

The Material Turn in the Study of Israelite Religions: Spaces, Things, and the Body

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SPACES, THINGS, AND THE BODY: THE MATERIAL TURN IN THE STUDY OF ISRAELITE RELIGIONS*

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“. . . more than passively enabling it, the body shapes, colors,
tunes, tastes, and performs belief.”¹

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes inspiration comes from the most unexpected places. The present study is the fruit of conversations in a coffee shop in downtown Santa Clarita, CA about the challenges of teaching the religions of Israel and Judah. During these meetings we outlined our forthcoming book, which seeks to integrate more robust theory on space and the body into the study of Israelite religion. This was the perfect setting for this project because the coffee shop was filled with our audience: undergraduate and graduate students from different types of institutions, from research universities, divinity schools, and undergraduate confessional colleges. As we wrestled with how to address the topics of space, materiality, and the body, the limitations of

* The present study has benefitted from valuable comments from several colleagues in the field. We thank Susan Ackerman, John Barton, Sara Brumfield, Aaron Burke, Seth Sanders, Mark S. Smith, Christoph Uehlinger, Jared Wolfe, and Ziony Zevit for providing helpful criticisms and suggestions for the piece. Any remaining errors are solely ours. We thank Catherine Bonesho and Kathryn Medill for editing the article. The anonymous reviewers of the article also provided very helpful feedback and criticisms that greatly improved the content and organization of the article. The inspiration for the sub-title of this paper derives from Sonia Hazard's excellent synthesis of developments in study of the material things of religion: S. Hazard, "The Material Turn in the Study of the Religion," *RelSoc* 4 (2013), 58–78.

¹ D. Morgan, "Materiality, Social Analysis, and the Study of Religion," in D. Morgan (ed.), *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief* (London: Routledge, 2010), 55–74.

a text-centric approach was a reoccurring theme in our conversations.

One key trend that we observed in our survey of the resources that we used to teach this subject was that many studies on the religions of Israel and Judah focus on the development of ideas and religious beliefs, in particular, the emergence of monotheism. We also noticed that when this subject is taught in biblical studies settings often instructors prioritize textual accounts and engage with the material in a more limited way.² Our main concern is that the things done, ingested, spoken, or made tend to be approached as the by-products of, or conduits to, understanding conceptual frameworks about YHWH and the West Semitic pantheon.³ Examples of this desire to reconstruct a coherent and cohesive “history” of the progression of Israelite beliefs and religious practices abound. A common thread is the formulation of models that explain the emergence of monotheism.⁴ Such assumptions, in turn, influence the

² For further on this point, see the comments in W.G. Dever, “The Contribution of Archaeology to the Study of Canaanite and Early Israelite Religion,” in P.D. Miller, P.D. Hanson, and S.D. McBride Jr. (eds.), *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 209–47; also idem, *Beyond the Texts: An Archaeological Portrait of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2017). For a similar critique, see O. Keel and C. Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of Gods* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 11; and T.J. Lewis, “Syro-Palestinian Iconography and Divine Images,” in N.H. Walls (ed.), *Cult Image and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East* (ASOR, 10; Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2005), 71–72.

³ The term “thing” as opposed to “object” accounts for a greater range of forms and meanings and considers the “processes through which the spiritual and the material—animation at work—are conjoined in religious forms” (D. Houtman and B. Meyer, “Introduction,” in D. Houtman and B. Meyer [eds.], *Things: Religions and the Question of Materiality* [New York: Fordham University Press, 2012], 16–17 [quote 16]). See also the classic work of B. Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 28 (2001), 1–22.

⁴ We refer here specifically to the many studies that attempt to reconstruct the development of the Judean pantheon and the history of monotheism from textual discourse about the attributes of the god Yahweh. Although it is beyond the scope of the present study to cite all of such works, for some of the most influential studies that attempt to reconstruct a cohesive “history” of Israelite religion, see Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972); W.F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: An Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (JLCS, 7; London: Athlone Press, 1968); F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973); P.D. Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (LAI; London: SPCK; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000); J. Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (JSOTSup, 265; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000); M.S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1990); idem, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); T.

ways in which ancient Israelite literature and culture are approached. Material culture becomes useful only insofar as it is seen to buttress scholarly paradigms of religious evolution. But by anchoring sites and objects into our sweeping metanarratives about the religions of ancient Israel, we simplify the diversity and dynamism of these ancient communities. Whereas, an approach that considers the things and spaces of Israelite religious practice highlights the complex nature of micro- or local histories and the diverse ritual stages of religious performance.⁵

As a product of our efforts to balance our study of text and material culture, we decided to read extensively outside of the field of biblical studies to gain perspective. This paper reflects our ongoing work to engage with new models from the study of religion which we found helpful to complement recent works in biblical studies that adopt a material religions approach. One basic, yet important point that we both address in our courses on this topic is that when we examine the religions of the ancient world, in particular those that have affected our own religious traditions, it is important to avoid the temptation to read what we ourselves wish to see in the text, or to take what is written at face value as what the ancient practitioners, themselves, *believed*.⁶ Indeed, the very use of the word “belief” to define or access the religions of Israel and Judah poses a significant

Römer, *The Invention of God* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); W. Dietrich and M.A. Klopfenstein (eds.), *Ein Gott allein? JHWH-Verehrung und biblischer Monotheismus im Kontext der israelitischen und altorientalischen Religionsgeschichte* (OBO, 139; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Freiburg: Presses Universitaires, 1994); H. Niehr, *Der höchste Gott: Alttestamentlicher JHWH-Glaube im Kontext syrische-kanaanäischer Religion des 1. Jahrtausends v. Chr.* (BZAW, 190; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990); A. Lemaire, *The Birth of Monotheism: The Rise and Disappearance of Yahwism* (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2007); J.C. de Moor, *The Rise of Yahwism: The Roots of Israelite Monotheism* (BETL, 91; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990); M. Weippert, *Jahwe und die anderen Götter: Studien zur Religionsgeschichte des antiken Israel in ihrem syrisch-palaestinischem Kontext* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997); R.S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007); D.V. Edelman (ed.), *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwism to Judaism* (CBET, 13; Kampen: Kok, 1995); R. Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy* (London: SCM, 1994); idem, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, vol. 2: *From the Exile to the Macca-bees* (London, SCM, 1994); J.S. Anderson, *Monotheism and Yahweh's Appropriation of Baal* (LHBOTS, 617; London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

⁵ For a nuanced consideration of the diversity of religious practice, see Jeremy M. Hutton's discussion in J.M. Hutton, “Local Manifestations of Yahweh and Worship in the Interstices: A Note on Kuntillet ‘Ajrud,” *JANER* 10 (2010), 177–210.

⁶ See the comments by Zevit in Z. Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel* (London/New York: Continuum, 2001), 79. For further critique of the theological presuppositions that have often been brought to bear upon the

obstacle to understanding the ways in which these ancient communities conceived of religion and religious practice.⁷ We have chosen tombs and temples as our case studies because the preoccupation with *belief* permeates the study of these spaces. Our goal is to underscore the value of the study of the material things of Israelite religious practice and to encourage more engagement in biblical studies with scholarship in the study of religion.

What is the advantage or “payoff” of a study of the materiality and spatiality of ancient Israelite religions? We will argue that the approaches outlined here offer a corrective to belief- and text-centric approaches that have dominated discourse in biblical scholarship. As Francesca Stavrakopoulou contends, the issue of belief “poses a particular challenge in biblical studies . . . for scholars have tended to prioritize ‘scripture’ (perceived as a repository of beliefs), rather than material culture (caricatured as ‘practice’) as the primary index of identity in Judaism and Christianity, whether ancient or modern. But religious texts are material objects, too.”⁸ Even those studies that primarily give more attention to aspects of material culture often see the physical as a means to better understand the development of *thinking* about the divine realm in these ancient cultures.

In truth, even the biblical literature offers a limited glimpse into conceptualizations of the divine realm or the ranges of ideologies that fueled religious practice.⁹ The portrait of religious life reflected in the text is at times polemical and at times idealized—it reflects the interests of small, mainly elite, groups. However, we must keep in mind that such views were not necessarily shared by all religious or

study of Israelite religion, see C. Uehlinger, “Distinctive or Diverse? Conceptualizing Ancient Israelite Religion in its Southern Levantine Setting,” *HBAI* 4 (2015), 1–24.

⁷ For a helpful critique of the use of the word “belief” by scholars of religions, see D. Morgan, “Introduction: The Matter of Belief?” in D. Morgan (ed.), *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief* (London: Routledge, 2010), 1–12.

⁸ F. Stavrakopoulou, “Materialist Reading: Materialism, Materiality, and Biblical Cults of Writing,” in K.J. Dell and P.M. Joyce (eds.), *Biblical Interpretation and Method: Essays in Honour of John Barton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 226. For further on the materiality of the biblical texts, see idem, “Making Bodies: On Body Modification and Religious Materiality in the Hebrew Bible,” *HBAI* 2 (2013), 532–53; idem, “Religion at Home: The Materiality of Practice,” in S. Niditch (ed.), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Ancient Israel* (Chichester/Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 347–65; J.W. Watts, “The Three Dimensions of Scriptures,” *Postscripts: The Journal of Sacred Texts and Contemporary Worlds* 2 (2006), 135–59; M. Schleicher, “Artifactual and Hermeneutical Use of Scripture in Jewish Tradition,” in C.A. Evans and H.D. Zacharias (eds.), *Jewish and Christian Scripture as Artifact and Canon* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009), 48–65.

⁹ T.J. Lewis, “How Far Can Texts Take Us? Evaluating Textual Sources for Reconstructing Ancient Israelite Beliefs about the Dead,” in B.M. Gitlen (ed.), *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 169–217.

political elites, let alone by the people of these ancient communities at large.¹⁰ Another benefit of a “material turn” is that it shifts the focus from textualized accounts of elite institutions (the same groups who produced and are the focus of much of biblical writings) to diverse communities of practice, who are un- or under- represented in biblical writings.

As we worked on the outline of our book, our explorations inspired us to give a more serious consideration to the diverse spaces of religious practice and their embodied experience.¹¹ This led us to consider what a history of Israelite religions would look like if we focused upon the religious experience of smaller communities of practice, rather than the priesthood or macrostructures. Religious practices were enmeshed within familial, social, and economic structures. Another benefit is that when we examine the materiality of religion, we are confronted with the economic, social, and political networks that moved raw resources, and the traders, artisans, and ritual specialists who created objects of ritual practice. This approach also considers the social structures in family and kinship communities that lead to the creation and use of specific spaces for ritual engagement. For lack of compelling evidence, we must assume that these networks were what drove Israelite religious institutions as well as the practices detailed in the biblical record and evidenced in Iron Age material culture.

While scholars such as Mark S. Smith and Benjamin Sommer, among others, have given the field a portrait of the gods, we decided to offer a synthesis of approaches that might be used to better understand the people participating in such practices and traditions. In other words, rather than approach Israelite religion “top-down” from the perspective of the gods or institutions, we focus on the individual and on kin or community based groups. We are interested in how we can use biblical, inscriptional, and archaeological data to better understand the spaces, things, and embodied experiences of these ancient people.

This topic also touches upon broader methodological concerns central in recent scholarship on how to move the study of Israelite religions in line with the study of religion more broadly. Of course,

¹⁰ Indeed, Zevit’s definition is intentionally open ended: “Israelite religions are the varied, symbolic expressions of, and appropriate responses to the deities and powers that groups or communities deliberately affirmed as being of unrestricted value to them within their worldview” (Zevit, *The Religions*, 15).

¹¹ For past attempts to apply spatial theory to the study of the biblical literature or ancient Israel and Judah, see J.L. Berquist, “Spaces of Jerusalem,” in J.L. Berquist and C.V. Camp (eds.), *Constructions of Space*, vol. 2: *The Biblical City and Other Imagined Spaces* (LHBOTS, 490; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 40–52; J.W. Flanagan, “Ancient Perceptions of Space/Perceptions of Ancient Space,” in R.A. Simkins and S.L. Cook (eds.), *The Social World of the Hebrew Bible: Twenty-Five Years of the Social Sciences in the Academy* (Semeia, 87; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 15–43.

much of the groundwork for this wave was anticipated by Ziony Zevit's 2001 monograph *The Archaeology of Israelite Religions: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches*. Zevit's book sought to give greater emphasis to the materiality of Israelite religions and the diverse spaces in which expressions of religion were performed.¹² While Zevit has provided the groundwork by describing much of such objects and spaces, we hope to add a theoretical inquiry into the way in which the body engaged with these ritual spaces and the objects they housed. In this way, we join those studies in recent years that focus upon the "materiality" of Israelite and Judean religions and strive towards greater engagement with theoretical work in the study of religion on this topic.¹³ As Stavrakopoulou and John Barton remind us "religious beliefs and practices are social and cultural activities. . . people 'do' religion, and religion cannot be divorced from those 'doing' it."¹⁴ This emerging current in the study of ancient Israel and Judah approaches ritual as a complex, dynamic set of actions grounded in the material and subject to the confluence of more complex cultural systems.¹⁵ Such studies also provide meaningful applications of theoretical work on material religion to the study of Israelite and Judean religions.

¹² Zevit, *The Religions*. But see also the reviews of Zevit's approach, most notably M.S. Smith, "Review Article: Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches*," *Maarav* 11 (2004), 145–218. For similar approaches, see especially B.A. Nakhai, *Archaeology and the Religions of Canaan and Israel* (ASOR, 7; Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2001); T.H. Blomquist, *Gates and Gods: Cults in the City Gates of Iron Age Palestine. An Investigation of the Archaeological and Biblical Sources* (ConBOT, 46; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1999).

