INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6” x 9” black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700  800/521-0600
WOMEN AND HOUSEHOLD SHRINES
IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

by

Elizabeth Ann Remington Willett

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the
DEPARTMENT OF NEAR EASTERN STUDIES
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
In the Graduate College
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

1999
As members of the Final Examination Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Elizabeth Ann Remington Willett entitled Women and Household Shrines in Ancient Israel and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

J. Edward Wright
Date 6 Apr. 1999

Amy W. Newhall
Date

Beth Alpert-Nakhai
Date 6 Apr. 1999

William G. Dever
Date 6 Apr. 1999

Robert Burns
Date 6 Apr. 1999

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate’s submission of the final copy of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

Dissertation Director J. Edward Wright
Date 6 Apr. 1999
STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

This dissertation has been submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for an advanced degree at The University of Arizona and is deposited in the University Library to be made available to borrowers under rules of the Library.

Brief quotations from this dissertation are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgment of source is made. Requests for permission for extended quotation from or reproduction of this manuscript in whole or in part may be granted by the head of the major department or the Dean of the Graduate College when in his or her judgment the proposed use of the material is in the interests of scholarship. In all other instances, however, permission must be obtained from the author.

[Signature]

[Signature]
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Importance of Women and Household Ritual</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture and Artifacts in Israelite Houses</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women and Household Shrines</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women as Religious Agents</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: REVIEW OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Research on Israelite Religion</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellhausen's Critical Evolutionary Approach</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthropological Approaches to Israelite Religion and Magic</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Myth and Ritual School</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The History of Religion School</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form Criticism</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Archaeology</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Theology</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys of the History of Israelite Religion from the 1960's and 1970's</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociological Approaches to Israelite History and Religion</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canaanite and Israelite Continuity</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De-centralized Domestic, Popular, or Family Cult in Ancient Israel</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular Religion</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and Family Religion in Israel and Mesopotamia</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Roles in Ancient Israelite Religion</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Role in the Israelite Household</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Religion in the Life of the Israelite and Babylonian Woman</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Research on the History of Israelite Religion</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research on the Goddess Asherah</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wooden Image of the Goddess</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asherah Means Shrine</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asherah is Yahweh's Presence in his Sanctuary</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asherah Not Represented in Theophoric Names</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asherah is Living Tree</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asherah is Impersonal Sacred Tree</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canaanite Goddess Imagery Conflated and Attributed to Yahweh</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cult Symbol of Yahweh Equals Deity</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canaanite Goddess Consort of Yahweh</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# TABLE OF CONTENTS — Continued

Research on Asherah Summary ................................................................. 74
The Interpretation of Ancient Israelite Figurines .................................... 60
Figurines as Magical Representations of Astarte .................................. 77
Unnamed Foreign Fertility Goddess .......................................................... 79
Figurines Continue Canaanite Tradition as Hebrew Goddess Asherah .... 80
Votive Figurines of Worshiping Women .................................................. 84
Cataloged (Specific) and Cultic (Unspecific) ........................................... 88
Figurines Non-Cultic? ............................................................................. 89
Are Figurines Toys? ................................................................................ 90
Mother of Generations .......................................................................... 90
Clay Figurines do not Define a Locale as Sacred .................................. 92
Pan-Syro-Palestinian Iconography ......................................................... 92
Non-Cultic Symbol of Asherah ............................................................... 95
Summary of the Interpretation of Figurines ............................................. 97

## CHAPTER TWO: CULT AND THE ISRAELITE FOUR-ROOM HOUSE ....101

Archaeology of the Israelite House and Family ...................................... 101
Tell Masos ............................................................................................... 107
House 314 ............................................................................................... 107
House 167 ............................................................................................... 111
House 42 ................................................................................................. 113
Cultic Artifacts in Women’s Living and Work Areas .............................. 114
Tell Masos-Summary ............................................................................. 115
Tell el-Far’ah ............................................................................................ 118
Houses 442 and 440 ................................................................................ 124
Houses with Courtyard Alcoves .............................................................. 128
Tell el Far’ah Summary ......................................................................... 132
Tell Beer-sheba ...................................................................................... 134
Western Quarter Houses ......................................................................... 136
Building 25’s Pillar-Base Figurine, Model Couch, and Miniature Lamp .... 140
The Courtyard 36 Offering Structures .................................................. 146
Houses 808 and 430 ............................................................................... 148
Tell Beer-sheba—Summary ................................................................... 152
Tell Halif ................................................................................................. 154
Cult and the Israelite Four-Room House—Summary .............................. 156

