through the first quarter of
the sixth century B.C.E.

Most cave and bench tombs were located in tell slopes or nearby wadi
cliffs. In cave tomb burials, the dressed and adorned body was laid out near
the center of a natural or hewn cave, and mortuary goods were positioned
around the body. As additional space was required, skeletal remains and provisions were moved to the cave periphery creating a cleared space in the
center. Cave burial was the predominant highland type in the Late Bronze
Age and into the first centuries of the Iron Age.[13] Beginning in the tenth century B.C.E., the number of sites with cave tombs decreased as the bench tomb
gained in popularity.

For bench tombs, a square to rectangular doorway in a rock-cut facade
opened into an approximately five meter square chamber with waist-high
benches arranged around the perimeter of the room. Occasionally, additional
chambers with benches were added. On the benches, individuals reposed,
extended on their backs, with their heads on stone pillows or headrests when
provided. Parapets to keep the deceased from falling off the bench and lamp
niches were also carved into tombs. When space was required for an additional burial, a previous burial and at least some mortuary provisions were
moved to a repository pit carved inside the tomb.

Both cave and bench tombs contained individuals of both sexes and all
ages buried together. The tombs are assumed to have accommodated family
burials, as recorded in the Bible (e.g., Gen 49:29-31), though osteological
evidence is lacking. A nuclear family most likely maintained the tomb, since
most undisturbed burials housed only fifteen to thirty individuals of varying
ages, which would represent three to five generations. Tombs of unusually

[12] For Jerusalem tombs, see M. Broshi, G. Barkai, and S. Gibson, "Two Iron Age Tombs below
the Western City Wall, Jerusalem and the Talmudic Law of Purity," *Cathedra* 28 (1983) 17–32
(Hebrew); and D. Ussishkin, *The Village of Silwan* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Tzvi and the Society for
the Exploration of the Land of Israel and her Antiquities, 1986 [Hebrew]). For the Gibeon
tombs, see H. Eshel, "The Late Iron Age Cemetery of Gibeon," *IEJ* 37.1 (1987) 1–17.

[13] R. Gonen, "Regional Patterns of Burial Customs in Late Bronze Age Canaan," *Bulletin of
the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* (1984–85) 70–74.

fine workmanship in Jerusalem and Gibeon were designed for a limited number of individuals, with no repositories. These tombs probably accommodated civic and religious high functionaries such as the royal steward Shebna, rebuked by Isaiah for choosing an ostentatious individual tomb in Jerusalem instead of burial with his family members (Isa 22:16). The bodies were dressed and adorned with jewelry. Select individuals, including women, were then wrapped in a cloak, as evidenced by Samuel's apparition (1 Sam 28:14) and the presence of toggle pins and fibulae in burials.

Individuals buried in both cave and bench tombs were similarly provisioned with local and imported pottery, tools, household items, and personal possessions. A commensurate number of provisions accompanied the large numbers of individuals buried in these tombs.

Nourishment in the afterlife was of paramount importance. Undisturbed tombs yielded bowls for foodstuffs, jugs for liquid, lamps for light, and jars and juglets for scented oils, perfumes, spices, and oil for lamps. Food remains were preserved in an Iron I Gezer tomb and the seventh-century B.C.E. Beth Shemesh 2 bench tomb. Bowls containing sheep bones and a knife were covered by a second inverted bowl, in the words of the Gezer excavator R. A. S. Macalister, "as though to keep it warm until he for whom it was destined should have need of it."[14] Beginning in the tenth century B.C.E., several ceramic forms previously found in Egyptian and lowland burials were added to the highland mortuary repertoire. The new ceramic forms were all utilized in the preparation, serving, and storage of foodstuffs and liquids: cooking pots, plates, platters, wine decanters, and amphoras.

After ceramic vessels, jewelry was the second most common item provided in burials. The dead were perceived as vulnerable in their new condition, as they had been while alive. For this reason, the protective powers invested in the colors, materials, and designs of jewelry and amulets, such as scarabs and the eye of Horus, were invoked.[15]

The presence in tombs of female pillar figurines, perhaps Asherah,[16] is

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[14] R. A. S. Macalister, *A Century of Excavation in Palestine* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1925) 260; D. Mackenzie, *Excavations at Ain Shems: (Beth Shemesh)* (Palestine Exploration Fund Annual 2: 1912–13) 67.