¹³ See in particular T. Stordalen, "Horse Statues in Seventh Century Jerusalem: Ancient Social Formations and the Evaluation of Religious Diversity," *HBAI* 4 (2015), 106–32; Stavrakopoulou, "Making Bodies"; idem, "Religion at Home"; E. Darby, *Interpreting Judean Pillar Figurines: Gender and Empire in Judean Apotropaic Ritual* (FAT, 2/69; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014); R. Schmitt, "Elements of Domestic Cult in Ancient Israel," in R. Albertz and R. Schmitt (eds.), *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 57–219; Z. Zevit, "The Textual and Social Embeddedness of Israelite Family Religion: Who Were the Players? Where Were the Stages?" in R. Albertz et al. (eds.), *Family and Household Religion: Toward a Synthesis of Old Testament Studies, Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Cultural Studies* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 287–314. We would also include here the recent essay by Stephen Russell that attempts to approach the study of ritual spaces from the perspective of the "performer" of ritual (see S. Russell, "Religious Space and Structures," in J. Barton [ed.], *The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Companion* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016], 356–77).

¹⁴ F. Stavrakopoulou and J. Barton, "Introduction: Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah," in F. Stavrakopoulou and J. Barton (eds.), *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 1–8 (1).

¹⁵ See the comments by Terje Stordalen on past interpretations of the

In order to demonstrate the benefits of such a “material turn” in the study of Israelite religion, we first offer a summary of key studies that have transformed how we think about ritual spaces, material objects, and the bodily experience of religion. We will then offer an analysis of two types of ritual spaces: tombs and temples. We will first problematize tendencies in past studies to neglect the socio-spatial and material characteristics of the Judean tombs at Khirbet Beit Lei and Khirbet el-Qom and the temples of Jerusalem and Tel Dan. Then we will offer some possible avenues that offer a corrective. The following does not aim to provide an exhaustive treatment of these issues, which will be more fully developed in our book. Instead, we hope that this review of literature will generate some theoretical signposts for further investigation of new facets of Israelite and Judean religion.

SPACES AND THINGS IN THE STUDY OF ISRAELITE RELIGION

In order to better understand the origins of the methodological problems introduced above and to offer a corrective, we look to the ways in which the field of religious studies analyses the spaces and things used in religious practice. Much of past scholarship on Israelite and Judean religions has set religious practices considered to fall outside of normative temple-based religion (i.e., those characterized as deviant, unorthodox, nonnormative, unofficial, personal, folk, household, popular, or peripheral) in opposition to sanctioned Yahwism.¹⁶ Even in works that seek to highlight the importance of non-

terracotta horse figurines from seventh-century Judah: “Scholarship developed the strategy to abstract surviving symbolizations from their social and material contexts and interpret them as part of a collected *corpus* displaying certain patterns or structures of symbolization. This pattern, categorized according to general historical periods, served as the primary context in which to interpret individual objects. This is, indeed, a focus on symbolic structures and on the cultural competence needed to process these symbols in order to produce a certain rational cognition. In their historical setting, however, symbolic items were used performatively by individual people in specific situations and for specific purposes. Recovering the experience of such use requires developing also a sense of the specific social dynamic at work in the spaces where the symbolic forms were being used performatively” (Stordalen, “Horse Statues,” 113).

¹⁶ Several recent studies have addressed these concerns and offer important steps forward. See especially F. Stavrakopoulou, “‘Popular’ Religion and ‘Official’ Religion: Practice, Perception, Portrayal,” in F. Stavrakopoulou and J. Barton (eds.), *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 37–58; S. Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992); see also Z. Zevit, “False Dichotomies in Descriptions of Israelite Religion: A Problem, its Origins, and a Proposed Solution,” in W.G. Dever and S. Gitin (eds.), *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestina* (Winona

temple cults, we see this tendency to describe religious experience and practice in terms of opposition and conflict. Instead, we seek to encourage dialogue about alternative models developed from more contemporary theory in the field of religious studies, which approaches religious experience as a loosely bounded network of sensorial and perceived experiences and practices that define a range of locations as *ritual spaces*.

RITUAL PRACTICE

We might begin by reintegrating the body and the things of religious practice into our analysis of Israelite ritual spaces. The tendency to separate religion from the material is not really a truism of only biblical studies, but is part of the legacy of past approaches to the study of religion more generally.¹⁷ Catherine Bell most famously problem-

Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 223–35; A.K. de Hemmer Gudme, “Modes of Religion: An Alternative to ‘Popular/Official’ Religion,” in E. Pfoh (ed.), *Anthropology and the Bible: Critical Perspectives* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2010), 77–90; J. Berlinerblau, “The ‘Popular Religion’ Paradigm in Old Testament Research: A Sociological Critique,” *JSOT* 60 (1993), 3–26; idem, “Max Weber’s Useful Ambiguities and the Problem of Defining ‘Popular Religion,’” *JAAAR* 69 (2001), 605–26; M.S. Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics That Shaped the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1988). For recent studies on “household” religion as an alternative to the label “popular religion,” see R. Albertz et al. (eds.), *Family and Household Religion: Toward a Synthesis of Old Testament Studies, Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Cultural Studies* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014); C.L. Meyers, *Households and Holiness: The Religious Culture of Israelite Women* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005); J. Bodel and S.M. Olyan (ed.), *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008); R. Albertz and R. Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012); R. Albertz, *Persönliche Frömmigkeit und offizielle Religion: Religionsinterner Pluralismus in Israel und Babylon* (Calwer Theologische Monographien, 9; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1978); B.A. Nakhai, “Varieties of Religious Expression in the Domestic Setting,” in A. Yasur-Landau, J.R. Ebeling, and L.B. Mazow (eds.), *Household Archaeology in Ancient Israel and Beyond* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 347–60.

¹⁷ For a summary of the study of material culture in the study of religion, in particular the influence of the Protestant worldview, which tended towards the bifurcation of the physical from the metaphysical (or the “spirit”) see M. Engelke, “Material Religion,” in R.A. Orsi (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 209–24. For a helpful discussion of the fields of theology and religion as they relate to the history of the study of Israelite religions and monotheism, see M.S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World* (FAT, 57; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 29–35; see also the article on the Ketef Hinnom amulets by H. Spieckermann, “‘YHWH Bless You and Keep You’: The Relation of History of Israelite Religion and Old Testament Theology Reconsidered,” *JSOT* 23 (2009), 165–82, and the recent article by J. Schaper, “The Question of a ‘Biblical Theology’ and the

atized the traditional approach to ritual, which overly focused on belief and minimized practice.¹⁸ As she and others have written, the assumption that there is a straightforward correlation between belief and ritual is problematic, in part because not all participants may share the same practices or understanding(s) of their meaning.¹⁹ Moreover, rituals are successful because of their inherent ambiguity and openness to interpretation—they are based upon “common symbols, not on statements of belief.”²⁰ As Bell writes, they “specifically do *not* promote belief or conviction” but “afford a great diversity of interpretation in exchange for little more than consent to the form of the activities.”²¹ Not all participants are believers and/or

Growing Tension between ‘Biblical Theology’ and a ‘History of the Religion of Israel’: from Johann Philipp Gabler to Rudolf Smend, Sen.,” in M. Sæbø, P. Machinist, and J.L. Ska (eds.), *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 3: *From Modernism to Post-Modernism: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Part 1: *The Nineteenth Century—A Century of Modernism and Historicism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 625–50; R. Hendel, “Culture, Memory, and History: Reflections on Method in Biblical Studies,” in T.E. Levy (ed.), *Historical Biblical Archaeology and the Future: The New Pragmatism* (London: Equinox, 2010), 250–61; M.W. Hamilton, “Israelite Religion as Communication: An Essay on Method,” in J.M. Hutton and A.D. Rubin (eds.), *Epigraphy, Philology, and the Hebrew Bible: Methodological Perspectives on Philological and Comparative Study of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of Jo Ann Hackett* (ANEM; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015), 295–328.

¹⁸ As she writes, “Theoretical descriptions of ritual generally regard it as action and thus automatically distinguish it from the conceptual aspects of religion, . . . beliefs, creeds, symbols, and myths emerge as forms of mental content or conceptual blueprints. . . . Ritual is then described as particularly thoughtless action—routinized, habitual, obsessive, and mere physical expression of logically prior ideas,” (C. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1992], 19).

¹⁹ The term *practice* is used in scholarship in diverse ways to describe lived religious experience, which includes individual actions and ongoing, habitual religious activities as well as their broader effects on a community. Courtney Bender contends that religious practice is best viewed as a process. As she writes, “practicing religion” accounts for the ways in which actions take on “religious” meaning. That is, rather than viewing practitioners as “keepers of containers of religions who then mobilize or play out ‘religious practice’ in an unmarked social landscape,” scholars should consider the ways in which practices are “socially embodied” (C. Bender “Practicing Religions,” in R.A. Orsi [ed.], *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012], 273–95; quote on 280). See also Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 183.

²⁰ *Ibid.* For a discussion of the diverse understandings of ritual that can coexist within a community, see James W. Fernandez’s work on the reformative Bwiti cult among the Fang people of northern Gabona and Rio Muni (J.W. Fernandez, “Symbolic Consensus in a Fang Reformatory Cult,” *American Anthropologist* 67 [1965], 906–7).

²¹ Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 183–86; for a discussion of the “belief” and “skepticism” of ritual practitioners, see also D.K. Jordan and D.L. Overmyer, *The*

share the same degree of understanding about the meaning of their actions. The ritual actions of an individual or a group should not be extrapolated as evidence of the system of belief of an entire religious community. Indeed, Bell contends that such an ideology “is *not* a coherent set of ideas, statements, or attitudes imposed on people who dutifully internalize them. . . Any ideology is always in dialogue with, and thus shaped and constrained by, the voices it is suppressing, manipulating, echoing.”²² We follow Bell’s approach and focus upon an analysis of the things and spaces central to ritual practice, rather than prioritizing what ancient Israelites may or may not have believed about them.

THE “MATERIAL TURN” IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION²³

Clifford Geertz’s classic work argued that the stuff of religion comprises symbols to be untangled and decoded. He defined religion as “(1) a system of symbols which act to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.”²⁴ The material was seen as “tangible formulations of notions, abstractions from experience fixed in perceptible forms, concrete embodiments of ideas, attitudes, judgments, longings, or beliefs.”²⁵ In other words, the material things of religion were approached as reflexives of a nebulous category of “belief,” or as symbols to be deciphered.

In recent years, there been much discussion of this so-called “material turn” in the study of religion, and its application.²⁶ The intellectual current in religious studies has transitioned away from the dualism that bifurcates the material and the physical from the conceptual or intellectual, or approaches that view the material as a shadow of ideas about the gods. Where previous models privileged the mind over the material and the abstract over the physical, scholars such as Kim Knott, Thomas A. Tweed, David Morgan, and Manuel Vásquez, among others, challenge us to “rehabilitate” the material.²⁷ These scholars have sought to “neutralize Platonic, Christian, and Cartesian legacies that split idea from matter, divine

Flying Phoenix: Aspects of Chinese Sectarianism in Taiwan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 270.

²² Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 191.

²³ For recent discussions of the materiality and the “material turn” in the study of religion, see S. Hazard, “The Material Turn.”

²⁴ C. Geertz, *Religion as a Cultural System* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁶ B. Meyer and D. Houtman (eds.) *Things: Religions and the Question of Materiality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012); B. Meyer et al., “Material Religion’s First Decade,” *Material Religion* 10 (2014), 105–11.

²⁷ M.L. Finch, “Rehabilitating Materiality: Bodies, Gods, and Religion,” *Religion* 42 (2012), 625–31.

from human, spirit from flesh, mind from body, and faith from practice.”²⁸ This has led to a heightened appreciation for the materiality of religion, rather than experiential religion or the intangible realm of belief, as the primary lens through which one understands religion.

Although the “material turn” has taken different guises and applications, we find the questions and points of debate that have been raised to be helpful for the study of Israel and Judah. Such a focus transforms how we think about ancient Israelite religion and calls for a more balanced use of the biblical text. In our own work on the spaces and things of Israelite religion we strive to consider the ways in which “their use, their valuation, and their appeal are not something added to a religion, but rather inextricable from it.”²⁹ By paying more attention to the social and physical spaces of these things and practices, we can better understand the multiple ways in which “historically distinctive disciplines and forces” informed them.³⁰ We can consider the ways in which the physical and social spaces and materiality of religious practice were informed by familial structures, community membership, regional identity, economic institutions such as craft guilds and associations, as well as internal and external political forces. Some questions that arise are: what degree of social power was needed to procure raw resources and labor, or to designate or change spaces in family and communal settings? The advantage to this approach is that anchoring these objects and spaces in their social and historical contexts elucidates a broader range of interconnections in Israelite and Judean society between religious practices and power structures beyond the well-trodden temple/palace dichotomies.

SEMIOTIC IDEOLOGIES AND BUNDLING

We also find Webb Keane’s study of the interpenetration of language, ritual, spaces, and objects to offer a helpful model for how to

²⁸ Finch, “Rehabilitating Materiality,” 626.