## CHAPTER THREE: HOUSE GODS AND SHRINES IN THE ANCIENT
NEAR EAST .......................................................... 166
Mesopotamian Domestic Shrines ............................................................ 168
Household Gods in Mesopotamia ......................................................... 174
# TABLE OF CONTENTS — Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The Lamp as Divine Fire</strong></td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Lamashtu, the Child-Stealing Goddess</strong></td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Mesopotamian Protective Spirits</strong></td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The Domestic Cult at Canaanite Ugarit</strong></td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The Temple of the Rhytons</strong></td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Sacred Texts and Divinity Figurines from Houses at Ugarit</strong></td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Lamashtu Charms at Ugarit</strong></td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Tel Mevorakh</strong></td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Philistine and Phoenician Shrines and Sanctuaries</strong></td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Semi-Public Cult Rooms in Israel and Judah</strong></td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Kuntillet ‘Ajrud</strong></td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>House Gods and Shrines in the Ancient Near East—Summary</strong></td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FOUR: FERTILITY IN EGYPT, UGARIT, AND ISRAEL</strong></td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The Subsistence Environment of Syria-Palestine</strong></td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Infant Mortality and Short Female Life Span</strong></td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The Canaanite Origin of the Israelite Cult</strong></td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The Canaanite Pantheon</strong></td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>El, Father of Gods and Humans</strong></td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Baal</strong></td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Qedešim and Fertility Ritual in Ugarit and Israel</strong></td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Anat</strong></td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Astarte</strong></td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Asherah, Procreatrix of the Gods</strong></td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Astarte and Asherah</strong></td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The Ugaritic Pantheon—Summary</strong></td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Semitic Goddesses and Fertility Figurines</strong></td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Asherah, Hathor, and Qudshu Plaques</strong></td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Lion Lady</strong></td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The Lachish Ewer and Sacred Tree Iconography</strong></td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The Khirbet el-Kom and Kuntillet ‘Ajrud Inscriptions</strong></td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The Nurturing and Apotropaic Power of Asherah Trees</strong></td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Reproduction, Sustenance, and Protection</strong></td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FIVE: AMULETS, EVIL EYE, AND CHILD-STEALING DEMONS</strong></td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The Near Eastern Context of Israelite Magic and Religion</strong></td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Social Science Models of Magic and Religion</strong></td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Women and Magic</strong></td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Inscribed Amulets</strong></td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter/Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egyptian-Type Amuletic Pendants</td>
<td>309</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divine Eye Motifs in Egypt and the Levant</td>
<td>312</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye Motifs in Mesopotamia</td>
<td>322</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Evil Eye in the Bible and in Rabbinic and Early Christian Thought</td>
<td>330</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lachish III and Women's Magic</td>
<td>335</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Middle Eastern Evil Eye Beliefs and Amulets</td>
<td>340</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonic Personifications of the Evil Eye—Lamashtu and Lilith</td>
<td>348</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Arslan Tash Inscriptions</td>
<td>352</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flying Night Demons</td>
<td>355</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deity Bonds, Bans, and Protective Covenants</td>
<td>360</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Divine Name and House Amulets</td>
<td>363</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye to Eye in the Second Arslan Tash Tablet</td>
<td>367</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-Stealing Demons in Modern Islamic Society</td>
<td>370</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breast Amulets</td>
<td>372</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillar-Base Figurines as Votives in Household Cult</td>
<td>377</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evil Eye and Child-Stealing Demons—Summary and Conclusions</td>
<td>383</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER SIX: WOMEN AS RELIGIOUS AGENTS IN ANCIENT ISRAEL</strong></td>
<td>389</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women as Israelite Household Administrators</td>
<td>389</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in “Patriarchal” Israelite Religion</td>
<td>390</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Images of Women in the Book of Proverbs</td>
<td>394</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wise Woman and Anat in the Poem of Aqht</td>
<td>402</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women as Religious Agents in Ancient Israel—Summary</td>
<td>406</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONCLUSION</strong></td>
<td>408</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REFERENCES</strong></td>
<td>459</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS FOR ANCIENT TEXTS</strong></td>
<td>493</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1: Gezer Plaque and Tell Beit Mirsim Pillar-Base Figurine .................................................. 82
Fig. 2: Ancient Egyptian Women Weaving and Spinning ................................................................. 104
Fig. 3: Lady Spinning ............................................. 105
Fig. 4: Tell Masos House 314 ........................................................................................................ 108
Fig. 5: Tell Masos Room 169 ........................................................................................................ 111
Fig. 6: Room 169 North Wall Bench, Plaster, and Body Sherd Paneling ........................................ 112
Fig. 7: Harnessed Horse Figurines from Tell el-Far'ah ................................................................. 118
Fig. 8: Tell el-Far'ah Level 7b Houses ............................................................................................ 120
Fig. 9: Bovine Heads and Female Figurine from Tell el-Far'ah Houses 176 and 427 ................. 121
Fig. 10: House 187 Figurine ........................................................................................................ 122
Fig. 11: Locus 241 Model Sanctuary .............................................................................................. 123
Fig. 12: Flute-player Amulet .......................................................................................................... 124
Fig. 13: House 440 Plan with Bench .............................................................................................. 125
Fig. 14: Horse Head, Woman with Tambourine, Model Shrine, and Nursing Female Figurine from House 440 ................................................................. 126
Fig. 15: Isometric Drawing of House 436 ..................................................................................... 129
Fig. 16: Isometric Drawing of House 327 ..................................................................................... 130
Fig. 17: Figurine Torso from House 327 ......................................................................................... 131
Fig. 18: Tell Beer-sheba Site Plan ................................................................................................. 135
Fig. 19: QDŚ Krater ...................................................................................................................... 136
Fig. 20: Western Quarter Houses ................................................................................................. 137
Fig. 21: Decorated and Inscribed Jars from Rooms 28, 145, 48, and 25 ........................................ 141
Fig. 22: Figurine, Model Chair, Miniature Lamp, and Juglet from House 25 ................................. 142
Fig. 23: Seated Female Figurines ................................................................................................ 143
Fig. 24: Mycenaean Divine Nurse Figurines ................................................................................ 144
Fig. 25: Courtyard 36 ................................................................................................................... 147
Fig. 26: House 430 ....................................................................................................................... 149
Fig. 27: Limestone Blocks, Incense Stand, and Female Figurine Head ........................................... 154
Fig. 28: Site of Israelite House Shrine ............................................................................................ 156
Fig. 29: Lamashtu Amulets ............................................................................................................ 181
Fig. 30: Cultic Pottery Vessels from 'Ai ....................................................................................... 203
Fig. 31: Qudshu-Astarte-Anat ....................................................................................................... 243
Fig. 32: Egyptian Tree Goddesses ............................................................................................... 248
Fig. 33: Gold and Electrum Pendants from Ugarit and Minet el-Beida ........................................ 250
Fig. 34: The Ta'anach Cult Stand .................................................................................................. 252
Fig. 35: Qudshu Standing on a Lion .............................................................................................. 254
Fig. 36: Lachish Ewer and Goblet ............................................................................................... 256
Fig. 37: Map of Khirbet el-Kom and Kuntillet 'Ajrud ................................................................. 260
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Khirbet el-Kom Yahweh-Asherah Inscription and Hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Cow and Calf from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud Pithos A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Kuntillet ‘Ajrud Sacred Tree, Caprids, and Lion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Kuntillet ‘Ajrud Pithos A Inscription and Drawings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Hazor Incense Spoon and Lady at the Window from Samaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Tell en-Nasbeh Scaraboid and Judean hlqhw bn pdy Seal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Tree Goddess Suckling Pharaoh Tuthmosis III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Sacred Tree Seals from Gezer and Megiddo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Inscribed Silver Amulet from Seventh Century BCE Jerusalem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Rosette, Bes, and Egyptian-Type Eye Amulets from Samaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Eye Beads from Samaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Fan Handle, Cosmetic Palettes, and Spindlewhorls with Ring-and-Dot Designs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Tell Brak Eye Figurines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Tell Agrab Eye and Rosette Motifs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Rhomb and Eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Greco-Roman Period Amulets against the Evil Eye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Lachish Road 1087 Houses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Bone Fan Handles and Pendants from Lachish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Modern Iranian Charms against the Evil Eye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Arslan Tash Plaque against the Child-Stealing Demons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Second century CE Aramaic Amulet against Lilith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Jewish Kimpettzettel against Lilith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>The Protective God Lahmu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Arslan Tash Plaque Against the Evil-Eyed Demon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Plaque and Pot Handles from Early Mesopotamia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Mediterranean Area Representations of Eyes and Breasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Judean Pillar-Base Figurines from Eighth and Seventh Century BCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Pillar-Base Figurines from Houses at Tell Beit Mirsim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Birdlike Lamashtu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have reviewed the copyright guidelines in the Chicago Manual of Style, and I believe that my use of the illustrations in this dissertation conforms to the doctrine of fair use in that its purpose is nonprofit educational (as was the purpose of most of the sources) and the pictorial material is appended to my text in order to illustrate points in my argument. The amount of material selected is small in proportion to the original works, and it should have no effect on the potential market for the copyrighted works. Credits accompany the figure captions.
ABSTRACT

High infant mortality and short female life span threatened Israelite women, who were respected as household administrators and educators. The concept of a personal god first observed in second millennium BCE Mesopotamian texts and house shrines involved apotropaic measures against a malevolent goddess who sickened and stole newborn children. Protective blessing inscriptions and deemphasis on the sexual aspect of Israelite figurines indicate that the personal goddess Asherah's function in Israelite religion was connected with protection more than with fertility.

Offering benches and incense burners that define semi-public cult rooms in Syria-Palestine accompany female figurines in Israelite houses at Tell Masos, Tell el-Far'ah, Beer-sheba, and Tell Halif. Eye amulets such as those from the eighth century Lachish houses as well as the large-breasted pillar-figurines reflect a long-standing Near Eastern tradition of using eye and breast motifs to protect against the evil eye and child-stealing demons. The figurines' occurrence with women's textile and food preparation implements in female domains indicates that women set up a household shrine with an Asherah figurine near an entrance. The figurines interpreted as votives that mean "this is me" or "this is you" represent a covenant relationship between the breast-feeding mother of a newborn infant and a nurturing and protecting female deity.

Israelite women dedicated votive gifts to Asherah and burned incense or oil with prayers and incantations on a regular basis during the vulnerable neonatal stage of a
child’s life, or at signs of illness. Ancient and modern Near Eastern parallels attest that women burn incense and oil to invoke the presence of a deity they contract with for protection. Pronouncing the deity’s name is essential, and in iconic cultures, visual images empowered by prayers form important parts of these rituals.
INTRODUCTION

The Importance of Women and Household Ritual

This dissertation argues that Israelite women used the female figurines and incense burners found in their houses as foci of prayer rituals directed to the goddess Asherah for protection from the child-stealing demons who attempted to enter the houses and sicken mothers and their newborn infants. It addresses the question of whether ancient Israelite family religion included a "household cult" or "domestic cult" component. In addition, it explores the agency women expressed in this practice. Biblical hints of household gods (Gen 31:30-37; Gen 35:2-4; Lev 26:1; Judg 17-18; 1 Sam 19:13; Ezek 20:24, 39), numerous religious artifacts found in archaeological excavations, and Karel van der Toorn's (1994) suggestion that Israelite houses had household shrines similar to the Mesopotamian ones discovered by Woolley at Ur inspired this research.