[15] A. Wilkinson, *Ancient Egyptian Jewellery* (London: Methuen, 1971) 196.

[16] The prominent breasts are agreed to indicate a connection with fertility. The figurines have thus been identified with Astarte, Asherah, Ishtar, and *dea nutrix*. The cylindrical body evokes a tree or a wooden pole, the biblical cult symbol known as the asherah for the goddess Asherah. However, the tree has been depicted throughout ancient Near Eastern art as a source of nourishment and identified with different deities at different times and places. Therefore, these figurines may represent the goddess Asherah; the cult symbol asherah, which could be interpreted as an appeal to Yahweh, who had incorporated Asherah's functions into his cult; or a superstitious or folkloric practice not associated with any particular deity. The biblical and northwest Semitic textual and inscriptional evidence is presented in J. Day, "Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature," *JBL* 105 (1986) 385–408; and S. A. Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel* (SBLMS 34; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988). R. Hestrin

also best explained as an appeal to sympathetic powers. Female pillar figurines are small ceramic figurines with solid or hollow conical bodies, molded or hand-fashioned heads, and prominent breasts emphasized by the arms encircling and supporting them. The earliest examples were found in the eleventh- to ninth-century B.C.E. Shephelah tombs Gezer 8I, Beth Shemesh 1, and Lachish 1002.[17] By the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. these figurines were supplied in cave and bench tomb burials throughout the Judahite foothills and highlands, from Jerusalem in the north to Ez Zahariyah in the south. While found in domestic contexts in Israel and Judah, female pillar figurines have been reported from tombs only within the heartland of Judah. The prominent bosom suggests that the figurine's symbolic function was to beseech adequate lactation to sustain newborns and infants, presumably invoked on behalf of surviving childbearing family members rather than for the deceased. In a discussion of women's roles in ancient Israelite religion, P. Bird suggested that women fulfilled religious roles outside the male-defined "rituals." One such role was providing for and consulting the ancestors, the mediator between the generations.[18] This role as "Mother of generations" may also be physically embodied in the female pillar figurine. The presence of these figurines in eighth–seventh-century B.C.E. tombs both attests to the ongoing relations between generations living and dead and poignantly illustrates Judahite concern for the welfare of newborns and infants in order to ensure the survival of the family line with its patrimony.

Tools, household implements, and personal items such as articles of dress, grooming, amusement, and identification occurred with the least frequency. Economic considerations do not explain the relative incidence of these objects, for although a metal blade or a seal may have been an expensive item, readily available objects such as spindle whorls, flints, and gaming pieces were also rarely present. Their small numbers may be due to the fact that they were regarded as extraneous provisions, not requisite for continued survival.

Cave and bench tomb plans, the body treatment which consisted of primary burial with secondary redeposition within the tomb, and the categories of mortuary provisions described above continued unchanged in Judah throughout the Iron Age. Any historical reconstruction must account for this absence of change in spite of biblical legislation aimed at suppressing aspects of the cult of the dead.

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introduces iconographic evidence in "The Lachish Ewer and the 'Asherah," *IEJ* 37 (1987) 212–23. For the most recent discussion of the evidence, see M. S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990) 80–88.

[17] Macalister, *Gezer*, 81–82; D. Mackenzie, *Ain Shems*, 52–63; Tufnell, *Lachish*, 229–36.

[18] P. Bird, "Gender and Religious Definition; The Case of Ancient Israel," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 20 (1990) 12–13, 19–20.