²⁹ Meyer and Houtman, “Introduction,” 4–9; for quote see B. Meyer et al., “The Origin and Mission of Material Religion,” *Religion* 40 (2010), 207–11 (209). Some key works on the materiality of religion include D. Miller (ed.), *Materiality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); D. Morgan (ed.), *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief* (London: Routledge, 2010); idem, “Materiality”; B. Meyer et al., “In Conversation: Materializing Religion,” *Material Religion* 4 (2008), 226–33; M. Vásquez, *More Than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³⁰ As Talal Asad writes, we should consider the broader “historic conditions” and think about how “power create[s] religion.” This entails a consideration of the ways in which knowledge is produced, validated, and transmitted, and how this informs religion. See T. Asad, “Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz,” *Man* 18 (1983), 237–59 (252); idem, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 54.

meaningfully put together the pieces of religious practice. Keane anchors his study of religion in “semiotic ideologies,” which considers the interrelated meaning of material objects, body movements, and language in a given community; how they are viewed and approached; and how this impacts their ongoing interpretation by group members.³¹ Keane writes of the limited way that the creator of an object can determine its range of use. He describes “bundling” as the vast range of possibilities of *both* use and meaning. He gives the example of a fabric flag, which is cotton and flammable.³² Its inherent flammability—a natural property of its materiality—takes on new semiotic meaning when it is burned as a political act of resistance or rebellion. The original intent of the creator/designer of the object may be at odds with this use of a flag. Such an act may be perceived by some as the defacement of what the flag represents. To this we would add that flag-burning has become central in debates about national identity, protest, and what constitutes protected speech. In some cases, the original intent in the creation of the flag as well as the meaning behind an act of flag-burning may be overshadowed by subsequent debates about the parameters of political protest and expression, or debates about nationalism and individual identity. In other words, the materiality of the flag lends itself to a variety of uses and interpretations that develop within its sociopolitical context. The spaces and practices and things that accompany the burning of a flag dictate whether this is an accidental act, signifies the retirement of a flag, or is an act of protest.

Taken together, when we turn to the significance of material aspects of religious practice, we start from the assumption that we *cannot* assume one discrete or bounded meaning. Rather, we must consider a constellation of possibilities dependent on the perspectives of the participants and on changing sociopolitical and material contexts. Keane’s writings offer a useful heuristic for the changes in ritual practice and in the reuse or secondary contexts of material objects used in ritual. We might refer to the Ketef Hinnom amulets as an illustration of an application of Keane’s work on semiotic ideologies. Their material, a precious metal, and their small size and miniature writings also marked these objects as status markers and texts that were not meant to be actively read. While the amulets undoubtedly served as personal objects in daily life for their owners, when they were placed in the tombs at Ketef Hinnom they were given a

³¹ W. Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 42–44.

³² W. Keane, “On the Materiality of Religion,” *Material Religion* 4 (2008), 230–31 (230). As another example, Matthew Engelke cites the materiality of the Bible, which is a book written on paper, a flammable medium. The act of burning a Bible is not a neutral act, but one charged with meaning that will solicit a strong response, even though it may be argued that “it’s *just a book*.” See the discussion of the semiosis of materiality in Engelke, “Material Religion,” 218–21.

new range of meanings. Their relocation with the deceased in the tomb transferred their blessings that Yahweh would “bless” and “guard” to a new context.³³ Set within the tomb space, the amulets communicated a message that was bundled with the other objects placed in the tomb and the context of concerns over the protection of the dead.³⁴ This new funerary environment and shift in social context redefined the meaning of these blessings and the protective function of the amulets, from individuals in life, to their remains and the space of their tomb in death.³⁵

AGENT NETWORK THEORY

It is also important to complement a study of the material with a consideration of the nonhuman subjects, actors, or objects also part of the experience of ritual practice. Any study of such material would benefit from Bruno Latour’s work on what is popularly described as “Actor Network Theory” and its application in the study of religion.³⁶ Latour’s writings suggest that social experience is a series of relationships between human and nonhuman participants who have agency inasmuch as they have an impact on and are informed by religious practice and experience.³⁷ There is a line in the TV show

³³ For a discussion see J.D. Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture: The Early History of Numbers 6:24–26* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 52–55.

³⁴ On this approach to the interpretation of the amulets, see especially B.B. Schmidt, “The Social Matrix of Early Judean Magic and Divination: From ‘Top Down’ or ‘Bottom Up’?” in B.J. Collins and P. Michalowski (eds.), *Beyond Hatti: A Tribute to Gary Beckman* (Atlanta, GA: Lockwood, 2013), 279–94; idem, *The Materiality of Power: Explorations in the Social History of Early Israelite Magic* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 128–43.

³⁵ For similar lines of argument, see T.J. Lewis, “Job 19 in the Light of the Ketef Hinnom Inscriptions and Amulets,” in M.J. Lundberg, S. Fine, and W.T. Pitard (eds.), *Puzzling Out the Past: Studies in the Northwest Semitic Languages and Literatures in Honor of Bruce Zuckerman* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 97–111; J.D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 99; R. Hendel, “Other Edens,” in J.D. Schloen (ed.), *Exploring the Longue Durée: Essays in Honor of Lawrence E. Stager* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 185–89.

³⁶ For some applications of this theory in studies on religion and archaeology, see P.W. Stockhammer, “Performing the Practice Turn in Archaeology,” *Transcultural Studies* 1 (2012), 7–42; H.P. Hahn, “Words and Things: Reflections on People’s Interaction with the Material World,” in J. Maran and P.W. Stockhammer (eds.), *Materiality and Social Practice: Transformative Capacities of Intercultural Encounters* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2012), 4–12.

³⁷ As Latour writes, “Why not say that in religion what counts are the beings that make people act, just as every believer has always insisted? That would be more empirical, perhaps more scientific, more respectful, and much more economical than the invention of two impossible non-existing sites: the mind of the believer and the social reality are hidden behind illusions propped up by even more illusions” (B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* [Oxford: Oxford University Press,

The Mentalist that demonstrates Latour's point about the importance of cultural context:³⁸

Patrick Jane: The ghost has something to do with Foster's death.

Teresa Lisbon: No, it doesn't because ghosts don't exist.

Patrick Jane: They don't exist in your mind. But if you believe they exist then. . . they exist.

This model accounts for the material (i.e., the "things" manipulated and/or transformed) and the range of beings, humans, nonhumans, animals, gods, spirits, demons, angels, etc. that are imbued with agency or are ascribed roles in ritual practice. As Latour contends, belief is not the glue that "holds any of these forms of life together"; rather, social systems are generated and sustained by the actions taken by human and nonhuman participants in this network of interaction.³⁹ This means that in our evaluation of agency in ritual, we must consider the nonhuman as well as material things.⁴⁰ The objects that acted upon or transformed in the process of ritual performance (e.g., spatial, corporal, and material) were qualitatively different; moreover, their sociospatial context informed their use and meaning. Accordingly, some more recent works frame the blessings inscribed in funerary spaces for the dead or for the benefit of nonhumans and/or divinities as transactions between the human and "nonhuman"—both acting as agents and recipients of the ritual action.⁴¹

2005], 235). See too A. Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 17.

³⁸ "The Red Scare," *The Mentalist*, season 2, episode 5 (2009).

³⁹ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 288. For further discussion of Latour's contributions, see especially Finch, "Rehabilitating Materiality," 628–29; and D. Miller, "Materiality: An Introduction," in D. Miller (ed.), *Materiality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 11–15.

⁴⁰ As Michael Stausberg reminds us, "Things are participants in courses of actions—just as there is no hammering without a hammer, or no zapping a TV without a remote. . . there are no revelations without books or places, no prayers without instruments, and there are no gods without temples, churches and lots of other things—starting with human bodies. It is the materiality of things which provides stability to the world, which relieves humans of the necessity to create the world *ex nihilo* on a daily basis" (M. Stausberg, "Distinctions, Differentiations, Ontology, and Non-humans in Theories of Religion," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 22 [2010], 354–74 [371–72]).

⁴¹ For example, we follow Karen B. Stern's more loose definition of "gift-giving," which includes "objects and activities that are explicitly transferred or performed for the substantive benefit of another entity," whereby "donors and recipients of gifts, moreover, need not be human." As such, Stern views the mortuary and devotional graffiti performed on the behalf of the dead as a type of gift that appears to have been seen to comfort the dead and perhaps cause the dead to benefit them in turn (K.B. Stern, "Mortuary and Devotional Practices in the Late Ancient Levant," in M.L. Satlow [ed.], *The Gift in Antiquity* [Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013], 137–57

THE PROBLEM OF “SPACE” IN THE STUDY OF ISRAELITE AND JUDEAN RELIGIONS

As noted above, our main focus is to integrate more contemporary theory on space and the body into the study of Israelite religion. We also follow Stavrakopoulou's contention that the dichotomy presented between “official” or “state” and “popular” religion in the context of Israelite practices is problematic.⁴² Once we consider the fluidity of ritual experience and break away from the bifurcation between “popular” vs. “institutional” practices, we are left with the issue of how to understand the complex matrix of ritual spaces presented in the biblical and archaeological record. Past scholarship focused intently on the core vs. periphery dialectic, whereby the sanctioned ritual practice reflected by the biblical writers was seen as being in opposition to the diverse practices attested in the material culture and alluded to in biblical literatures.⁴³

In our survey of the descriptions of religious spaces in ancient Israel and Judah, we find a propensity to think of space as a reflection of belief. The problem with such descriptions is that the sacral nature of a space is defined *by human agency and ritual use, not by top-down revelation*.⁴⁴ In other words, more recent theory moves away from Mircea Eliade's understanding of space, in which sacred space was explained through the idea of revelation by a divine power or a supernatural manifestation. This Eliadian opposition offers an accessible, yet simplified understanding of space and the many ranges of human religious experience.⁴⁵ However, more recent work in spatial theory and its application to religious space offers an important corrective that

[139 and 143]).

⁴² As Stavrakopoulou writes, “[I]f any broad distinction between types of religion is to be assumed within discussions of religious diversities in ancient Israel and Judah, it seems prudent to abandon the categories of ‘popular’ religions and ‘official’ religion altogether, and instead to distinguish between biblical portrayals of the religious past on the one hand, and the likely religious realities of ancient Israel and Judah, on the other” (Stavrakopoulou, “‘Popular’ Religion,” 50).

⁴³ Several studies have already begun to emphasize this point. See especially Stavrakopoulou, “Religion at Home”; idem, “Making Bodies.”

⁴⁴ V. Anttonen, “Space, Body, and the Notion of Boundary,” *Temenos* 41 (2005), 185.

⁴⁵ For critiques of the sacred/profane dichotomy, see especially L.E. Shiner, “Sacred Space, Profane Space, Human Space,” *JAAAR* 40 (1972), 425–36; J.Z. Smith, “The Wobbling Pivot,” *JR* 52 (1972), 134–49; R. Stodtstill, “Eliade, Phenomenology, and the Sacred,” *RelS* 36 (2000), 177–94; S. Hamilton and A. Spicer, “Defining the Holy: The Delineation of Sacred Space,” in A. Spicer and S. Hamilton (eds.), *Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 1–23; J. Hubert, “Sacred Beliefs and Beliefs of Sacredness,” in D.L. Carmichael, J. Hubert, B. Reeves, and A. Schanche (eds.), *Sacred Sites, Sacred Places* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 9–19.

develops the models espoused by Émile Durkheim and Eliade.⁴⁶ Such approaches emphasize the fluidity, subjectivity, and sensorial aspects involved in the experience of space and its interpretation.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, much of this scholarship remains to be integrated into the study of ancient Israelite ritual spaces.

By way of example of a scholar of Israelite religion who engages with theoretical work on spatial theory, we turn to Smith's most recent work on the conceptualizations of the divine. For example, Mark Smith understands the descriptions of such spaces in biblical and West Semitic texts to reflect ideas about deities and religious practices that are not necessarily evidenced in the material. He anchors his analysis in Edward W. Soja's "Secondspace," that is, "conceived rather than perceived" space. We acknowledge the different aims of Smith's work, which offer a text-focused biography of the divine. However, would argue that this tendency, to prioritize texts or to assume a detachment between the imagined and the real or lived spaces in ancient Israel and their materiality, is pervasive in the broader application of spatial theory to the textual accounts of the ritual spaces in ancient Israelite and Judah.⁴⁸

To use the example of the most studied religious space in Israelite history, we cannot assume that the Temple Mount was experienced as "Eden," or a "cosmic mountain," or as the seat of *the* divine by each and every practitioner or person experiencing this space. Such interpretations reduce the complexity of experience to later canonical literary and theological connections. We instead need to consider a fuller range of meaning that accounts for social, economic, and political changes and how these impacted the space (both real

⁴⁶ Veikko Anttonen, for example, takes a spatial-theoretical approach to the study of religious spaces and how they are classified and conceptualized. Boundaries between spaces are defined by their use, in the case of "sacred" spaces, by ritual practice and the "cultural logic" that classifies the space and actions done in it. Anttonen argues that the "sacred" is determined by "actions, events and intentions of cultural agents in specific contexts as they make distinctions between spaces, mark them for specific uses, create visible and invisible boundaries, and establish cultural conventions of behavior to deal with those boundaries. In short, the 'sacred' that separates, binds, transcends and purifies, is the location for ritual communication" (Anttonen, "Space, Body," 198).

⁴⁷ On the role of the senses in religion, see S. Feld, "Places Sensed, Senses Placed: Toward a Sensuous Epistemology of Environments," in D. Howes (ed.), *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2005); W. Keane, "Semiotics and the Social Analysis of Material Things," *Language and Communication* 23 (2003), 409–25; I. Meskell, "The Irresistible Body and the Seduction of Archaeology," in D. Montserrat (ed.), *Changing Bodies, Changing Meanings: Studies on the Human Body in Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1998), 139–61.