"Religion" refers to any system of beliefs and practices that relate to supernatural powers. "Family religion" indicates traditions and rituals a family or clan celebrates apart from city, state, or royal festivals and temples. The little defined and discussed "household cult" and "domestic cult" denominate in this research the subset of family religious practice that residents execute within a private house or in a neighborhood shrine. Although scholars frequently apply the terms "official" and "popular" in classifications of ancient Israelite religion, I employ them primarily in the quoted opinions of published archaeologists and biblical scholars. "Official" usually means a cult
that a state's dynasty or priests and writings they sponsor sanction, while "popular" denotes rituals ordinary people observe outside the domain of governmental religious authority. The terms official and popular prove problematic when used to describe Israelite religion because critical biblical scholars traditionally equate "official" with priestly or Deuteronomistically-approved law, whereas there is no assurance that the ruling dynasties in the pre-exilic Jerusalem temple actually adhered to such aniconic monotheistic ideals. Archaeological discoveries and the biblical texts themselves portray a scene of religious rituals performed in many locations by various groups of citizens including royalists. Furthermore, the term "popular" lacks precision for defining multifarious interest groups—traveling herdsmen, merchants, metalworkers, disenfranchised priests, military, female practitioners of the magic arts, and other women's groups. The somewhat disparaging term "folk religion" implies that people still execute primitive ceremonies that others have given up through enlightened intellect. "Magic" defines efforts to control events through symbolic ritual actions. In this research I show that magic and religion interrelate as facets of the same attempt to invoke supernatural powers to solve family and societal problems.

The subject of domestic cult matters because archaeologists and textual scholars have concentrated most of their study on the monumental architecture of urban sites, to the neglect of the everyday activities of common village people. In addition, the Hebrew Bible presents what Carol Meyers (1990:158) calls "the official and institutional manifestations of national religious life." Recent trends in modern scholarship focus attention on the rituals and ceremonies of ordinary citizens. The social concerns of our
generation require us to understand and appreciate the diversity of society, rather than dwelling on the activities of a male elite. People of Judeo-Christian faith study this topic because they view Israelite religion as the foundation on which Judaism and Christianity built, and they desire to understand their heritage. In addition, many contemporary women look for an assurance that their ancient sisters were religious agents, and some seek a historical connection with the divine feminine.

Architecture and Artifacts in Israelite Houses

My methodology begins with investigating what religious artifacts—deity figurines, offering stands, magic jewelry—came from 1200-586 BCE Israelite houses and whether there were any ritual architectural features—altars, cult niches, offering benches—associated with them. I identify Israelite houses according to the accepted typology current in the archaeological literature and with due consideration of evaluations of the excavators at individual sites. For instance, if an excavation report names a building “House 314” or identifies “Locus 314” in the list of loci as a room of a house, I give weight to the opinion of the excavator. However, I rely primarily on published site and house plans to determine whether the building under consideration is, in fact, an Israelite-type house and to assess the structural characteristics the accompanying prose report describes. I identify architectural furnishings as religious by defining cultic structures universal to cult-rooms in the ancient Near East, and in the southern Levant in particular—niches or offering benches for deity figurines and their votive gifts.
Certain artifacts are cultic if they resemble artifacts from recognized temples or shrines or embody religious terms or activities known from ancient texts. For example, the Hebrew Bible describes various cultic activities for Israelite religion—burning incense and oil lamps, offering grain and animal sacrifices, divining future events, producing music, and so forth. These involve the use of cultic equipment which survives in the material record. Also, Near Eastern texts mention representations of deities present in their shrines, and archaeological excavations find many of these. In addition, I use available texts to correlate artifacts with apotropaic functions.

**Women and Household Shrines**

Near Eastern parallels like the Mesopotamian *asīrtu* and *ibratu* shrines, the Ras Shamra “Temple of the Rhytons” and religious artifacts in residential neighborhoods, as well as Israelite period cult-rooms demonstrate that ancient Near Eastern people personalized and decentralized their religions. Excavations of four-room pillared houses at Israelite sites reveal the presence of many small artifacts that appear to be religious in character. These include female figurines, small limestone incense altars, clay incense chalices and stands, zoomorphic vessels and figurines, lamps, and various examples of apotropaic pendants and beads based in Near Eastern mythological traditions. Female figurines, including the pillar-base figurines, represent key elements in the discussion because their votive iconography suggests a female participant, and they come primarily from houses, which were female domains.
I explain which artifacts represent the feminine division of labor, then show that the cultic artifacts from Israelite houses exist in the context of women’s work areas and associate with feminine implements like food storage and preparation vessels, apotropaic jewelry and accessories, and textile tools. At four test sites—Tell Masos, Tell el-Far’ah (North), Beer-sheba, and Tell Halif—I identify offering structures for venerating household deities that occur in conjunction with religious artifacts.

Women as Religious Agents

I determine women’s agency in domestic cult by investigating women’s roles in ancient Israelite society, with particular attention to how the Hebrew Bible portrays them in religion and in the household. Israelites revered women as wise household administrators and educators, and ancient Near Eastern texts show that women initiated repetitive incantations. I argue that ancient Israelite women tended household shrines that protected their families by transacting religio-magical rituals that included incense offerings and prayers with figurines.

I delineate which goddesses Hebrew and other Semitic texts describe and suggest Israelite women’s motive in venerating or fearing them. I employ biblical texts and archaeological burial statistics to show that concerns with infertility, infant and female mortality, and the resulting small family inspired early Israelite women’s religious expression. I compile extensive examples of amulets against child-stealing demons from before, during, and after the time of the Israelite state, and I include modern Middle
Eastern ethnographic parallels of women's rituals that protect their breast milk and the infants who need it.

Moreover, I review and evaluate former interpretations of female figurines, including the Judean pillar-base figurines. By exploring a range of possible votive meaning for these large-breasted figurines, I establish that the iconography implies a ritualized contractual relationship between the protective goddess Asherah and a woman, as protection for herself and her newborn against child-stealing demons. The artifacts and architectural structures found in Israelite houses support this argument, and the Israelite woman's significant position as administrator, procreator, and wise teacher in the early Israelite household substantiates it. This thesis finds theoretical corroboration in modern Middle Eastern prayer and incense rituals that counteract the effects of the evil eye and child-stealing demons on mothers' milk and infant mortality.
CHAPTER ONE:
REVIEW OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Biblical scholars use ancient Near Eastern texts to illustrate the roots of Israelite religion as well as to emphasize the differences between Israelite and neighboring Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Canaanite religions. However, biblical studies and archaeological excavations in the Near East, as well as their amalgamation in what came to be known as Biblical Archaeology, have in the past century focused on the official and institutional manifestations of national religious life. New inscriptional and artifactual discoveries like the “Yahweh and his Asherah” inscriptions and accompanying iconography at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud encouraged a resurgence of interest in popular or family religion. Many archaeologists link female figurines found in excavations in the southern Levant to the cult of Asherah. Women biblical scholars have developed feminist approaches to the Bible that identified previously overlooked women’s roles in ancient Israelite religion, thereby highlighting their influence. Others decry women’s lack of position, suggesting their marginalization as the reason for their development of specifically female forms of nonconformist cults. Few researchers attempt to combine archaeology and the Bible in Women’s Studies.
History of Research on Israelite Religion