II. Biblical Information about the Cult of the Dead

Biblical stories and injunctions support the reconstruction of mortuary practices proposed on the basis of the physical remains. Feeding the dead, even tithed food, is as well attested in the Bible as it is in the ground. The dead were regarded as divine beings, and so were entitled to the tithe. *'Ĕlōhîm* is unequivocally used for the dead Samuel in the story of Saul and the woman of En-Dor (1 Samuel 28). Isaiah 8:19 provides a second example of *'ĕlōhîm* referring to the dead. God instructs Isaiah to ignore the advice of those who counsel him to consult their gods, the dead, when Yahweh does not answer. If *'ĕlōhîm* is understood as the deified dead, an early example of feeding the dead tithed food is provided by Jacob, who vowed that upon a safe return from his travels he would offer a tithed sacrifice at a *bêt 'ĕlōhîm*, which could be interpreted as a marker or shrine for his deified ancestors located on family ground (Gen 28:22).[19] That the practice continued well into the Iron Age is demonstrated by the Deuteronomic vow taken when presenting tithed offerings to Yahweh. The Israelite recited, "I have not eaten of it while in mourning, I have not cleared any of it while I was unclean, and I have not deposited any of it with the dead" (Deut 26:14). Offering consecrated food to the dead was sufficiently widespread to require a verbal disavowal. Sacrifices including tithed food were offered to the dead at burial markers (Jacob in Gen 28:17–18), on hilltops (Jacob in Gen 31:53–54), in tombs (Isa 57:8; 2 Chr 16:14;[20] 32:33), at shrines (the *zebaḥ mišpāḥâ/zebaḥ hayyāmîm* at Shiloh in 1 Sam 1:21; 2:19; and 20:6, 29[21]), and perhaps at *bāmôt* (Isa 53:9; Ezek 43:7).[22] Upon death and burial, elite and royalty such as Hezekiah were honored (**kbd*) (2 Chr 32:33) with lamenting (1 Kgs 13:20; Jer 22:18) and the offering of sacrifices (Isa 57:7, 9; 2 Chr 16:14). The root **pqd* (Num 16:29; 2 Kgs 9:34), related to the Mesopotamian *paqidum*, who regularly provided food and drink offerings for a deceased father or relation,[23] probably also refers to care and sacrifices for ancestors and deceased royalty. T. Lewis suggests that the Omride rulers introduced the *"pqd* ritual" into Israelite society in the ninth century B.C.E., as reflected in the verb *piqdû* used in reference to Jezebel's remains (2 Kgs 9:34).[24] Proper postmortem care (**pqd*) was

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[19] B. Halevi, "'qbwt nwspym lpwlhn 'bwt," *Beth Mikra* 64 (1975) 114.

[20] The "great burning" for King Asa refers not to cremation but to sacrifices offered.

[21] A. Malamat, "King Lists of the Old Babylonian Period and Biblical Genealogies," *JAOS* 88 (1968) 73 n. 29. P. K. McCarter, Jr. noted that Codex Vaticanus of the Septuagint for 1 Sam 1:21 reads, "Elkanah offered his annual sacrifice and his vows and all the tithes of this land" (*I Samuel* [AB 8; New York: Doubleday, 1984] 55). This records another occasion at which tithed products were offered to the dead.

[22] R. Amiran details preserved *bāmôt* structures with sacrificial remains from the Jerusalem area ("The Tumuli West of Jerusalem: Survey and Excavations, 1953," *IEJ* 8 [1958] 205–27).

[23] J. J. Finkelstein, "The Geneology of the Hammurapi Dynasty," *JCS* 20 (1966) 115.

[24] Lewis, *Cults*, 120–22.

probably not a foreign practice but an integral aspect of Judahite and Israelite social organization. Moses denied proper care to the accursed Korahites (Num 16:29), and in a play on the root *pqd Jonathan attributed David's absence in court to a trip home for a family ancestral sacrifice (1 Sam 20:6).[25]

Why did Judahites and Israelites feed the dead, as attested in both the biblical record and the physical remains of burial? Biblical stories and prohibitions attest to beliefs in the supernatural powers of the dead. Both figurines and intermediaries served to establish contact with the dead. On the basis of Mesopotamian evidence, K. van der Toorn interprets teraphim as ancestor figurines, used both at home and in the public cult for divination.[26] Using a figurine may have been preferable to disturbing the dead; however, an array of intermediaries were available: 'ōbôt (diviners), yidde'ōnîm (knowing ones),[27] dōrēš 'el-hammētîm (seeker of the dead), ḥōbēr ḥāber (magician), prophets, and priests. In 1 Sam 28:7–14 a ba'ălat-'ôb, a woman who consults ghosts, conjures up the deceased Samuel, who then foretold the outcome of Saul's impending battle with the Philistines. The priest Eli probably assisted Elqanah and Hannah with their zebaḥ mišpāḥâ at Shiloh (1 Samuel 1). Even prophets of Yahweh consulted the dead. When Yahweh hid his face, the people encouraged Isaiah to "seek the ghosts and familiar spirits that chirp and mutter. Should not a people inquire of their divine beings, on behalf of the living inquire of the dead?" (Isa 8:19).