⁴⁸ See M.S. Smith, *Where the Gods Are. Spatial Dimensions of Anthropomorphism in the Biblical World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 4; see also E.W. Soja, *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 66; see also 74–79.

and conceptual) of the temple(s). To do this, we must first come to an understanding of what is meant by space and what informs a person's experience of a ritual space.

What follows is an assessment of several studies that offer a helpful corrective to what we have described as the lack of engagement with more recent scholarship on ritual space in our field. Biblical texts reflect diverse perspectives and descriptions that were based on spaces that were real *and* lived *and* imagined, and for this reason require an approach that considers the cognitive associations between spaces that are not temporally or geographically constrained. The two pitfalls that we hope to avoid are: 1) to assume an unnecessary bifurcation between spaces that are understood to be imagined or conceptual and manifest in the material, and 2) to focus on the materiality of a space as an expression of belief or as a description of the divine as reflected in biblical texts.

Thomas Tweed's study of religious spaces accounts for the simultaneous confluence of real and imagined spaces, as well as a person's experience of the physical immediacy of a space and the memories of past experiences that this can evoke.⁴⁹ Such a model is perhaps better suited to the ritual spaces and objects that we encounter in biblical texts and in the archaeological record, as it accounts for change and complexity. For Tweed, space is not static, anchored, geo-spatial, bounded, temporal, or a structural stage for religious experience to take place. Rather, Tweed speaks of the "confluence" within religions and uses aquatic metaphors to describe their fluidity.⁵⁰ He considers the ways in which religions are about "crossing"; that is, they "employ tropes, artifacts, rituals, codes, and institutions to mark boundaries, and they prescribe and proscribe different kinds of movements across those boundaries."⁵¹ Religious space is multi-dimensional: "differentiated, kinetic, interrelated, generated, and generative."⁵² "Differentiated" spaces, according to Tweed, are those spaces "imaginatively figured and/or sensually encountered locales that are deemed more or less 'special', 'singular', or 'set apart'.⁵³ So instead of dividing space into two separate categories

⁴⁹ T.A. Tweed, "Space," *Material Religion* 7 (2011), 116–23. This article distills Tweed's idea about space and the body, which are developed in idem, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006) and idem, *America's Church: The National Shrine and Catholic Presence in the Nation's Capital* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁵⁰ For a discussion of the usefulness of aquatic metaphors, such as "confluences" and "flows," to describe how space are processes see Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 59–64.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁵² Tweed, "Space," 119.

⁵³ See *ibid.*, where Tweed also draws upon Knott (K. Knott, *The Location of Religion. A Spatial Analysis* [London: Equinox, 2005], 61) and Ann Taves (A. Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* [Princeton: Princeton University

(sacred vs. profane), using Tweed's model we might approach the spaces of ancient Israel and Judah as a *continuum* of differentiated and undifferentiated spaces. This more nuanced definition highlights the fluidity and dynamism of ritual spaces. It also prioritizes the experiences and perspectives of the diverse audiences engaging with such spaces.

In our own writings on the diverse spaces of ritual practice, we found Tweed's suggestions to provide a helpful corrective to binary models of space for a number of reasons. First, this model brings the body to the forefront of analysis because it gives priority to the significance that human cognition, experience, and emotion play in the imparting of meaning to space.⁵⁴ Secondly, it addresses the most challenging aspect of ritual spaces to pin down—*their interrelatedness*. A person's experience of a space is always "translocative" and "transtemporal," and spaces can "propel" a person "back to earlier miraculous interventions and exemplary actions and up and down sacred sites."⁵⁵ In other words, Tweed's model of space addresses the failure of the binary model of sacred vs. profane space to account for the importance that *association* plays in the imaginative and physical construction of religious and ritual landscapes. The very process of differentiation involves the use of language or physical construction to distinguish a space and associate it with other important locales. This process serves to draw together or connect spaces—those real and present, and distant or imagined—into the sensorial focus of a person's experience of a space.

This shifts the conversation from one about space—as defined by narrowed locative or geopolitical lines—to one about relationships—at times coexistence and symbiosis, and at times opposition. In other words, ritual space is understood as a network of intersecting zones used for ritual rather than as an opposition between binary geographical or physical boundaries.⁵⁶ As Ronald Grimes observes,

It is easier to conceptualize ritual space if the example is a mosque or megachurch building, but even when there is no built edifice with walls separating inside from out, a boundary is often implied by ritual actions, generating a center and circumference, both of which can fluctuate, the center receding and advancing or momentarily disappearing altogether as subgroups disperse and recongeal.⁵⁷

Indeed, the opposition between what is bounded (i.e., included in that space) and what is excluded is largely in the eye of the beholder,

Press, 2009], 28–35).

⁵⁴ See Tweed, "On Moving Across: Translocative Religion from the Interpreter's Position," *JAAAR* 70 (2002), 253–77.

⁵⁵ *Idem*, "Space," 119.

⁵⁶ Hamilton and Spicer, "Defining the Holy," 1–4.

⁵⁷ R. Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (Oxford Ritual Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 257.

or in the case of religious space, the devotee and/or ritual practitioner. As Knott writes, “The spaces of religion are synchronically dynamic because at any time they are overlapping, coexistent, in parallel with other spaces, and because they are internally in tension, being made up of multiple, contested, real, and imagined sites and relations.”⁵⁸ Such an approach would account for the spaces that intersected the temple complex in Jerusalem, be it a place to purchase materials for a sacrifice, or the site of ritual purification.

This approach also accounts for boundary spaces, such as a city gate shrine, the doorway of a house marked by a *mezuzah*, or that of a cultic object or installation within an industrial space or in the home, where there is no clear divide between sacred or profane space. Such an understanding also detaches ritual space from the hegemony of institutions or communities as a whole, which, according to the traditional view, dictate the boundaries of the religious system, whereby sanctioned ritual specialists serve as the guardians of ritual spaces. We can then bring in a fuller discussion of the power structures laying claim to the Temple’s spaces. We can also consider how the destruction, rebuilding, and subsequent renovations informed the experience of the Temple and its meaning as well as its legacy in later Jewish, Christian, and Muslim architecture.

Recent studies of the body and sensorial culture also highlight how the senses shape the experience of space.⁵⁹ The physicality of experience (e.g., the sensory processes of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting etc.), and the spatial and social boundaries that such practices created and transformed are also important.⁶⁰ They would have been a contributing factor in the placement and ritual use of the inscriptions and funerary objects set in tomb spaces. Indeed, the lack of attention that is devoted to the body’s role in shaping the physical and conceptual parameters of ritual space is perhaps the

⁵⁸ Knott, *The Location of Religion*, 23.

⁵⁹ For further on sensory studies and material culture, see S.M. Promey (ed.), *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014). For an application of theory on the body as a physical and metaphorical space in a literary treatment, see J.E. Lapsely, “Body Piercings: The Priestly Body and the ‘Body’ of the Temple in Ezekiel,” *HBAI* 1 (2012), 231–45.

⁶⁰ One might argue that much of the way for this was paved by Menahem Haran in his work, *Temple and Temple Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into Biblical Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985). Our method differs from Haran’s in that we seek to rehabilitate the body as the central index in the study of space. Hence, our approach would not focus solely upon the dimensions of the temple or the details of its description in the biblical texts, but offers a description of temple space based upon the remains of temples discovered in recent archaeological excavations (i.e., Dan, Arad, etc.). In addition, our approach would emphasize the way in which the body interacted with the space of a temple rather than focusing upon ideas about the temple.

strongest indication of this pervasive tendency to prioritize the metaphysical and abstract over the material and physical. This is perhaps most notable in the near complete lack of interest in exploring the ways that the biblical texts themselves use body terms to define and describe ritual spaces in ancient Israel and Judah (i.e., temples, tombs, etc.). As we will describe in more detail below, any corrective to this neglect would need to begin by relocating the body at the forefront of inquiries about the shape and meaning of ritual space.

The approaches of Tweed and Knott, among others, have the advantage of relocating the study of ritual and ritual space to the perspective of those interacting with the space based upon their experiences with other spaces. In other words, a ritual space is a place that connects people to “other times and wider spaces.”⁶¹ In a similar vein, according to our understanding, those engaging in ritual practices in the ancient Levant brought with them a horizon of sensorial experiences and expectations. All such somatic influences determined the field of meaning ascribed to a religious space and the manipulation of material objects in those spaces, and the movement of the body. Therefore, when we examine the ritual spaces of the ancient Levant, we should consider the ways in which space is “translocative” and “transtemporal”; that is, the ways in which people produce cognitive associations with other spaces, be they real or imagined. Such an approach offers a different analysis of the garden imagery in temple spaces in the Levant, not limited to allusions to Israelite or neighboring ancient Near Eastern iconography or cosmogonies.⁶²

As discussed above, the garden imagery in the biblical descriptions of the Temple differentiates this space as a place of fertility and life. There also appears to be a relationship between the descriptions of the space of the Temple and Israelite traditions about the garden(s) of creation, which are also reflected in Gen 1–3 or Ezek 47. Instead of limiting an understanding of the Temple to these conceptual or textualized spaces, we can consider the relationship between the space of the Temple and other ritual spaces (e.g., the high place at Tel Dan) and how these spaces were interconnected to the natural surroundings (e.g., to other mountains, or to Saphon in the north), and to imaginary spaces, such as Mount Moriah, Mount Sinai, Horeb, and Eden. Tweed’s principle of “interconnectedness” may also be employed in analyses of later synagogue architecture, which pays tribute to spaces that were no longer in existence, but were very much “alive” for diverse Jewish communities. That is, returning to our discussion of Smith’s use of Soja, we do not need to limit our discussion of the Temple to the domain of the real *or* the imagined,

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁶² For a discussion of such a portrayal of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount see L.E. Stager, “Jerusalem and the Garden of Eden,” *Erlsr* 26 (1999), 183–94.

as reflected in the text. We can consider a more comprehensive complex of meanings that accounts for the interpenetration of such spaces over time.

WALKING IN TOMBS AND TEMPLES

In the previous sections, we described some of the recent theoretical work that provides new approaches to the study of ritual spaces. In this section, we turn to two specific test cases in order to illustrate how such theoretical insights might be applied meaningfully to examinations of ritual space in ancient Israel and Judah. We will begin by offering some brief critiques of past studies of these sites. Then we will examine how the studies summarized above offer new ways to study the tomb inscriptions at Khirbet el-Qom and Khirbet Beit Lei. Our analysis outlines several ways in which the meaning of the inscriptions might be approached through a study of the *syntax of space* of the tombs. Next, we will apply a similar model to the space of the cultic precinct at Tel Dan in order to illustrate the heuristic value of the theoretical insights described above for the study of Levantine temple spaces, and temple space in ancient Israel and Judah more specifically.

THE TOMB INSCRIPTIONS FROM KHIRBET EL-QOM AND KHIRBET BEIT LEI

The observations raised in the introduction of this study are perhaps best illustrated by past studies of the corpus of inscriptions discovered in funerary spaces. Such inscriptions are treated as textual evidence and examined as part of the linguistic and religious history of religion.⁶³ In our past collaborations, we have problematized the ways in which the tomb inscriptions from the sites of Khirbet el-Qom and Khirbet Beit Lei have been narrowly studied for what they might index about the Judean pantheon or reveal about belief in the powers of the god Yahweh.⁶⁴ The very lifting of these inscriptions

⁶³ For the publication of the inscriptions at Khirbet el-Qom, see W.G. Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material from the Area of Khirbet El-Kôm," *HUCA* 40–41 (1970), 139–204; S. Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006), 220–26. It is beyond the scope of the present study to cite all of the past discussion of the inscriptions. For helpful summaries, see especially Z. Zevit, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription Mentioning a Goddess," *BASOR* 255 (1984), 39–47; idem, *The Religions*, 359–70. For the publication of the inscriptions from Khirbet Beit Lei, see Y. Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions in a Burial Cave," *IEJ* 13 (1963), 74–92; idem, "Hebrew Inscriptions in a Tomb Cave from the Period of the First Temple," *BIES* 27 (1963), 235–56 (Hebrew); idem, "Hebrew Graffiti from the First Temple Period," *IEJ* 51 (2001), 197–98. For recent discussion of the inscriptions, see Zevit, *The Religions*, 405–36.

⁶⁴ A. Mandell and J.D. Smoak, "Reading and Writing in the Dark: The Literacies of Ancient Subterranean Judah," *NEA* 80 (2017), 188–95; idem,

from the cave tomb by looters becomes an apt metaphor for the way in which biblical scholars have studied such texts detached from their original material setting.⁶⁵ While William G. Dever provided a detailed discussion of the layout of the tomb complexes, the other inscriptions, and other materials thought to have been recovered from these tombs, many of his observations have been left out of most discussions of the el-Qom inscriptions.⁶⁶ The most obvious support for this observation is the variety of studies that have used the inscriptions from Khirbet el-Qom as evidence for debates about the developmental relationship between polytheism and monotheism in ancient Judah.⁶⁷

The tendency to separate inscriptions from their tomb spaces is particularly evident in the studies of *Inscription 3* from Khirbet el-Qom. Although there are two caves and two sets of inscriptions, most studies have limited their significance to el-Qom 3 because it contains a rare reference to Yahweh and the goddess Asherah in late monarchic Judah. It is marshaled as evidence of the development of beliefs in either Yahweh and Asherah's powers in the realm of the grave or the afterlife, or as a comment upon the status of the divine

"Reconsidering the Function of the Tomb Inscriptions in Iron Age Judah: Khirbet Beit Lei as a Test Case," *JANER* 16 (2016), 192–245.