The study of Israelite religion has taken form in various approaches or "schools of thought" since the late nineteenth century. These approaches have differed in their interest in and application of extra-biblical data to the research. They also differ in their presuppositions and conclusions as to whether the Israelite religion was unique or rather was continuous with and similar to the religions of its ancient Near Eastern neighbors Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Syria. The mediate view asserts that it developed uniquely out of its Near Eastern context. A related issue is the character of Israelite religion in time and space: was it static or evolutionary; monolithic, or complex and multi-aspectual? Archaeological discoveries of sanctuaries and occurrences of the name of Yahweh have opened up new avenues of investigation into the religion of Israel.¹

Wellhausen's Critical Evolutionary Approach

Julius Wellhausen's 1883 Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels represents a century of literary critical theory on the origin and composition of the Hebrew Bible and Israelite religion. According to his critical approach, all ancient literature is a product of human culture, and the Bible is a body of literature to study and appraise by the same principles of scholarly research as any other ancient book. Wellhausen combined an

¹Some of the details of the history of research on Israelite religion have been taken from Herbert F. Hahn, The Old Testament in Modern Research (1966); Patrick D. Miller, "Israelite Religion" (1985); Richard E. Friedman, Who Wrote the Bible? (1987); and William G. Dever, "The Contribution of Archaeology to the Study of Canaanite and Early Israelite Religion" (1987) and Recent Archaeological Discoveries and Biblical Research (1990).
evolutionary model of interpreting Israelite religion with a reconstruction of the development of the sources of the Pentateuch.

Criticism of the Jewish and Christian tradition that Moses authored the first five books of the Bible had begun soon after the completion of the Hebrew canon with observations of third-person accounts about Moses, statements he would not have made about himself, the account of his death, references to peoples and places that date to a later time period, contradictions and doublets in narratives, and expressions like "to this day" that seem to place the author a long time after the events recorded. Attempted explanations began as early as Origen in the third century CE and continued through medieval times. In the fourteenth century Bonfils suggested that a later prophet interpolated some of these anachronisms, but in the sixteenth century Carlstadt, a contemporary of Luther, noted that they were written in the same style as the "Mosaic" texts, which led to suggestions of later editors who collected and arranged old texts. By the eighteenth century, investigators like Witter, Astruc, and Eichhorn had discovered that in most cases the doublet narratives could be distinguished by which of two different names for God they used. This theory of two sources was expanded in the nineteenth century to three sources, then to four when De Wette published his dissertation showing that the book of Deuteronomy used different language from the other books.

In an attempt to determine the relative order in which the sources were written, German biblical scholars employed Hegelian ideas of the historical development of civilization. Vatke analyzed Israelite religion into three stages—a nature/fertility religion which followed Canaanite cultic practices, a prophetic ethical stage, then a late stage of
priestly ritual law. Concurrently, Graf deduced a chronological order of the Pentateuchal sources using authors’ awareness of historical developments. Wellhausen combined these two approaches into his “Documentary Hypothesis.” He characterized the clergy, sacrifices, sanctuaries, and festivals of each stage, and concluded that the Yahwistic and Elohistic sources documented the fertility stage of Israelite religion. Deuteronomy belonged to the ethical stage, and the Priestly source came last from the legalistic stage.

This critique forced historians to think of the writer and identify his interests; however, it interpreted the biblical text exclusively from within a strictly textual-philological approach. Its proponents lacked knowledge of the religion’s historical background and comparison with its Near Eastern milieu. Wellhausen’s approach was based on the then-popular theory of the evolution of society. The evolutionary assumption that Israelite religion developed out of primitive animism ignored the ritual complexities of such religious systems. Scholars like Rudolph Kittel and Ernst Sellin of the History of Religion school showed that the Mosaic conception of ethical monolatry dated in fact much earlier than Wellhausen had proposed. In addition, Wellhausen’s approach overemphasized the importance of legal codes in Israelite history, which encouraged anti-Semitism because he caricatured Judaism as a degeneration while liberal Protestant Christendom epitomized the ethical pinnacle of biblical religion.²

² The articles by Hayes, Miller, and Silberman, in Semeia 25 provide more detailed critiques of these issues.
Anthropological Approaches to Israelite Religion and Magic

The anthropological school represented by William Robertson Smith and his 1889 work Lectures on the Religion of the Semites was a parallel development in the history of Israelite religion. Robertson Smith studied “primitive” Semitic religion through literary sources in Hebrew, Arabic, and classical languages. He held that primitive belief could be understood through community ritual institutions like sacrifice and holy sanctuaries. Sir James Frazer, famous for his book A Study in Magic and Religion (1890), expanded this study to include the beliefs and practices of all animistic peoples in an attempt to find parallels to the ideas and institutions of the Hebrew Bible. His method fell short because it ignored the complexity and development of Israelite religion and equated it with modern animistic societies. In addition, he settled for the anecdotal and descriptive rather than building a systematic theory.

Emile Durkheim of the French ethnological school wrote Theory of the Origin and Nature of Religion on the psycho-sociological background of religion. He linked religious feeling with social organization. His students Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss developed the idea of mana, the mysterious mental basis for magic and religion. Religion constituted a social phenomenon, whereas magic related to individuals. In this theory, the mystic, pre-modern mind recognized no distinction between the material and the spiritual. People included magic in the sphere of religious practice because they could manipulate invisible supernatural powers by physical means. When ritual manipulated an impersonal force, it was magical; when it addressed a personal deity, it was religion.
The anthropological approach to Israelite religion presented a breakthrough in interpretation. It opened the field to human conceptions of magic and religion rather than concentrating on theological debate. However, this anthropological analysis attempts to interpret the Bible in terms of a theory derived from the observation of external data, instead of using the point of view of the text itself. It lacks a sense of historical development and admits no stages or contemporary levels of practice; it reduces all of Israelite religion to one monolithic phenomenon. My present study will build on some of the anthropological school’s ideas by combining them with archaeological research and actual concerns expressed in the texts themselves.

The Myth and Ritual School

The Myth and Ritual school consisted of a group of Scandinavian and British scholars who postulated calendrical ritual festivals based on the religious literature of ancient Near Eastern communities. In a series of studies on the Psalms (1922-24), the Norwegian scholar Sigmund Mowinckel developed the theory of a magically based cult-myth of the enthronement of the Divine King, the Creator who was victorious over the primeval chaos. Johannes Pedersen (“Das Wesen der Magic,” 1926-27) discussed the ideas of “soul” and “holiness,” but his “phenomenology” of religion turned out to be descriptive and ideal, rather than actually historical. Samuel H. Hooke (“The Babylonian New Year Festival,” 1927; Myth and Ritual, 1933; The Origins of Early Semitic Ritual, 1938) represents the British group that defined a religious “culture pattern” diffused throughout the ancient Near East. This involved a specific set of myths and rituals
discernible in the religious texts of Egypt and Babylonia relating to a New Year religious
gallery centered in the person of the king. The festival was celebrated by reciting cult-
myths and acting them out ritually. Although Hooke recognized that the myths were
“disintegrated” and adapted as they were passed from culture to culture, he
overemphasized Near Eastern myth and ritual as the heart of Israelite religion, to the
neglect of the possibility that the Israelites reinterpreted their original meaning and
practice in their historical situation.