Saul's encounter with the deceased Samuel demonstrates the dead's prescient powers (1 Samuel 28). Furthermore, the dead were credited with the power of vivification. Elisha's bones miraculously revived a dead man (2 Kgs 13:20–21), and Hannah prayed for children on the occasion of the ancestral sacrifice (1 Sam 1:11). The dead may have been thought vengeful, with the power to harm the living. The only evidence is provided by David, whose uncharacteristic responses to death and dying, including mourning over the illness but not the death of one of his sons (2 Sam 12:15–23). In 2 Samuel 4:12 David had the hands and feet of Ishbaal's already dead murderers cut off, probably not for tallying purposes but to avert the possibility of revenge.[28]

The Bible thus records motives and methods for caring for the dead. The motives were to benefit from the dead's beneficial powers and perhaps avert revenge, and the methods were to provide for the dead's physical needs

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[25] Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 124–125.

[26] K. van der Toorn, "The Nature of the Biblical Teraphim in the Light of the Cuneiform Evidence," *CBQ* 52 (1990) 203–22.

[27] H. Rouillard and J. Tropper interpret 'wb and yd'ny ambiguously as "Beschwörung-instrument den weissagenden Totengeist oder den Totenbeschwörer" in "Vom kanaanäischen Ahnenkult zur Zauberei: Eine Auslegungsgeschichte zu den hebräischen Begriffen 'wb und yd'ny," *UF* 9 (1987) 236.

[28] A. Lods, *Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Middle of the Eighth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1932) 220.

including nourishment, to erect burial markers (Gen 35:20; 2 Sam 18:18, 2 Kgs 23:16–18; Isa 56:5), and to maintain a family tomb enabling the generations to be buried together.

The tomb itself also played a role in Israelite society. In addition to housing the dead, ancestral tombs served to reinforce the family claim to the patrimony, the *naḥălâ* (Josh 24:30; Judg 2:9). The existence of the tomb constituted a physical, perpetual witness to ownership of the land, and in some cases may have served as a boundary marker. Rachel's tomb was situated on the border of Benjamin (1 Sam 10:2),[29] and Joshua's "on the border of his inheritance," *bigbûl naḥălātô* (Josh 24:30).

In sum, the ancestral dead with supernatural powers, residing in the tomb which constituted a physical claim to the patrimony, made the cult of the dead an integral aspect of Judahite and probably also Israelite society.

III. A Historical Reconstruction of the Opposition to the Cult of the Dead

The archaeological and biblical evidence suggests that throughout the Iron Age Judahites and Israelites cared for their empowered ancestors. Vessels for foodstuffs, liquids, perfumes, spices, and oil for lamps, plus jewelry, tools, household and personal items, and talismans were provided in Judahite burials throughout the existence of the kingdom. Given this physical evidence for a continuing cult of the dead, how are the biblical injunctions regarding the dead to be understood?

Ancient Israel, like most societies, had regulations and taboos proscribing relations between the worlds of the living and the dead. Purity laws, now included in the Priestly document, conceivably could have been early legislation that served to distance the living from the dead (Lev 21:1–3, 11; Num 6:6–7; 19:11, 14, 16, 22; 31:19). The lengthy duration of the purification rituals could have discouraged contracting impurity, such as through exposure to the dead. Early "official" opposition to the death cult may be preserved in the northern Covenant Code, which mandates *ḥerem* ("proscription") for anyone sacrificing to divine beings other than Yahweh (Exod 22:19). However, the dead are not specified in the parallel section in the Deuteronomic Law Code, Deut 13:1–18. There the objectionable divinities are "other gods, whom neither you nor your ancestors have known" (Deut 13:7; see also v. 3).[30] The only other evidence for early opposition to the cult of the dead is provided

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[29] L. E. Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel," *BASOR* 260 (1985) 23. P. K. McCarter explains the variant tradition locating Rachel's burial in the Bethlehem vicinity (Gen 35:19–20) as a later attempt to associate her burial with Ephrathah in Judah, the ancestral home of David and the site of the present-day "Tomb of Rachel" (*Samuel,* 181).