⁶⁵ W.G. Dever, "Archaeology and the Ancient Israelite Cult: How the Kh. El-Qôm and Kuntillet 'Ajrud 'Asherah' Texts Have Changed the Picture," *Erlsr* 26 (1999), 9–15; idem, *The Lives of Ordinary People in Ancient Israel: Where Archaeology and the Bible Intersect* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 284–86; F.M. Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions from Khirbet Beit Lei," in J.A. Sanders (ed.), *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honor of Nelson Glueck* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 299–306; A. Lemaire "Prières en temps de crise: Les inscriptions de Khirbet Beit Lei," *RB* 83 (1976), 558–68; idem, "Le 'Dieu de Jérusalem' à la lumière de l'épigraphie," in C. Arnould-Béhar and A. Lemaire (eds.), *Jerusalem antique et médiévale. Mélanges en l'honneur d'Ernest-Marie Laperrousaz* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 49–58; S.B. Parker, "Graves, Caves, and Refugees: An Essay in Microhistory," *JSOT* 27 (2003), 259–88; S. Mitmann, "A Confessional Inscription from the Year 701 BC Praising the Reign of Yahweh," *Acta Académica* 21 (1989), 17–23; F. Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice: Biblical Distortions of Historical Realities* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 98. Patrick D. Miller has also written on these inscriptions as a reflection of the language in the Psalms (see P.D. Miller, *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000], 210–32); see also idem, "Psalms and Inscriptions," in J.A. Emerson (ed.), *Congress Volume Vienne 1980* (VTSup, 32; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 311–32; idem, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1994), 55–134.

⁶⁶ In a past study, we traced a person's progression through the tomb space and engagement with the tomb assemblage and inscriptions (Mandell and Smoak, "Reading and Writing," 188–92).

⁶⁷ Dever comments on the significance of the inscription in the following words: "Here we have another inscription with a blessing formula naming a pair of deities. Nothing could better illustrate the intersection of religious beliefs and burial practices" (Dever, *The Lives of Ordinary People*, 285).

couple.⁶⁸ While these are valuable lines of inquiry, they nevertheless demonstrate how this lone inscribed blessing has been sequestered from the other objects and inscriptions because it offers a way of reconstructing the development of beliefs about the powers of the divine.

This lacuna in the scholarship of the el-Qom tomb has led us to think about the function of the texts and images in these two complexes within the broader context of a Judean family tomb. For this reason, our own study led us to address the relationship between writing and the objects placed for the dead.⁶⁹ There is still much work to be done in investigating the material dimensions of these tomb spaces and the role of the objects purportedly found therein. Any serious study of these tombs should also address how the body's interaction with ritual space formed an important determinant in religious meaning.

Much of the same may be said about the ways in which scholars of ancient Israelite and Judean religions have treated the tomb inscriptions from Khirbet Beit Lei. Scholars have labeled the inscriptions "confessions of faith," "hymns of praise," or have studied them for what they might reveal about the background of the biblical psalms.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ See the conclusion of Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger: "It is interesting that Line 3 of the inscription is formulated in the singular, not the plural. Only one divine power, namely, Yahweh, is considered as the active agent who provides freedom from enemies, whereas Yahweh's *asherah* is the medium or entity through which it happens" (Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses*, 239–40). For further on the connection between the blessing and ideas about Yahweh's power in the afterlife, see M. Leuenberger, "Blessing in Text and Picture in Israel and the Levant: A Comparative Case Study on the Representation of Blessing in Hirbet el-Qom and on the Stela of Yehawmilk of Byblos: Teil 1," *BN* 139 (2008), 61–77; idem, "Blessing in Text and Picture in Israel and the Levant: A Comparative Case Study on the Representation of Blessing in Hirbet el-Qom and on the Stela of Yehawmilk of Byblos: Teil 2," *BN* 141 (2009), 67–89; C.B. Hays, *A Covenant with Death: Death in the Iron Age II and Its Rhetorical Uses in Proto-Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 151–53; Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing*, 52–55.

⁶⁹ Matthew J. Suriano's book *A History of Death in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming) is an important exception. This study is important advance, as Suriano anchors his study in the meaning of the inscriptions from Khirbet el-Qom and Khirbet Beit Lei in an analysis of the materiality of the bench-tomb in Iron Age Judah and the funerary rituals that occurred in these spaces. See also M.J. Suriano, "Sheol, the Tomb, and the Problem of Postmortem Existence," *JHS* 16 (2016), 1–31.

⁷⁰ Miller sees the inscriptions as our earliest evidence for the types of prayers preserved in the Psalms, noting, "together they provide our most extensive assemblage of Psalmic materials prior to the Restoration period, in this case probably the sixth century BC" (Miller, "Psalms and Inscriptions," 320). See, too, the comments by Graham Davies on the Beit

Overwhelmingly, the focus of the studies of this site has been on the written materials to the neglect of the funerary spaces in which they were discovered.⁷¹ Several studies go so far as to completely disassociate the inscriptions from the tomb space in order to argue that they represent the written “prayers” of people who used the tomb as refuge from enemies.⁷² For instance, Dijkstra claims that one of the inscriptions “might, perhaps, be called a confession of orthodox Yahwistic faith,” and he situates it in a “reformist YHWH-alone movement that rose in the latter years of the Kingdom of Judah and the atmosphere of mono-Yahwism.”⁷³ This tendency approaches these inscriptions as a reflection of belief in the god Yahweh and as types of written declarations of that faith, but offer little engagement with the material setting of these inscriptions within a funerary cave.

Scholars have also integrated these inscriptions into efforts to reconstruct the history of Israelite literacy, or into models of the production of biblical texts. The Beit Lei inscriptions have been described as learned graffiti and a reflection of the spread of literacy. They have not been classified or studied with the el-Qom and Silwan inscriptions, but have joined the larger corpus of Iron Age inscriptions. Removed from the Beit Lei tomb, they are valued primarily for what they indicate about historical grammar, the extent of literacy practices, or the evolution of royal and temple scribal apparatuses.⁷⁴ While such aims are important, our contention is that this narrow focus has decontextualized the inscriptional corpus. Inscriptions are removed from their socio-spatial contexts and are studied by many

Lei inscriptions, who notes, “These graffiti are informative about the piety of at least some rural folk in the time around or shortly after the Assyrian invasion of Judah in 701 and Isaiah’s prophetic ministry: they show that devotion to the religious significance of Jerusalem was not limited to the capital itself” (G. Davies, “Hebrew Inscriptions,” in J. Barton [ed.], *The Biblical World*, vol. 1 [London: Routledge, 2002], 270–86 [281]).

⁷¹ For an overview of past studies and a comprehensive application of our methodology see Mandell and Smoak, “Reconsidering the Function.”

⁷² See particularly the study by Parker, “Graves, Caves, and Refugees.”

⁷³ M. Dijkstra, “‘I Have Blessed You by YHWH of Samaria and His Asherah’. Texts with Religious Elements from the Soil Archive of Ancient Israel,” in B. Becking (ed.), *Only One God? Monotheism in Ancient Israel and the Veneration of the Goddess Asherah* (London: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 35.

⁷⁴ We seek to avoid offering a bibliographic list, and instead point our readers excellent summaries of scholarship that detail the role that Hebrew inscriptions have played in arguments about the development of biblical literature and Hebrew historical grammar, see W.M. Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew: Its Origins Through the Rabbinic Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 112–13; idem, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 98–106; K. van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); C.A. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age* (ABS; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010).

firstly as linguistic artifacts, and only secondarily as material ones. This becomes problematic when the function of inscriptions is limited to their linguistic properties or what they reveal about scribal practices and literacy.⁷⁵ We will address some recent scholarship in the second half of this article that demonstrate how the theory outlined above can be applied to such tomb complexes.

THE SYNTAX OF SPACE AT KHIRBET EL-QOM AND KHIRBET BEIT LEI

Our analysis begins with the following premise: writings in a family tomb were tied to the immediate funerary context and would have served quite a different function than that assumed for administration or epistles.⁷⁶ This means that in order to understand their function, we must intellectually restore such inscriptions to the walls of these tombs. Only when these inscriptions are evaluated as a part of the material assemblage of these tombs can scholars begin to make meaningful observations about their function within these ritual spaces and how these served to orient the bodies of visitors in the tomb. An analysis of the spatial syntax of these funerary complexes also elucidates how writing was used to demarcate and delineate the spaces within this tomb.⁷⁷ Such an approach also has the advantage of drawing attention to regional patterns in the placement and clustering of funerary writings around architectural features in funerary spaces in Iron Age Judah.

Our approach to the tomb inscriptions from Khirbet el-Qom and Khirbet Beit Lei begins by relocating their meaning within the

⁷⁵ See most recently R.S. Hess, "Writing about Writing: Abecedaries and Evidence for Literacy in Ancient Israel," *VT* 56 (2006), 342–46; idem, "Literacy in Iron Age Israel," in V.P. Long and D.W. Baker (eds.), *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of "Biblical Israel"* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 82–102. For other recent summaries on the role that the inscriptions play in debates about Israelite literacy and the presence of scribal schools, see I.M. Young, "Israelite Literacy: Interpreting the Evidence, Part I," *VT* 48 (1998), 239–53; idem, "Israelite Literacy: Interpreting the Evidence, Part II," *VT* 48 (1998), 408–22; W.G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 202–21; C.A. Rollston, "Scribal Education in Ancient Israel: The Old Hebrew Epigraphic Evidence," *BAJOR* 344 (2006), 47–74. An important exception to this is Suriano's recent study of Inscription 3 at el-Qom. His study attempts to anchor an understanding of Inscription 3 at Khirbet el-Qom in its funerary setting. He considers the function of such writing to be "to preserve the individual name of the dead within a larger communal setting (the family tomb)" (M.J. Suriano, "Death, Disinheritance, and Job's Kinsman-Redeemer," *JBL* 129 [2010], 49–66; quote on 55).

⁷⁶ On the performative nature of the inscriptions at el-Qom, see most recently Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power*, 144–60.

⁷⁷ Mandell and Smoak, "Reconsidering the Function."

spatial setting of the tombs. We use the terminology *syntax of space* to emphasize the way that such inscriptions would have been read when bundled together with the space and materiality of the tomb. Our approach prioritizes a description of the inscriptions from the perspective of a person entering the tomb and reading the inscriptions as part of the larger constellations of reliefs (*text and image and text as image*) that appear on the different walls of the tomb chamber.

Moreover, we would seek to rehabilitate the terminology of graffiti as it is applied to the inscriptions in the tomb. As discussed, past studies have tended to employ the term as a way of (mis-) characterizing the inscriptions as informal or popular examples of writing that fell outside of administrative-bureaucratic practice. We would emphasize that such a categorization of the inscriptions misses the point entirely. Rather than labeling the inscriptions as “sloppy” graffiti, we approach them from a material standpoint. That is, we see their linguistic character as a less important feature in their meaning than the significance of their visual and material forms. The lack of concern for spelling in the inscriptions in the tomb indicates that the primary concern was not for spelling standards, but for their semi-otic value as a part of the material fabric of the tomb. We approach such inscriptions as multimodal texts that communicated in ways that were not limited by the literacy of those engaged with them or by the clearness or evenness of their execution.⁷⁸ The placement, spacing, orientation, and size, as well as the relationships between these writings and the spaces in these tomb complexes, too, were central to their social function. We cannot speak to the beliefs of those entering the tombs, but we can analyze how these writings served as a sign to demarcate space and to warn potential intruders that they were entering a tomb space.⁷⁹ The inscriptions would have been read as part of the larger syntax of space in the tomb, meaning that a correct interpretation of their function would have been guided by their location in the tomb, their placement next to reliefs,

⁷⁸ For a discussion of the materiality of writing and its power to communicate in ways beyond mere language, see Donald Polaski’s discussion of the standing stones in Josh 22. As he writes, “The stone has ‘heard’ the words of YHWH, in a sense absorbing them. . . . So the blank stone has become an illegible yet visible text, drawing the attention of the reader away from the written yet invisible book.” See D. Polaski, “What Mean These Stones? Inscriptions, Textuality and Power in Persia and Yehud,” in J.L. Berquist (ed.), *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 43–54.

⁷⁹ Such an approach to writing is inspired by several studies. In addition to Della Pollock’s approach, which considers the social context of writing, we are appreciative of Mark Sebba’s helpful application of sociolinguistic theory to written language, which considers the material placement of writing and its materiality and execution (M. Sebba, “Iconisation, Attribution, and Branding in Orthography,” *Written Language and Literacy* 18 [2015], 208–27; idem, “Sociolinguistic Approaches to Writing Systems Research,” *Writing Systems Research* 1 [2009], 35–49).

and their setting on or adjacent to specific walls, lintels, and doorways in the tomb space.

The first step in this process would be to “read” them from the perspective of a person entering the tombs. The advantage of this approach is that it refocuses the location of meaning around the body and the role that the senses play in shaping experience, and hence, meaning.⁸⁰ As discussed above, past approaches have tended to prioritize theological paradigms that read textual descriptions of space rather hastily into definitions of space without giving attention to the materiality of the space or how the body dictated certain physical and conceptual notions of the space. But, as Morgan notes, “more than passively enabling it, the body shapes, colors, tunes, tastes, and performs belief.”⁸¹ In other words, we must begin our inquiry with a consideration of the ways in which the body helped in mapping space and how the senses interacted with its physical characteristics. We would not only seek to account for the inscriptions’ place within the tomb setting, but we would ask how a person’s interaction with this setting would have shaped the experience of the inscriptions. In this way, we would draw upon Keane’s model of “bundled messages” in order to treat the inscriptions as part of a larger mosaic of semiotic ideologies in the tomb space.⁸² Rather than reading or interpreting the inscriptions against the background of assumed spelling standards or literacy practices, we would argue that their contents would have been mediated via their physical relationship to certain parts of the tomb (i.e., benches, entrances, lintels, etc.).