Although other scholars pointed out that the Ugaritic offering lists, other ritual
texts, and archaeological finds did not seem to match the rituals they extracted from the
mythological texts, British and Scandinavian scholars like Ivan Engnell (Studies in Divine
Kingship in the Ancient Near East, 1943) and Arvid Kapelrud (The Ras Shamra
Discoveries and the Bible, 1963) continued to debate the role of Israel’s king and the
place of the psalms in Israel’s public worship festivals. Although myth and ritual scholars
renewed interest in comparative Near Eastern religions and restored an emphasis on ritual
practice as opposed to literary criticism, they did not discuss family religious customs
outside the Jerusalem royal cult. They focused their attention on official male-dominated
political and religious institutions to the exclusion of popular or family religious practice
at shrines in the outlying country. In addition, they ignored the possibility of women’s
household religious rituals and customs.
The History of Religion School

The History of Religion school attempted to avoid apologetic bias and reference to supernatural factors by applying what they regarded as the scientific method to trace Israelite religious phenomena through historical phases. Hugo Winckler (Geschichte Israels, 1895, 1900; Das alte Westasien, 1899) extracted from the Amarna Letters a unified system of thought about nature and the universe accepted in the ancient Near East since the earliest times. This is referred to as the “pan-Babylonian” theory. As part of this movement, Friedrich Delitzsch (Babel und Bibel, 1902) sparked a controversy by writing that there was nothing in the Hebrew Bible that was not a “pale reflection” of Babylonian ideas. Hugo Gressmann (Der Ursprung der israelitisch-jüdischen Eschatologie, 1905) pointed out the Babylonian mythological parallels embedded in prophetic eschatology. Although the pan-Babylonian model lost credibility through its artificial systematization and lack of attention to the critical evolutionary interpretation of religious history, its revelation of Israel’s involvement in the interrelationships of ancient Near Eastern cultures provided the impetus to further comparative study. One drawback to its method, however, was its almost complete reliance on textual rather than material archaeological data.

Written before the extensive discoveries of modern archaeology, Rudolf Kittel’s A History of the Hebrews (1895) and Geschichte des Volkes Israel (1909-12), and Ernst Sellin’s Altestamentliche Religion in Rahmen der andern altorientalischen (1908) provided a moderate position that concentrated on the cultural situation in Palestine itself,
through Egyptian, Phoenician, and Babylonian texts that referred to Canaan, to show that the Mosaic conception of ethical monolatry was in fact much earlier than Wellhausen had proposed. The methodology introduced and developed by these scholars—an interest in the phenomenological (actual historical rather than metaphorical or theoretical), functional (role in shaping society), and comparative data and tools—has formed the basis for all following successful research on the history of Israelite religion. This approach recognized the socioeconomic and cultural influences of Israel’s predecessors and neighbors—a problem to theologians who insisted on Israelite religion’s unique and final revelation—but also studied how the religion adapted and developed outside influences to its own ideology. This dissertation will confirm that female household religious rituals expressed widespread and long-standing ancient Near Eastern conceptions of the evil eye and the child-stealing demons. While the names of the malevolent and beneficent deities varied between the cultures, many of the protective measures women used to counteract evil forces remained similar across international borders and throughout the centuries.

Form Criticism

Some of the same biblical scholars who espoused the religio-historical approach went on to develop form criticism which analyzed literary forms in biblical literature and tried to identify the Sitz en Leben “life situation” of the Israelite people that underlies the religious oral traditions and festivals. This approach grew out of sociological trends that emphasized common people as opposed to individual leaders as the source of cultural
history. For example, Hermann Gunkel, who had previously investigated the mythology underlying biblical concepts of the beginning and the end of the world (*Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit*, 1895), in several works ranging from 1904 to 1933 built on and anticipated similar psalms in the literature of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Ugarit in order to describe the long history of Israel’s religious poetry as cultic hymns chanted in local shrine rituals.

Various Scandinavian history-of-tradition scholars and continental scholars like Hugo Gressmann, Gerhard von Rad, and later Martin Noth, followed this method and attempted to find the *Sitz en Leben* of prophetic and historical discourses. For example, Alfred Haldar (*Associations of Cult Prophets among the Ancient Semites*, 1945) described associations of cult prophets attached to various shrines in the monarchical period who originated, developed and transmitted oral prophetic pronouncements. Von Rad (*Das formgeschichte Problem des Hexateuchs*, 1938) showed how the Yahwist molded old documents into an ideological history of Israel’s beginnings in the religious framework of God’s work in history. Noth used the same kind approach for the Deuteronomistic History.

While form criticism had the distinct advantage of bringing attention to the socioeconomic and religious interests of common population groups as contrasted with divine king ideologues in ancient Israel, it tended to base its historical reconstructions primarily on textual analysis. Archaeological research by those interested in the “little people” can add much more data about the socioeconomic context that fomented Israel’s
religious expression. In some cases this school has neglected or misinterpreted already available archaeological information in favor of its ideology, as is the case in its theory of the nomadic infiltration hypothesis of Israelite origins. To a great extent this group of scholars supported using the biblical texts for theological purposes rather than understanding the actual cultic rituals practiced in ancient Israel.

**Biblical Archaeology**

The European literary or “higher” critical view propounded by scholars like Wellhausen who presumed that the Bible was composed of late, edited, historically unreliable documents was challenged by the Biblical Archaeology movement in American Protestantism. Melvin G. Kyle, editor of *The Fundamentals* (1906) was an early proponent of biblical archaeology with his monographs *The Deciding Voice of the Monuments in Biblical Criticism* (1912) and *The Problem of the Pentateuch: A New Solution by Archaeological Methods* (1920). William F. Albright, the major figure in archaeology, wanted to discredit the excessive skepticism about the value of the Bible as a source of history by placing it in its historical and literary background. He took archaeology from an amateur “prove-the-Bible” activity to a scientific and critically based study of biblical history. His historical descriptions of Canaanite and Israelite religion include both textual and material archaeological evidence. Albright’s significant works include *The Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible* (1935), *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process* (1940), *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (1942), “The Old Testament and the Archaeology of the Ancient East”
in *The Old Testament and Modern Study* (Rowley, 1951), and *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (1968).

In the 1950's and 1960's, archaeological excavations affiliated with the American Schools of Oriental Research and funded and staffed by Protestant seminaries were led by prominent scholars such as Paul Lapp at Ta'anach, Joseph Callaway at ‘Ai, James Pritchard at Gibeon, and G. Ernest Wright at Shechem. As Protestant clergymen supported by seminaries, these excavators had a vested interest. Their overriding purpose was to prove that the Bible was historically reliable by substantiating its major personalities and events. This Albrightian school tried to fit the narratives of Genesis, Exodus, and Joshua into specific chronological time periods in defiance of the layering of the written tradition that had been claimed by literary critics. These archaeologists searched for material evidence of Abraham and the patriarchs, Moses and the Exodus, Joshua and his conquest of Jericho and Canaan, Solomon’s building projects, and other such foundation stones to their ideology. Israeli scholars like Yigael Yadin were also interested in biblical archaeology, but mostly in issues of the Israelite settlement history that gave credibility to Israel’s post-war national presence in Palestine. Biblical archaeology was able to reveal the remains of material culture and perhaps some patterns of behavior, but was not as successful as hoped in documenting the Bible’s personalities or ideology, since they were not as generally visible.