[30] For a discussion of the relationship between the Covenant Code and the Deuteronomic Law Code, see D. Patrick, *Old Testament Law* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985) 85, 97, 107–9.

by 1 Sam 28:3, which claims that Saul banished necromancers from the land. It is argued that this verse is an editorial edition, perhaps by a Deuteronomic hand.[31]

Beginning in the late eighth–seventh century B.C.E., death cult legislation was introduced into or revived in Judah. The earliest explicit opposition to the cult of the dead consisted of the Deuteronomic and Holiness Law Code prohibitions against consulting the dead *through intermediaries* (Lev 19:26, 31; 20:6, 27; Deut 18:10–11) and feeding the deceased *tithed* food (Deut 26:14). The dead are not specified in the Deuteronomic Law Code prohibition against sacrificing to deities other than Yahweh. The objectionable practice is the diversion of tithed products to the dead. Isaiah 8:19 supports this late eighth–seventh-century B.C.E. agenda in admonishing individuals and prophets who rely on the dead rather than Yahweh.

If the cult of the dead was such an integral aspect of Judahite society, as has been argued above, why was there an "official" attempt to suppress certain aspects of it? The late eighth–seventh-century B.C.E. Hezekian-Josianic reforms were initiated to resanctify the people Israel and centralize the Yahwistic cult in Jerusalem.[32] As part of the effort to centralize both worship and cultic personnel, the dead were deemed an inappropriate source of knowledge. Formerly, the dead could be consulted at various locales, either directly or with the aid of shrine or *bāmôt* personnel, prophets, or necromancers. Toward achieving resanctification and centralization, necromancers had to be eliminated, and true priests and prophets were identified as those who attained their knowledge and direction not from the dead but from Yahweh alone, in the place where he causes his name to dwell.

The death cult legislation, while set within the framework of a religious platform, was also economically advantageous for the Jerusalem Temple cult. The proscriptions guaranteed the self-styled "legitimate" priests their livelihood, first, in their role as the only acceptable intermediaries to the true source of knowledge, and, second, in the form of the tithe. Tithed food was no longer to be diverted to the dead. These reforms were not necessarily economically motivated, but one may wonder whether they would have been included in the late eighth–seventh-century B.C.E. program if they had cost the Jerusalem Temple cult rather than adding to its coffers.

According to this reconstruction of the biblical evidence, the dead's powers were never denied. Individuals could still feed the dead, but not tithed food, and consult them, but without professional help. Provisioning

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[31] M. S. Smith and E. Bloch-Smith provide a brief diachronic review of opposition to the cult of the dead in Israelite religion ("Death and Afterlife in Ugarit and Israel," *JAOS* 108 [1988] 281–83).

[32] R. E. Clements, "Deuteronomy and the Jerusalem Cult Tradition," *VT* 15 (1965) 301–12; M. Weinfeld, "The Emergence of the Deuteronomic Movement: The Historical Antecedents," in *Das Deuteronomium: Entstehung, Gestalt und Botschaff* (ed. N. Lohfink; Leuven; Leuven University Press, Uitgeverij Peeters, 1985).

the deceased continued before and after the fall of Jerusalem, as evidenced by the Hinnom Valley tombs located within sight of the Temple Mount.[33] The late eighth–seventh-century B.C.E. Hezekian-Josianic reforms constituted a first step toward dismantling the cult. Legislation was directed primarily at cultic personnel who consulted the dead, that is, individuals who competed with the self-proclaimed "legitimate" Jerusalem priests and prophets who now claimed exclusive access to divine knowledge and the tithe.

This interpretation of the biblical evidence accords with the archaeological remains. The absence of change in the archaeological record suggests that there was no general shift in practices or attitudes regarding the dead, among Jerusalemites as well as those in the hinterlands. Judahites continued to provide for the dead, in order to benefit from ancestral blessings of fecundity for family and perhaps also fields. The divine ancestors, *'ĕlōhê 'ābîw*, continued as vital entities in Judahite religion and society as long as the kingdom existed.

[33] G. Barkay, "Excavations on the Hinnom Slope in Jerusalem," *Qadmoniot* 17 (1984) 94–108 (Hebrew).