We can turn to Dever’s discussion of the objects that he acquired which were purported to belong to the tombs at el-Qom. The many objects included portable inscribed vessels, figurines, weights, diverse beads and amulets, including Egyptian-style Bes and “eye of Horus” pieces. Dever also describes clay objects that appear to have been recontextualized in the tomb for funerary use; these include pillar figurines, zoomorphic and “horse and rider” figurines, and “clay rattles” as well as inscribed clay bowls and alabaster and bronze vessels.⁸³ The syntax of the space of the tomb would have transformed the meaning of the household objects placed therein, to having a funerary purpose. Such objects were, to borrow Keane’s terminology, “bundled” together with the inscriptions in these two tombs thus transforming their meaning from domestic objects to materials

⁸⁰ K. Knott, “Spatial Theory and Method for the Study of Religion,” *Temenos* 41 (2005), 157. For an application of this to the study of Israelite religion, see C. Uehlinger, “Religion in the Ancient Levant: Confronting Gazes Now and Then,” *Material Religion* 8 (2012), 525–27; idem, “Visible Religion und die Sichtbarkeit von Religion(en). Voraussetzungen, Anknüpfungprobleme, Wiederaufnahme eines religionswissenschaftlichen Forschungsprogramms,” *Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift* 23 (2006), 165–84.

⁸¹ Morgan, “Materiality,” 59.

⁸² Keane, “On the Materiality of Religion,” 230.

⁸³ Dever, “Iron Age Epigraphic Material,” 169–88.

associated with the care and memorial of the dead. Accordingly, we are interested in how someone visiting the tomb would have read the inscriptions along with the objects in their field of vision. So rather than studying the inscriptions apart from these other objects, we can also think about how the act of depositing a new inscription in the tomb space was perhaps akin to the act of depositing a funerary vessel.⁸⁴ Moreover, we can consider how a person's engagement with the inscriptions would have been informed by the funerary assemblage in the tombs as well as by the local knowledge of the purpose of this space and the families that it commemorated. As such we can resituate the el-Qom inscriptions within their immediate funerary context, and also within the broader communities living in the vicinity of Khirbet el-Qom.

Another way to illustrate this point is to examine the way in which the placement of Inscription 3 at Khirbet el-Qom played a role in conveying the meaning of its content. As we noted earlier in this study, the majority of the inquiry that has been directed toward this inscription has centered upon debates over the grammatical form of the name Asherah in line 3.⁸⁵ Our approach would stress that reading the inscription "correctly" begins by recognizing that it stood directly inside and to the right of the main entrance to the tomb.⁸⁶ That is, the inscription would have been one of the first images or signs that a visitor would have encountered upon entering the main hall of the tomb. This observation is important for two reasons. First, the setting of the inscription just inside the entrance to the central chamber of the tomb indicates that it may have served as a signpost or guide for how a visitor should experience and use the space.⁸⁷ In this regard, it is noteworthy here that the inscription contains a relief of a human hand. Judith Hadley posited that the

⁸⁴ See the discussion in Mandell and Smoak, "Reading and Writing."

⁸⁵ It is debated whether or not **šrth* (Asherah) is a designation for an object (a pole/ tree) symbolizing Asherah, or refers to the actual goddess. For a summary of the various positions, see A. Mandell, "Numinous Writing at Kuntillet 'Ajrud: Dedicatory Inscriptions and the Epistolary Genre," *Maarav* 19 (2012), 131–62 (136–39).

⁸⁶ For a similar observation, see Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power*, 161.

⁸⁷ Pollock's definition of performative writing provides a helpful model for exploring the nature of Judean funerary inscriptions. She starts from the premise that the most significant element in understanding performative writing is the context or location in which it is employed, as it is "no more or no less formally intelligible than a road sign or a landmark: its styles may be numbered, taught, and reproduced, but its meanings are contextual. It takes its value from the context-map in which it is located and which it simultaneously marks, determines, transforms" (D. Pollock, "Performing Writing," in P. Phelan and J. Lane [eds.], *The Ends of Performance* [New York: New York University Press, 1998], 73–103 [81]). See also idem, "Performative Writing," in G. Cody (ed.), *Performance Studies: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2012); idem, "Essays in Textual Power," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 12 (1992), 54–60.

hand might represent a pictorial relief of the word *yād* with the sense of memorial or monument.⁸⁸ If such an argument is correct, then we might view the relief as a way of labeling the space. The point is that the correct way of reading the inscription was not provided by the visitor's ability or competency in orthographic standards. Instead, the inscription served as a sign that marked the entrance to the space, signaling to the visitor that they had moved from natural space to the constructed space of a tomb. Moreover, the location of the inscription near the entrance would have served to warn any potential intruders that they were entering a space of the dead and that the space was protected by the blessings of the deities Yahweh and Asherah.

Secondly, an approach that emphasizes the setting of the inscription near the entrance of the tomb would also clarify certain enigmatic features that scholars have struggled to explain. For instance, scholars have long been puzzled by the so-called "ghost-letters" or "doubling of letters" preserved in line 3, written perhaps by later hands.⁸⁹ In addition, lines 5 and 6 of the inscription consist of the repetition of the phrase "to his Asherah." Although most studies have remarked on this feature of the inscription, few have attempted to provide any substantive explanation. But by focusing upon the inscription's location near the entrance of the tomb, we might be able to arrive at a possible explanation for this phenomenon. In a recent reevaluation of the inscription, Brian B. Schmidt has argued that the "doubling" or tracing over of letters may have been a ritual performance by visitors to the tomb aimed at enhancing the apotropaic blessing in the inscription. He argues, "The writer or a repeat visitor or visitors sought to reactivate or empower Asherah in protecting the deceased from harm."⁹⁰ In this way, Schmidt's conclusions take seriously the way in which the inscription's meaning was related to the use of the tomb space and the material function of writing.

The inscriptions at the site of Khirbet Beit Lei provide another particularly apt test-case for the method described in this study. As noted at the beginning of the study, the majority of studies of the inscriptions from this site have tended to strip their contents away from the tomb context and compare them to the biblical Psalms or to explain them as prayers of refugees hiding in the tomb. For example, Simon B. Parker concluded that the inscriptions were left by people who were "hiding from their enemies, praying to Yahweh to take note of their desperate situation, to acquit them of offences against him which may have brought on his anger, to save them."⁹¹

⁸⁸ J. Hadley, "The Khirbet el-Qom Inscription," *VT* 37 (1987), 60–62.

⁸⁹ See Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 160; Zevit, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription," 43; Hadley, "The Khirbet el-Qom Inscription," 50.

⁹⁰ Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power*, 160–61.

⁹¹ Parker, "Graves, Caves, and Refugees."

These approaches illustrate the tendency of scholars to invest interest in the inscriptions only for what they may be employed to say about the history or background of the biblical texts or what they might reveal about the religious piety of Judeans during the late Iron Age.

The main problem with these approaches is that they have given very little, if any, consideration to the ways in which the inscriptions (and reliefs) were integrated into the overall design of the tomb space. Again, our approach stresses that a correct understanding of the religious meaning of the inscriptions would not begin (or even end) with a view that sees them as a way to uncover belief about Yahweh and his powers. Instead, we emphasize the way in which the body interacted with the inscriptions as part of the construction and décor of the walls of the tomb. The use of writing on the walls and other parts of the tomb were not an act separate from the construction of the spaces of the complex. Instead, the inscriptions played an elemental role in defining the walls as part of the “interior” of the tomb and marked the central chamber of the tomb as a communal multipurpose room where ritual activity is performed and kinship identity reified. The point of the act of inscribing was not to convey abstract ideas or beliefs but to build the space and demarcate its features, characteristics, and materials.

SOLOMON’S TEMPLE IN PAST RESEARCH

We now turn to past studies of Solomon’s temple to illustrate this tendency to esteem belief or the immaterial over the material, or to use the material merely as it pertains to the evolution of Yahwistic practice. The study of the materials of the Temple are viewed as evidence of the “omnipotence” and “power” of the Israelite god, as opposed to what they might reveal about the interconnections between economics, politics, and religion in Jerusalem during the Iron Age.⁹² The vast majority of studies of the Temple in Jerusalem value its material components for what they may index about ancient Israelite mythology, that is, ancient Israelite ideas and beliefs about cosmogony, divine-human relationships, and notions about the presence or size of God.⁹³ As a consequence, many studies on the Temple tend to prioritize the search for “divine experience” instead of an

⁹² For an attempt to navigate the relationship between the physical and conceptual aspects of temple space in the description of Solomon’s temple, see E. Bloch-Smith, “‘Who is the King of Glory?’ Solomon’s Temple and Its Symbolism,” in J.C. Exum et al. (eds.), *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible in Honor of Philip J. King* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 18–31. For a helpful exception to these critiques, see the study by Carol L. Meyers on the connection between the temple iconography and the royal ideology of the Davidic dynasty in C.L. Meyers, “Jachin and Boaz in Religious and Political Perspective,” *CBQ* 45 (1983), 167–78.

⁹³ See the discussion of the objects in the temple courtyard and inner chambers and their relationship to biblical (e.g., the creation accounts in

examination of how the interactions between the human body and the Temple's materiality shaped the conceptualization of its spaces.

This is perhaps most evident in the ways that treatments of the furniture of the Temple search for assumed symbolism in the materials and architecture or draw parallels with descriptions of creation in the biblical literature.⁹⁴ The design of Solomon's temple is then seen as the material expression (or confirmation) of beliefs about the divine or Israelite cosmogonies.⁹⁵ The Temple is described by such studies as "the vehicle for communication with God," the location of "God's invisible Presence (*kāvod*)," and "the place from which the divine beatification of humanity proceeds."⁹⁶ The molten sea is attributed to "YHWH's cosmic victories" and the divine sanction on the monarchy; the stylized columns are understood as symbols of "the divine attributes of longevity and fruitfulness, or virility and fertility," citing Gen 30:37–39.⁹⁷ Too, the objects in the temple are viewed to espouse the pro-Davidic stance assumed for certain psalms.⁹⁸

Genesis; Ps 18 = 22, 29, 89, and 93; and the sections in Ezekiel that describe the Temple) and pan-near eastern texts in E. Bloch-Smith, "Solomon's Temple: The Politics of Ritual Space," in B.M. Gittlen (ed.), *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 83–89.

⁹⁴ See M. Sweeney, *1 and 2 Kings: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), who states concerning the function of the interior decorations of the temple, "They [the carvings on the interior walls of the Temple] include images of cherubim and palm trees as well as blossoming flowers to recall the role of the *dēbīr* as a symbol of the garden of Eden" (115). Earlier Marvin Sweeney describes the significance of the cherubim in the following words: "Cherubim relate to the mythological world, and represent the manifestation of the divine on earth as guardians of sacred sites, kings, cities, and so forth. . . Within the temple, they stand guard over the ark. They are carved into the walls and doors of the *dēbīr* together with palm trees, flowers, and so on (see vv. 29, 32, below, Ezek 41:15–26), which calls to mind the cherub that guards the garden of Eden and its tree of life. The cherubim thereby symbolize the roles of YHWH as king and creator and the temple as representative of the garden of Eden" (114–15).

⁹⁵ For example, the two pillars Boaz and Jachin are seen as the material expression of the creative power of YHWH or as allusions to the descriptions of cosmogony in Gen 1:7; Ps 104:5–9. For discussion of the symbolism of the Jachin and Boaz, see R.B.Y. Scott, "The Pillars of Jachin and Boaz," *JBL* 58 (1939), 143–49; G.E. Wright, "Solomon's Temple Resurrected," *BA 4* (1941), 21–26; S. Yeivin, "Jachin and Boaz," *PEQ* 91 (1959), 1–15; C.L. Meyers, "The Elusive Temple," *BA* 45 (1982), 33–41; idem, "Jachin and Boaz"; H.G. May, "The Two Pillars before the Temple of Solomon," *BASOR* 88 (1942), 19–27.

⁹⁶ J.D. Levenson, "The Jerusalem Temple in Devotional and Visionary Experience," in A. Green (ed.), *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages*, vol. 1 (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 37.

⁹⁷ Bloch-Smith, "Who is the King of Glory?" quotes on 21, 23.

⁹⁸ As Elizabeth Bloch-Smith writes, "After defeating the chaotic forces of nature, symbolized by the Molten Sea, Yahweh extended his powers to

To be clear, we do not intend to suggest here that such observations or lines of interpretation are necessarily wrongheaded. The way in which these studies interpret the descriptions of the material and their Iron Age parallels provide us with important observations about Israelite conceptions of the divine. Our point is to draw attention to how few studies of Solomon's temple pause to consider other ways of thinking about the Temple. For example, one focus of inquiry might be how the materials of the Temple would have been valued for their very materiality. It is also striking how few studies remark on the role that the Phoenician materials contributed to the Temple's prestige or the ways in which its materials conveyed political and economic power.⁹⁹ And, indeed, it is very telling, as Jon D.

the monarchy (Ps 89:26) and designated Zion, the holy mountain won in battle, to be the seat of eternal divine (and human) sovereignty (Ps 18:8–16 = 2 Sam 22:8–16; Ps 29, 89, 92). Sated with offerings from the stands or *mēkônôt*, Yahweh entered his Temple, bestowing blessings on the king and the people, as recorded on the pillars *Yachin* and *Boaz* that flanked the Temple entrance. Thus the courtyard objects conveyed Yahweh's enthronement in the royal chapel with the attendant empowerment of the king and divine blessings for all Israel" (Bloch-Smith, "Solomon's Temple," 84–85).