As a result of its fundamental purpose the biblical archaeology movement focused heavily on political history related to the conquest of Canaan with its public buildings, fortification gates and walls, and destruction layers, all dated by pottery sequences, rather
than on Israelite religion and the socioeconomic background it developed in. Excavation sites were chosen by biblical prominence. Although ancient Israel was predominantly rural rather than urban, biblical archaeologists gave very little attention to surveying the central hill country to locate farming villages. This tended to produce an unbalanced, elitist view of Israelite culture. In the process they discarded much evidence that could have constructed a more realistic picture of early Israelite life because it was irrelevant to the personalities and events they were seeking to substantiate. In the last decades Israeli archaeologists' regional surveys have turned up hundreds of small Israelite village sites in the central hill country:

To begin with, the typical early Israelite sites are mostly in the central regions of Palestine, especially the hill country, and not on destroyed or deserted Late Bronze sites (where they had previously been sought), but founded in the early twelfth century B.C. Most are small unwalled villages, characterized by early four-room courtyard houses, rock-hewn cisterns, and silos—all features typical of the material culture of agrarian or peasant societies. The economy is based on small-scale terrace farming, with some herding of livestock and primitive cottage industries, but also with some evidence of trade with more distant urban centers. ...the small architectural units, the agrarian economy, and the egalitarian social structure can be directly compared with Biblical descriptions of tribal life in the period of the Judges. (Dever 1990:78, 80)

American Protestant clergymen were not looking for neighborhood shrines because they thought that all Israelites traveled to the Jerusalem temple for religious assemblies. Biblical archaeologists were not fully aware of aspects of the agricultural economy that produced overwhelming concerns about rainfall and water supply integral to livestock and crop fertility. Otherwise they might have understood why the authors of the biblical texts were preoccupied with the threat of the Canaanite fertility deities Baal
and Asherah and why Israelite religious festivals followed the agricultural calendar. The Israelite village house and what women did there were not interesting to these male clergymen. They represented male-dominated aniconic religious and political institutions, and they researched male-dominated aniconic religious and political institutions.

Albright's student G. Ernest Wright continued the combination of archaeology and biblical studies. He was active both in the emphasis on archaeology and human religion and in the interest in theology as God's revelation in history. Wright's monographs *The Old Testament Against its Environment* (1950), *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* (1952), and *Biblical Archaeology* (1957) stressed the importance of the historical basis of biblical religion and underlined the superiority and uniqueness of Israel's faith in contrast to its Near Eastern neighbors. The ideological *tendenz* of these books is clear. Although Albright and Wright used Ugaritic and Phoenician materials and acknowledged Canaanite influences on the religion and culture of Israel, they maintained the Israelite religion was "monotheistic" as opposed to all preceding and contemporary Near Eastern "pagan" and "polytheistic" religions. Israelite religion was unique because it had been uniquely revealed by God, whereas other religions were man-made. Biblical archaeologists did not compare early Israelite pottery, temple forms and burial patterns with their Philistine and Canaanite counterparts in order to establish a continuity because they believed that Israelites were a new and separate people. Any religious objects or small female figurines they found were "Canaanite" or "magical," not Israelite. Since the biblical writers condemned these objects, they were not considered part of the real
Israelite religion. Biblical archaeologists' uncritical stance on the biblical texts biased these investigations and influenced their conclusions.

**Biblical Theology**

The Biblical Theology movement launched by Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* in the 1930's reacted to religious historians' relativism with a reemphasis on the uniqueness and revelatory nature of Israelite religion. This trend was evident in the United States and in England in neo-orthodox theology which synthesized the historical point of view with theology by saying that revelation was the learning of God's will through historical events. On the Continent, too, the idea of "the religion of Israel" became unpopular and problematic, exemplified in Gerhard von Rad's introductory chapter "A History of Yahwism and the Sacral Institutions of Israel" which is not really integrated into the subject matter of his *Old Testament Theology* that presupposed a static, noncomplex monotheism.

The Jewish scholar Yehezkel Kaufmann's postwar multivolume *History of Israelite Religion* (1937-56, 1960) seemed to ignore the extensive comparative work on the Ugaritic texts by other Jewish scholars like H. L. Ginsberg, Umberto Cassuto, Cyrus Gordon, Nahum Sarna and others in its insistence that Israel's monotheistic religion was an original creation of the people of Israel in contrast to the polytheistic pagan religions of the ancient Near East. Kaufmann acknowledged two levels of Yahwistic religion—royal public cult and popular folk practices that worshiped Yahweh in pagan, idolatrous (but not Canaanized, syncretized) ways. Popular religion was as monotheistic and
nonmythological as the public royal cult. Kaufmann disliked Wellhausen’s idea that
Israelite religion was dynamic. For him Israelite religion was so far removed from
paganism that it could not even understand it; it regarded it as “fetishism.”

Poponents of this approach completely divorced their insistence on the divine
revelation of Israelite religion from the realities of the religious environment from which
it had arisen. Kaufmann’s anti-materialist bias focuses more on the literature about the
religion of Israel than on a description of actual religious practice. He takes the Priestly
source more seriously than evidence excavated from Israelite sites. The chief method of
evaluating “histories” of Israelite religion such as Kaufmann’s is analyzing their source of
information. It is important to extract details from the biblical accounts without allowing
our own or the editors’ theological bias to cloud obvious material remains of a Canaanite-
influenced henotheistic Israelite cult.

Surveys of the History of Israelite Religion from the 1960’s and 1970’s

Several histories of Israelite religion written in the 1960’s and 1970’s, Prophecy
and Covenant (R. E. Clements, 1965), The Religion of Ancient Israel (Th. C. Vriezen,
1967), and two books by Werner H. Schmidt, Alttestamentlicher Glaube und Seine
Umwelt: Zur Geschichte des alttestamentlichen Gottesverständnis (1968) and Das erste
Gebot (1969), actually focus on theology and apologetics. Schmidt’s history deals with
Israel’s idea of God and argues for the distinctiveness of Israelite religion on the basis of
the claim of exclusive and aniconic worship of Yahweh. Schmidt relies on a late, edited
text for his interpretation and ignores extensive data of images and names of other gods from archaeological excavations of Israelite sites.

Although Clements notes the selectivity of the canonical writings with respect to "false" prophets, he deals exclusively with theological issues such as the election of Israel, the law, and Israel's worship, all from the perspective of public male-oriented religious institutions. He devotes an entire chapter to the pre-exilic prophets' use and interpretation of the law, but he does not mention the role of the prophetess Huldah, seemingly the first interpreter of written Deuteronomistic law (2 Kgs 22:14-20). According to the Deuteronomistic historian, the Davidic king consulted Huldah rather than her well-known contemporary Jeremiah. While narrators of the Bible and its modern interpreters often leave women on the periphery of society, in this case "the narrator accepts the existence of an influential female intermediary as a matter of course. This suggests that powerful women may have been more numerous in ancient Israel than the biblical record suggests" (Darr 1991:41). But Clements did not discuss women in Israelite religion.

Vriezen's chapter "The Religion of Ancient Israel against the Religions of the Ancient East" characterizes Israel's religion by contrasting biblical texts with those of Egypt, Babylon, and Phoenicia. Vriezen (1967:72) claims for Israelite religion a dynamic monotheism incomparable with the static pantheizing kind of solar monarchism of Egyptian religion. According to Vriezen (1967:72), Israel's religion was teleological or apocalyptic rather than cyclical. It was not rooted in the natural and vegetative phenomena fundamental to Canaanite-Phoenician religion; it was not conditioned by
sexual potentialities or the agricultural cycle. Vriezen (1967:73) reiterates three differences between Yahwism and the gods of Canaan in the realm of fertility—Yahwism denigrates magic rituals to induce fertility; Yahweh is nonsexual; and he does not die and rise again. Vriezen does not recognize the fact that the agricultural cycle formed the basis of the Israelite religious calendar.

Furthermore, Vriezen does not investigate roles of women in Israelite religion, nor does he seek to identify Israelite female figurines with a goddess. He denies any feminine aspect:

Whereas in the Phoenician world goddesses and gods appear side by side, the former often envisaged as naked, and even El is said to have debauched two female deities, such a thing is inconceivable in Israel...and one has to add that not only is there no female consort of the godhead in Israel, but the priestly office is never exercised by women. They are increasingly excluded from all direct contact with the holy place. (Vriezen 1967:73)

Vriezen also states that Israelite religion was unlike Babylonian dualism and naturalism:

The world is not a battle-ground of forces personified by the gods, but is defined and determined absolutely by a single Power to whom all forces are subject. Even at the stage when what men believed about God was not monotheistic in the strict sense, Yahweh was absolute master of all the powers. Not one of the beings around him had a name...Yahwism took up the fight not only against images but against every form of demonism, questioning of the dead, magic and soothsaying. It was permitted to the faithful Israelite only to ask of Yahweh regarding his will and for his help; and he was required to forgo all other kinds of religious prop. At the practical level of religious conduct Yahweh was the one and only God long before monotheism as a theory was carried to its logical conclusion. (Vriezen 1967:76)

That Israel was “required to forgo” demons, images and “all other kinds of religious prop” actually says nothing about “the practical level of religious conduct.” The
biblical text itself hints at the fact that at the practical level of daily life Israelites continued to serve other gods and goddesses besides Yahweh. Archaeological discoveries, unrecognized or minimized by such scholars who insist on the monotheistic character of the ancient Israelite cult, reemphasize Israelites' reliance on goddesses and magic jewelry to avert natural disasters and demonic powers. In the following chapters I will discuss convincing archaeological evidence for Israelites' preoccupation with these concerns.

Georg Fohrer (History of Israelite Religion, 1972), through a renewed application of literary criticism, understands Israelite religious history in the sequential stages of Mosaic Yahwism, kingship, prophecy, Deuteronomistic theology, and incipient eschatology, the latter clearly influenced by Christian theology. Fohrer (1972:49) identifies the uniqueness of Yahweh on the basis of his ethical demands and his actions directly with people and nations rather than within the cycle of nature. Fohrer's approach is more of a theological history than a sociological history of Israelite religion, and it uses literary criticism rather than archaeology as its research method.

Israelite Religion (Helmer Ringgren, 1966) includes brief analyses of the pre-Davidic, exilic and post-exilic periods of Israelite religion, but it focuses primarily on the time of the monarchy. Ringgren's study cites textual information about ancient Near Eastern religions as a background against which to contrast Israelite "affective monotheism" (1966:99). Ringgren (1966:157) acknowledges that the findings of archaeology confirm literary source mentions of bāmôt "high places, open-air shrines" with their altar and massēbāt "sacred stelae," although the wooden "asherah" post that
symbolized the Canaanite mother-goddess of fertility that accompanied them is no longer visible because of natural organic decay. According to Ringgren (1966:157-58), high places consisted of Canaanite shrines Israelites had taken over to worship Yahweh:

Presumably, however, the worship at these sites was not directed to Canaanite divinities, or at least not exclusively to them, but also to Yahweh. In any case, the high places suggest a syncretistic pattern of thought.

Although Ringgren uses the biblical texts critically, since they “represent the viewpoint of the religion of Yahweh that ultimately won out, and as a consequence are strongly tinged with polemic” (1966:96), he bases his defense of Israelite monolatry on them:

But we are obviously confronted with a situation in which the worship of other gods by foreign nations is accepted as an empirical fact, while Yahweh alone is of significance for the Israelites.

Ringgren (1966:100, 103) claims that hypostases, that is personified attributes of Yahweh, did not develop into independent divinities in Yahwism. Also the belief in demons was superfluous since both good and bad came from Yahweh.

Ringgren and Fohrer follow the persistent habit of Protestant male clergymen—they base their descriptions of the ancient Israelite cult almost entirely on the biblical text. This results in a focus on topics like the kingship of Yahweh, the temple, and the roles of cultic functionaries that are important to the religious establishment that supports them. They ignore the roles of women and non-conformist population groups. As Katheryn Darr (1991:40) puts it:

If ancient Israel’s patriarchal social structures had exercised no influence whatsoever upon the shapers of Israel’s traditions—if women were, in fact, scarce
in ancient Israel (as the paucity of biblical material about women might, on the face of things, suggest), and if women's experiences and contributions actually were, as many narratives present them, limited primarily to their sexual and reproductive capabilities—then a hermeneutic of suspicion would be unnecessary. As we noted above, however, feminists and other scholars as well have become increasingly aware that wholly objective, utterly undistorted accounts and reconstructions of history were as impossible for ancient Israelite authors and editors as they are for contemporary writers.

The pre-feminist bias of these scholars is exhibited by the title of Ringgren's chapter seven: "Man before God."

Histories of Israelite religion written in the 1960's and 1970's followed the examples of earlier ones. They analyzed the biblical text to prove that the Israelite religion was aniconic and monotheistic—distinct from and better than other ancient Near Eastern religions. They paid little attention to the religion practiced by the private citizens in their home neighborhoods, and they ignored the religious concerns, activities and contributions of women. Today, women are looking for clues hidden in the biblical text that specify women's roles. The additional information that archaeology and sociology are providing to the study of Israelite religion is receiving increasing attention.

Sociological Approaches to Israelite History and Religion

when he examined *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (1978), but he based his conclusions predominantly on a literary analysis of early P material, that is, sections of levitical law authored by priests. Although these historians are to be commended on their incorporation of archaeological discoveries, their titles evidence continued attention to public cultic institutions and installations, with little interest shown to family religion.

George Mendenhall ("The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine," 1962; *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition*, 1973) inaugurated the peasants’ revolt model of Israelite origins by reconstructing the socioeconomic background of Israelite religion through interdisciplinary research methods. By applying sociological and anthropological theory, Mendenhall used clues in the biblical text as well as ethnographic divergences from modern Bedouin cultures to argue against Alt’s and Noth’s nomadic peaceful infiltration theory of Israelite settlement. For Mendenhall (1962:73), Israel’s establishment was a socio-political process from a historical perspective, “a peasants’ revolt against the network of interlocking Canaanite city-states.” Mendenhall reiterated an old idea of covenant as the founding and defining character of Israelite religious and social structure. The covenant was certainly an important concept in Mesopotamian and Israelite cultures, and I will argue in the following that the ancient Near Eastern idea of covenant with a protective personal deity was the basis for Israelite women’s relationship with the goddess Asherah expressed through the use of votive female figurines.

Although Mendenhall was unable to corroborate his peasant revolt theory with archaeological data from the appropriate time frame, his work launched a new era in biblical studies and served as an impetus to Norman Gottwald’s important book *The
Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E. (1979). Gottwald employed a sociological theory close to Marxist cultural determinism to suggest that Israel began as an egalitarian socioreligious revolution. According to Gottwald’s theory,

sectors of the indigenous populace joined in a combined sociopolitical and religious revolution against the imperial and hierarchic tribute-imposing structures of Egyptian-dominated Canaan. This tributary mode of production (often called the Asiatic mode of production) laid on the mass of peasants and herdsmen heavy burdens of taxation in kind, forced labor, and military service. Indebted peasants, deprived of independent means of subsistence, were recruited as cultivators of large estates or reduced to the status of tenant farmers. A large percentage of the communal productive energy and resources went into warfare and the luxuried life of the ruling classes that included lavish religious displays. (1985:284, 272)

While Mendenhall’s and Gottwald’s chief purpose was to draw attention to the socioeconomic history of Israel’s settlement, their impact was twofold—they claimed that most Israelites were indigenous Canaanites and they called attention to the actual social and economic context in which the biblical population lived. Gottwald allowed that the peasant revolutionaries were joined by a small exodus group of immigrants from Egypt, but his claim that most Israelites were indigenous collided with the traditional view that all Israelites were alien invaders who had a completely unique religion revealed to them by Yahweh. The theory that Israelites were former Canaanites who developed their own new form of Canaanite religion rekindled the fire of comparative research on the Canaanite and Israelite religions. For example, a 1983 study by Baruch Halpern, The Emergence of Israel in Canaan, claims that Israelite religion was a Canaanite religion because of the continuity of Israelite with Late Bronze Age Canaanite culture.
Gottwald is famous for his statement, "Only as the full materiality of ancient Israel is more securely grasped will we be able to make proper sense of its spirituality" (Gottwald 1979:xxv). This was the invitation the new archaeology needed to begin to explore not just royal institutions, but the daily lives of real people. It was a stimulus to locate and examine the material remains of Israelite houses and village shrines to see how ordinary citizens actually lived and worshiped. In this dissertation I use information in both ancient Near Eastern texts and archaeology to draw attention to the socioeconomic concerns behind the use of Israelite female figurines and incense burners in Israelite household cult.