⁹⁹ We would note also the tendency in the study of the description of the Temple in 1 Kgs 6–7 centers upon discussions of the text's date rather than efforts to understand how the descriptions of its architectural features stem from the body (i.e., shoulder, thigh, ribs, etc.). Exceptions to this are several studies by Mark S. Smith on the size of the furniture of the temple (see M.S. Smith, "Divine Form in Ugaritic and Israelite Religion," *ZAW* 100 [1988], 424–27; idem, "Like Deities, Like Temples [Like People]," in J. Day (ed.), *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel* [LHBOTS, 422; London: T&T Clark, 2005], 3–27). For past discussions of the date of the texts of 1 Kgs 6–7, see most recently idem, "In Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 6–7): Between Text and Archaeology," in S. Gitin, J.E. Wright, and J.P. Dessel (eds.), *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 276–82; R. Tomes, "'Our Holy and Beautiful House': When and Why Was 1 Kings 6–8 Written?," *JSOT* 70 (1996), 33–50; J. van Seters, "Solomon's Temple: Fact and Ideology in Biblical and Near Eastern Historiography," *CBQ* 50 (1997), 45–50. For recent studies of the architecture of Solomon's temple and relevant comparanda, see W. Zwickel, *Der Tempelkult in Kanaan und Israel: Studien zur Kultgeschichte Palästinas von der Mittelbronzezeit bis zum Untergang Judas* (FAT, 10; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994); M. Ottoson, *Temples and Cult Places in Palestine* (Boreas: Uppsala Studies in Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern Civilizations, 12; Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 1980); F.M. Cross, "The Priestly Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon," in F.M. Cross (ed.), *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 84–95; W.E. Mierse, *Temples and Sanctuaries from the Early Iron Age Levant: Recovery after Collapse* (HACL; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012); V. Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings* (LHBOTS, 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992); J. Monson, "The New 'Ain Dara Temple and the Jerusalem Temple," in G. Beckman and T.J. Lewis (eds.), *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion*

Levenson aptly notes, that those studies that do emphasize the Phoenician characteristics of the Temple explain them as part of the de-
volution of Israelite religion during the era of Solomon.¹⁰⁰

We also contend that even the analyses of the Temple that consider its materiality still draw heavily upon older scholarship on the nature of ritual or religious space. For example, Eliade's work, *The Sacred and the Profane*, is the source for descriptions of the Temple Mount as a "cosmic mountain" and an *axis mundi*. Eliade described sacred space as dependent upon *hierophany*, the manifestation of the sacred or the divine, culminating in the transformation of a profane space into a sacred one, which has been adopted into descriptions of the space of the Jerusalem temple.¹⁰¹ As Eliade argued, "Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane."¹⁰² This is a "top-down" approach that has been polemicized in works on the spatial theory of religion, most famously by Jonathan Z. Smith in 1972.¹⁰³ Yet, Eliade's set of terminology is among the most cited theoretical studies in scholarship on the Temple.¹⁰⁴

Lawrence E. Stager's study of Eden imagery in the Temple narratives, which is one of the most influential analyses of the imagery of the Temple, is essentially an application of Eliade. He writes,

(Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2006), 273–99.

¹⁰⁰ J.D. Levenson, "The Temple and the World," *JR* 64 (1984), 275–98, see especially his comments on 275–76.

¹⁰¹ M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. W.R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963). See also É. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. J.W. Swain (London: Allen & Unwin, 1915), 36–42; C. Colpe, "The Sacred and the Profane," in M. Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 12:513–14. For a discussion of the legacy of Eliade on studies of sacred space, see K. Knott, "Spatial Theory and the Study of Religion," *RC* 2 (2008), 1104–5. For a summary of the influence of Eliade's paradigm upon religious studies, see J.P. Brereton, "Sacred Space," in M. Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 12:525–35.

¹⁰² Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 11.

¹⁰³ Smith, "The Wobbling Pivot"; idem, *To Take Place: Toward a Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 26–28.

¹⁰⁴ Sommer's descriptions of the tabernacle as a mobile shrine "linking heaven and earth" builds on Jonathan Z. Smith's critique of Eliade. He contrasts P's tabernacle, as a fixed center symbolizing the moment of creation, with E's tent, which is non-locative and focuses on the periphery. This work builds on Smith's critique of Eliade, yet still analyzes such spaces in terms of the beliefs presented about the divine in E and P (B. Sommer, "Conflicting Constructions of the Divine in the Priestly Tabernacle," *BibInt* 9 [2001], 46–48; quote on 48). See too the discussion in his chapter entitled "God's Bodies and Sacred Space (1): Tent, Ark, and Temple," in idem, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 80–108.

For ancient Israel, the Temple of Solomon—indeed, the Temple Mount and all Jerusalem—was a symbol as well as a reality, a mythopoetic realization of heaven on earth, Paradise, the Garden of Eden. . . This cosmic mountain linked heaven and earth (as axis mundi); from here order was established at creation and was continually renewed and maintained through rituals and ceremonies. . . The whole drew on celestial archetypes that were common to ancient Near Eastern cultures. Cosmic Mountains, for example, were traditionally situated above the primordial waters (the “deep”), which is an orderly cosmos, because the source of the sacred rivers that watered the four quarters of the earth.¹⁰⁵

In Stager’s study, we find an Eliadian understanding of a sacred space as the seat of divine revelation, thus evolving into an *axis mundi*, a place that connects heaven and earth. Such descriptions of Jerusalem as a cosmic mountain and place of sacred waters ultimately betray an overreliance on Eliade’s paradigms.¹⁰⁶ To be clear, we are not arguing that Eliade’s work is unhelpful, but rather that the field should also engage with more recent works on spatial theory in the study of religion. To this end, in the next section of this paper we provide a synthesis of recent works that offer a more nuanced approach to the Iron Age precinct at Tel Dan.

As example of the fusion of the “top-down” and “bottom-up” approach to the study of the temple, we can turn to Zevit’s approach to Solomon’s temple. He delineates three spaces: geographical space, which accounts for the location, design, and the impact of the space on “real people”; thematic space, i.e., the ideas about this space as expressed in literature relating to the Temple as the place of YHWH’s residence and the seat of his glory; and mythic-symbolic space, i.e., *axis mundi*, the “primal” and the “orientational key” through which the entirety of the Temple space was understood. As

¹⁰⁵ See L.E. Stager, “Jerusalem as Eden,” *BAR* 26 (2000), 1, which is a more popular version of Stager, “Jerusalem and the Garden of Eden.”

¹⁰⁶ For example, Eliade draws a comparison between the descriptions of the *apsu* as the foundation of the temple in Babylon and the mythological meaning of the Temple. As he writes, “The same tradition is found among the Hebrews; the rock of the Temple in Jerusalem reached deep into the *tehom*, the Hebrew equivalent of *apsu*. And, just as Babylon had its Gate of *Apsu*, the rock of the temple in Jerusalem contained the ‘mouth of the *tehom*’. The *apsu*, the *tehom* symbolize the chaos of waters, the preformal modality of cosmic matter, and, at the same time, the world of death, of all that precedes and follows life. The Gate of *Apsu* and the rock containing the ‘mouth of the *tehom*’ designate not only the point of intersection—and hence of communication—between the lower world and earth, but also the difference in ontological status between these two cosmic planes. There is a break of plane between the *tehom* and the rock of the Temple that blocks its mouth, passage from the virtual to the formal, from death to life” (Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 41–42).

he writes, “Some sacred places in Israel were sites that for some reason elicited belief because of an awe-generating experience there . . . while others were built on convenient real estate and ‘sacralized’ after the fact.”¹⁰⁷ This approach has the advantage of considering the material space of the temple in its physical settings and the cultural streams that informed it. And yet, this view still draws heavily on Eliade’s work on hierophany, which, in turn, is used to create totalizing assumptions about what people believed about such spaces.

THE MATERIAL AT THE CULTIC AREA IN TEL DAN

The tendency toward a concern with the metaphysical in the study of the religions of ancient Israel and Judah is perhaps nowhere better illustrated in the ways that biblical scholars describe temple space. As we discussed above, studies of Solomon’s temple overwhelmingly prefer to explain the significance of the materials of the building as conduits for understanding abstract thought, mythological traditions, and beliefs about the divine. Even those studies that give explicit focus to the size and materials of the Temple betray a tendency toward using the material as a way of explaining divine attributes (size or scale, power, omnipotence, etc.). Our point is not that such observations are misguided, but rather that they give preference to aspects of religion that stand outside of empirical verification. That is, they focus upon Eliadian notions of “divine manifestation” or belief instead of how the body shaped and contributed to the experience of ritual space. Effectively, the modern study of the Temple has cut off the body from the realm of consideration of temple space. As a result, very few studies of the Temple afford any space for consideration of the role that bodily gesture, emotions, and the senses contributed to the projection, construction, and experience of temple space.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, we might add that the most revealing characteristic of scholarly discussion of temple space in ancient Israelite and Judean religions is the ineffectual and scholarly space that is devoted to the temple for which we lack physical evidence, namely, Solomon’s Temple. Although there are a number of complex reasons for this, we note here that the interest in this “textual” temple further belies the tendency toward an interest in the biblical text over a comprehensive view of the material evidence in the study of ancient Israelite and Judean religions.

By contrast, our approach to temple space in ancient Israel and Judah begins with the cultic precinct discovered in the excavations at Tel Dan. The cultic precinct at the site contains one of the most

¹⁰⁷ Z. Zevit, “Preamble to a Temple Tour,” in B.M. Gittlen (ed.), *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 77–78.

¹⁰⁸ For important exceptions to this, see the study by Mark S. Smith on conceptions of divine size (Smith, “Like Deities”).

well preserved Iron Age temple spaces in the southern Levant.¹⁰⁹ Yet, in spite of ongoing excavations at this site, it tends to be mostly overlooked in discussions of ritual space in ancient Israel and Judah.¹¹⁰ We would start by reorienting the study of the precinct from the perspective of a person entering the temple space. In other words, we ask how someone experiencing this space would have “bundled” the different spaces and things in the precinct into fields of meaning; we might also consider how the physical environment in which the precinct sat affected this field of meaning. Our approach not only considers the physical items in the precinct (altar, side chambers, high place, etc.), but also the ways in which the mountains and springs that encased the site contributed to its experience.

A focus upon the body’s engagement with the temple space also means that we should think about how the temple was integrated into the wider space of the city. For instance, we should think about

¹⁰⁹ On the cultic site at Dan (Area T), see A. Biran, *Biblical Dan* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Hebrew Union College, 1994), 202–3; idem, “Sacred Spaces: Of Standing Stones, High Places, and Cult Objects at Tel Dan,” *BAR* 24 (1998), 38–45, 70; idem, “To the God who is in Dan,” in A. Biran (ed.), *Temples and High Places in Biblical Times: Proceedings of the Colloquium in Honor of the Centennial of Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion, Jerusalem, 14–16 March, 1977* (Jerusalem: Hebrew Union College, 1981), 143–48; idem, “The Temenos at Dan,” *ErIsr* 16 (1982), 33–41 (Hebrew); Zevit, *The Religions*, 180–91; Y. Shiloh, “Iron Age Sanctuaries and Cult Elements in Palestine,” in F.M. Cross (ed.), *Symposia Celebrating the 75th Anniversary of the Founding of the American Schools of Oriental Research* (Cambridge, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1979), 147–57; Nakhai, *Archaeology and the Religions*, 185–87; J.S. Greer, “An Israelite *Mizraq* at Tel Dan?” *BAŚOR* 358 (2010), 27–45; idem, “Archaeological Views: Cultic Practices at Tel Dan—Was the Northern Kingdom Deviant?” *BAR* 38 (2012); B.A. Nakhai, “What’s a Bamah? How Sacred Space Functioned in Ancient Israel,” *BAR* 20 (1994), 18–29, 77–78; J.S. Bray, *Sacred Dan: Religious Tradition and Cultic Practice in Judges 17–18* (LHBOTS, 449; New York: T&T Clark, 2006); H. Niemann, *Die Daniten: Studien zur Geschichte eines altisraelitischen Stammes* (FRLANT, 135; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985); M. Bartusch, *Understanding Dan: An Exegetical Study of a Biblical City, Tribe and Ancestor* (JSOTSup, 379; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2003); A.R. Davis, “Tel Dan in Its Northern Cultic Context” (PhD diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 2010); D.V. Edelman, “Cultic Sites and Complexes Beyond the Jerusalem Temple,” in F. Stavrakopoulou and J. Barton (eds.), *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 92–93; L.S. Fried, “The High Places (*Bāmôt*) and the Reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah: An Archaeological Investigation,” *JAOS* 122 (2002), 427–65; Zwickel, *Der Tempelkult*, 254–56; L.E. Stager and S.R. Wolff, “Production and Commerce in Temple Courtyards: An Olive Press in the Sacred Precinct at Tel Dan,” *BAŚOR* 243 (1981), 95–102.

¹¹⁰ As Dever notes, this site is even omitted in Rainer Albertz’s history of Israelite Religion (W.G. Dever, “Archaeology and the Religions of Israel,” review of *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period* by R. Albertz, *BAŚOR* 301 [1996], 83–90 [86]).

how a person's progression from outside the urban space, through the ritual areas of the city gate, and to the temple complex would have created an "interpenetration of ritual spaces," as David Frankfurter labels it.¹¹¹ Indeed, an emphasis upon the body's role in the experience of the temple would also allow for more critical reflection upon how rituals in domestic settings overlapped with, mirrored, or even differed from those in the temple space at Dan.

Jonathan S. Greer's recent book, *Dinner at Dan*, provides the initial step toward such an approach.¹¹² In a section of the book, he bases his study of the cultic precinct around the "ritual movements" of a person who entered the space and brought an offering to a priest in front of the altar.¹¹³ Although his focus is to describe how the syntax of space in the cultic precinct complements the descriptions of the ritual movements involved in sacrifice in biblical priestly literature, Greer grounds the significance of the temple space in ritual action. He shows how the meaning of the architectural layout of the precinct was coordinated and made intelligible by the ritual interaction between priests and those bringing offerings to the temple.

Our approach would hope to build on Greer's work on the temple space at Dan in two ways. First, we argue that a study of the ritual space at Dan should combine observations about how both the constructed and natural environments of the space were interrelated in a person's experience of the space. In other words, a study of the ritual space must ask how the natural landscape surrounding the cultic precinct guided a devotee's experience of the "built" space, and *vice versa*. Although studies at times note the importance of the regional setting of the temple at Dan, few of such studies give explicit attention to the way in which such a regional setting would have influenced a pilgrim's visit to the site. For this reason, Susan Ackerman's recent study of the cultic area at Dan makes an important advance.¹¹⁴ She draws attention to the significant roles that certain features of the region, such as Mount Hermon and the Ein Dan and Ein Leshem springs, would have exerted upon a person's experience of the site.¹¹⁵ Commenting upon the ways in which the

¹¹¹ D. Frankfurter, "The Interpenetration of Ritual Spaces in Late Antique Religions: An Overview," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 10 (2008), 211–22.

¹¹² J.S. Greer, *Dinner at Dan: Biblical and Archaeological Evidence for Sacred Feasts at Iron Age II Tel Dan and Their Significance* (CHANE, 66; Leiden: Brill, 2013); A. Mazar, "Temples of the Middle and Late Bronze Ages and the Iron Age," in A. Kempinski and R. Reich (eds.), *The Architecture of Ancient Israel: From the Prehistoric to the Persian Periods* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1992), 161–89 (184–85).

¹¹³ Greer, *Dinner at Dan*, 116–19.

¹¹⁴ S. Ackerman, "E-Dan," *JANER* 13 (2013), 153–87.

¹¹⁵ For further on the natural environment of Tel Dan, see especially F.D. Por et al., "River Dan, Headwater of the Jordan, an Aquatic Oasis of the Middle East," *Hydrobiologia* 134 (1986), 123–24.

natural topography works together with the cultic area at the site, Ackerman notes,

After all, not only do the platform and its associated compound sit immediately adjacent to and above the Ein Dan and Ein Leshem springs, as the motif of the cosmic garden requires. The platform—sitting as it does in a dominating position overlooking the sanctuary courtyard, as well as being sited at the apex of Tel Dan as a whole, and also at a point on the tel at which the slope falls off steeply, at least to the north and the west—can readily be taken to represent God’s “holy mountain” and “the mountain height of Israel.”¹¹⁶

To be sure, Ackerman’s statements are directed toward questions concerning the cultic area’s associations with “Edenic” traditions in the biblical texts. Still, her observations highlight a significant aspect of the ritual space. They draw attention to the importance that the physical topography surrounding and within the site contributed to the experience of the temple space at Dan. That is, her study paves the way for further consideration of how the physical setting of the site amplified and guided a visitor’s understanding of its “built” environment. A visitor to the cultic area would have blended the natural and constructed features of the cultic area into an imaginative mosaic of associations.¹¹⁷ As Grimes writes,

Because a ritual is necessarily spatialized, it implies an ecology, a mode of engaging its locale and the world. . . . Rituals operate in environments that are simultaneously biological, geographical, social, political, historical, and cultural. A ritual’s environment is the totality of whatever surrounds it and interacts with it.¹¹⁸

Grimes observes further,

In some cultures, spaces not only mean; they also act. Not merely containing or framing actions, a sacred place exerts force, becoming an agent on par with, or even greater than, a ritual leader. The mountains and rivers were here before we mere mortals strolled the face of the earth . . . so space is not necessarily passive, the spectator but of human design. Sometimes it can be a lead actor, to whom (yes, whom) human actions are but a response. Human ritual activity is secondary, even a little pretentious.¹¹⁹

Drawing upon such observations, our approach would stress the agency of the physical environment—that is, the ways in which the

¹¹⁶ Ackerman, “E-Dan,” 183.

¹¹⁷ For further on the role that the natural environment plays in the perceptions of ritual, see Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, 259.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

natural topography surrounding the city would have *acted* to influence a visitor's perception of the cultic area. Such an understanding moves beyond the observations that the springs at this site may be tied to the religious importance of the site. As Andrew R. Davis also argues, we should consider the ongoing political, social, and economic processes that lead to its ongoing use.¹²⁰

Secondly, we would ask how a visitor to Dan would have experienced the cultic area as interrelated to its sociopolitical context. In other words, we should think about how the ritual space enfolded religious, political, *and* economic messages. Rather than focus upon what materials were used in the construction of the cultic area or what its furniture symbolized or revealed about ancient beliefs, we would prioritize what they conveyed about the connection between northern Levantine religion, politics, and economics at this important crossroads of politics and trade.¹²¹ To this we would add that we should consider how the confluence of the natural environment and social processes would have actively shaped the experience of this site.¹²²

This means that we should begin with a description of the space and its natural setting. Most studies of the remains in the cultic area have attempted to relate them to the description of Solomon's Temple or to the priestly legislation in the Torah. The finds from Area T include a massive raised podium measuring 18 × 18 meters. It is not clear whether the podium was a *bamah* ("high place") or supported some type of enclosed temple-structure. A large stepped porch measuring 5.25 × 8 meters stood in front and provided access to the raised podium. In front of the stepped porch excavators discovered the remains of a large platform measuring 4.75 × 4.75 meters. The platform likely supported a massive four-horned altar.¹²³ However, our approach emphasizes how their materiality and dimensions conveyed the relationship between religion, politics, and intra-regional economic activity. Instead of asking how the cultic area related to the biblical narratives about Jeroboam, our approach asks about the

¹²⁰ For a discussion of the natural springs and landscape from an Eliadian perspective and a critique, see A.R. Davis, *Tel Dan in Its Northern Cultic Context* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 6–7.

¹²¹ For an important recent discussion of these issues, see R. Schmitt, "The Iconography of Power: Israelite and Judean Royal Architecture as Icons of Power," in R. Schmitt and I.J. de Hulster (eds.), *Iconography and Biblical Studies* (AOAT, 361; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2009), 75–96.

¹²² Davis writes, "However much we emphasize the social and political processes at Tel Dan, we must also acknowledge that its sanctity was not merely a function of these processes but, to some extent, transcended them" (Davis, *Tel Dan*, 8).

¹²³ Greer, *Dinner at Dan*, 106. For further on the four-horned altar, see S. Gitin, "The Four-Horned Altar and Sacred Space: An Archaeological Perspective," in B.M. Gittlen (ed.), *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 95–123; A. Biran, "An Israelite Horned Altar at Dan," *BA* 37 (1974), 106–7.

multiple possibilities or horizons of expectations that a visitor may have brought to the cultic area. For example, how did the materials of the cultic site encode the city's regional significance in relation to the site's association with the Phoenician coast?¹²⁴ Recent studies have focused upon the question of the identity of the inhabitants of the city during the Iron I and Iron II periods and how the site's material culture might reflect Israelite-Damascene or Israelite-Sidonian political and economic relationships during the 9th–8th centuries.¹²⁵ Such studies make an important advance to an understanding of the significance of the cultic area as they challenge us to consider the influence of its natural setting as well as the impact that the political climate would have had on its use and ritual significance.

In this way, our approach to the sacred precinct at Dan would stress that religious space is defined as the place where space, things, and bodies converged in the making of religion. Given that we have such an array of material remains from this particular space we contend that many more questions should be invoked in order to locate the senses of the body at the forefront of critical discussion of how the space and the bodies that moved through it produced religion. For instance, we might begin by asking how the materials discovered at the site could aid an answer to the following questions:

1. How did the color of the materials in the sacred precinct affect a person's experience of the space?
2. In what ways did the color of the stone and the color of the other materials of the built-environment encode religious meaning?
3. How did certain auditory experiences at the site converge with the colors of the sacred precinct?
4. Could audiences hear the water of the springs while they brought their offerings to the altar?

We imagine that a host of additional questions could be addressed to these materials, but they are beyond the scope of the present

¹²⁴ For some initial observations about this aspect of the cultic area, see Ackerman, "E-Dan," 164, 166–67; Davis, "Tel Dan," 62–64; K.L. Noll, "The God who is among the Danites," *JSOT* 80 (1998), 3–23; C. Uehlinger, "Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary in Iron Age Palestine and the Search for Yahweh's Cult Images," in K. van der Toorn (ed.), *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 116–17.

¹²⁵ I. Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom: The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 74–77; E. Arie, "Reconsidering the Iron Age II Strata at Tel Dan: Archaeological and Historical Implications," *TA* 35 (2008), 6–64; I. Finkelstein, "Hazor and the North in the Iron Age: A Low Chronology Perspective," *BASOR* 314 (1999), 55–70; I. Finkelstein and E. Piasetzky, "¹⁴C and the Iron Age Chronology Debate: Rehov, Khirbet en-Nahas, and Megiddo," *Radiocarbon* 48 (2006), 373–86.

study. It suffices to note here that such questions work toward locating the study of the religion of temple space in the experience of a body interacting with spaces and things. The benefit of this approach is that it localizes religion in the sense that it moves away from totalizing approaches that focus upon the evolution of ideas. It also has the benefit of returning religion to the body, in the sense that the body is viewed to be “more than passively enabling it, the body shapes, colors, tunes, tastes, and performs belief.”¹²⁶

CONCLUSION

We note that all of the elements of space described above share commonalities of concern with understanding the multiple and diverse ways in which the natural morphology of a region and “built” material signify and encode meaning. We do not mean here that the material provides a way to access belief, but rather that the material is the very foundation of social, political, economic, and religious meaning. Instead of attempting to connect the material to certain ideas reflected in the textual or other worlds, our developing model highlights the possibilities evident in working with the material in the first instance rather than trying to connect dots between a material space and an idea or narrative about the space in the world of text.

This is not to suggest that the narratives of, or references to, spaces in texts are unimportant, but to stress the significance of their difference. Indeed, textual descriptions of space played an important role in developing the “aspects” of space described above (i.e., the varieties of ways that spaces are experienced).¹²⁷ But it is also important to allow the materiality of the space to speak as loudly as the “belief” that is often quickly and loosely connected to a space. In other words, we should resist the temptation to conflate or confuse textual descriptions of a given space with the ways in which the very physicality of the space produces meaning. While there might be overlap between the textual and material aspects of a given space, emphasizing the different ways in which the space has been conceived and reconceived paves the way for a more sophisticated approach to material culture in the study of ancient Israelite and Judean religions.

¹²⁶ Morgan, “Materiality,” 59.

¹²⁷ Several important past studies have attempted to apply the theories of space developed by Henri Lefebvre and Edward W. Soja to the descriptions of space in the biblical texts; see especially Berquist, “Spaces of Jerusalem”; idem, “Critical Spatiality and the Construction of the Ancient World,” in D.M. Gunn and P.M. McNutt (eds.), *“Imagining” Biblical Worlds: Studies in Spatial, Social and Historical Constructs in Honor of James W. Flanagan* (JSOTSup, 359; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 15–29; Flanagan, “Ancient Perceptions”; M.K. George, *Israel’s Tabernacle as Social Space* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009); see also the essays in D.V. Edelman and E. Ben Zvi (eds.), *Memory and the City in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014).

Indeed, our hope is that ultimately such a method leads to further investigation of the ways in which texts themselves represented important stages or places for ritual activity. We must not be too quick to differentiate the space of an inscription on the wall of a temple from the space of a ritual or legal text preserved in the Torah. Texts, like temples, altars, amulets, and other physical “things” of religion, are also material productions and artifacts.¹²⁸ The past century of scholarship on Israelite and Judean religions has too often segregated text into a separate realm than artifact; hence, the popular, yet problematic, expression “text and artifact” found in many studies on Israelite and Judean religions. The problem with the expression is that a text *is* an artifact, and the approach presented here would include it as an important ritual space in which certain rituals and memories could be relocated, preserved, modified, and transformed for new temporal and cultural horizons.

¹²⁸ See Stavrakopoulou, “Materialist Reading,” 226. For recent attempts to navigate the relationship between text and ritual, see J.W. Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); idem, “The Rhetoric of Ritual in Lev 1–7,” in R. Rendtorff and R.A. Kugel (eds.), *The Book of Leviticus: Composition and Reception* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 79–100; idem, “Using Ezra’s Time as a Methodological Pivot for Understanding the Rhetoric and Functions of the Pentateuch,” in T.B. Dozeman; K. Schmid, and B.J. Schwartz (eds.), *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 489–506; idem, “The Three Dimensions”; W.J. Bergen, *Reading Ritual: Leviticus in Postmodern Culture* (JSOTSup, 417; London: T&T Clark, 2005); idem, “Ritual Legitimacy and Scriptural Authority,” *JBL* 124 (2005), 401–17; K. van der Toorn, “The Iconic Book: Analogies between the Babylonian Cult of Images and the Veneration of the Torah,” in K. van der Toorn (ed.), *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 229–48.