Canaanite and Israelite Continuity

The relation of Canaanite and Israelite religion continues to be the focus of studies of the Ugaritic texts such as John Gray’s The Legacy of Canaan: The Ras Shamra Texts and Their Relevance to the Old Testament (1965) and Jean-Michel de Tarragon’s La culte à Ugarit d’après les textes de la pratique en cunéiformes alphabétiques (1980). These studies, however, make little or no reference to the archaeological remains of the Canaanite religion that the texts suggest. Frank M. Cross (Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic, 1973) built on Alt’s analysis of patriarchal clan religion (Der Gott der Väter, 1929) and Albright’s work on Near Eastern parallels. He studied the strands of the ancient Near Eastern world that combined in the pre-settlement origins of Israel—Amorite clan deities, Canaanite religion, especially its Baal imagery, Hittite treaties, even Old Akkadian sources—to reconstruct aspects of the history of Israelite religion. Cross’s study of the
origins of Israel’s delivering god Yahweh focuses primarily on the biblical texts, but uses linguistic, literary, and religious parallels from the ancient Near East to understand it. Cross interacts with the approaches of Wellhausen, the myth and ritual school of Scandinavia and Great Britain, and the German *heilsgeschichte* "history-of-redemption" associates of Noth and von Rad. He concludes:

> Israel’s choice of the epic form to express religious reality, and the elevation of this form in their cultic drama, illustrates both the linkage of the religion of Israel to its Canaanite past and the appearance of novelty in Israel’s peculiar religious concern with the ‘historical.’ (Cross 1973.ix)

Cross sees order and development in Israelite religion, but he disagrees with literary and form critics who teach that qualities like long, complex, and rational are necessarily late features, whereas brief, simple, and primitive features are early. Archaeologists highly esteem his work, although his “archaeology” consists almost exclusively of examining ancient texts rather than actual material culture. Cross avoids both the extremes of those who claim that Israelite religion is newly revealed by God and thus completely “other” than Near Eastern polytheistic religions and the mistakes of those who say, conversely, that Israelite religion and culture continued on with the same mythology, pantheon, and rituals, unchanged from Canaanite and Mesopotamian origins.³

William G. Dever emphasizes the usefulness of Late Bronze Age material archaeological evidence for connecting parallel religious practices in the Bible and in

---

³ Mark S. Smith (*The Early History of God*, 1990) continued Cross’s textual research into the development of the Israelite God. I discuss his view that Canaanite goddess imagery was conflated and attributed to Yahweh later in this chapter in the section “Research on the Goddess Asherah.”
ancient texts in the study of early Israelite religion. For example, in “Recent Archaeological Confirmation of the Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel” (1982) and “Asherah, Consort of Yahweh? New Evidence from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud” (1984), Dever argues that the inscriptions found at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud show that the forty mentions of ʾāšērād in the Hebrew Bible refer to the old Canaanite goddess personified and actually worshiped in ancient Israel as the consort of Yahweh, and he explains the origin and significance of the Asherah cult by reference to Late Bronze Age iconography repeated at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud. In “Material Remains and the Cult in Ancient Israel” (1983), “The Contribution of Archaeology to the Study of Canaanite and Early Israelite Religion” (1987), “The Silence of the Text: An Archaeological Commentary on 2 Kings 23” (1994), as well as in his book Recent Archaeological Discoveries and Biblical Research (1990), Dever gives archaeological support for additional aspects of the continuity of the Canaanite fertility cult in Israel and the diversity of actual popular religious practice including unauthorized priests, bāmōt “high places, open-air shrines,” massēbōt “sacred stelae,” proscribed altars and incense offerings, horse-and-chariot imagery connected with solar and astral deities, and magic. Dever’s research substantiates with material archaeology what textual scholars had already suggested from examination of the Ugaritic texts—Israelites continued old Canaanite religious traditions adapted to a new social and economic environment. Dever shows that material artifacts are valuable affirmations or correctives to theories derived solely from biblical and other Near Eastern texts. Although sympathetic to the archaeological investigation of domestic cult and related Women’s Studies issues, Dever’s work stops short of these specialized treatments.
De-centralized Domestic, Popular, or Family Cult in Ancient Israel

John S. Holladay, Jr. published an important article, "Religion in Israel and Judah under the Monarchy: An Explicitly Archaeological Approach," in 1987. He classified Iron I and Iron II religious sites in the Levant into an aniconic "establishment" praxis, localized "nonconformist" worship, and a "distributed" domestic cultus on the basis of the presence or absence of site features such as prestige of location; size and number of rooms/spaces; accessibility; evidence of foreign influence; architectural immobilia—steleform stones, large altars for burnt offerings, favissae, podiums and benches; and artifacts like incense altars and figurines. Although his classification is not necessarily definitive, his identification and quantification of religiously affective attributes is a step beyond opinion and subjectivity.

In relation to the thesis of this dissertation, Holladay (1987:294, n.126) notes that women might have been the primary participants in the distributed cultus, but he does not see any way of testing that hypothesis, except possibly through ethnographic analogy. He also posits the idea of a two-story house in which the ground floor is used for "storage, animal stalling areas, and work space," so that domestic shrines, located on the no-longer-existing second floor, could not or would not be found in situ (Holladay 1987:292, n.113; Holladay 1992; Holladay 1997). I evaluate these views in the light of Mesopotamian parallels that show house shrines in central courtyards and protective figurines near the door to the street, and I present evidence for religious artifacts in women's work and living areas.
Popular Religion

Around 1990 biblical scholars responded to archaeological discoveries of figurine caches and outlying shrines with textual studies on popular religion—how women and dissident groups practiced Israelite religion outside the sanction of the prophets and Deuteronomists. Susan Ackerman’s articles “And the Women Knead Dough’: The Worship of the Queen of Heaven in Six-Century Judah” (1989) and “The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel” (1993) shifted attention from the idealistic male-dominated institutional focus of most biblical studies to women’s leadership in goddess worship. Ackerman bases “Marzeah in Ezekiel 8:7-13” (1989) and her monograph Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah (1992) mostly on prophetic denunciations of idolatry in the biblical text. Her coordination of negative biblical citations with clues in other ancient Near Eastern texts serves as an invaluable springboard for a more comprehensive study that includes the positive assertions of archaeological remains.

Jacques Berlinerblau (The Vow and the Popular Religious Groups of Ancient Israel, 1996) highlights the need to define popular religion in positive terms and the importance of recognizing the diversity in social groupings within ancient Israel, among them heterodoxies, non-privileged economic classes, and women. For women, he concludes that a vow was a convenient medium of religious expression, since it could be practiced outside the sphere of religious and political authority structures. Although both of these scholars bring a necessary change of focus to biblical studies through worthy
textual analyses, they give only scant attention to the archaeological record. My survey of
cultic structures and artifacts found in Israelite houses adds considerable detail to the
picture of women’s ritual in ancient Israelite religion.

*Personal and Family Religion in Israel and Mesopotamia*

Thorkild Jacobsen (*The Treasures of Darkness*, 1976) cites Mesopotamian
“Penetential Psalms” and “Letters to the Gods” in parallel with post-Amarna Egyptian
prayers and biblical Psalms to attribute personal religion, as opposed to national or
official religion, to developments in second millennium BCE Mesopotamian religion that
spread from there to Egypt and Israel. While Jacobsen provides evidence for both male
and female personal deities in Mesopotamia, he confines his application of the idea of a
personal god to an Israelite male god. I discuss Jacobsen’s analysis in Chapter Three:
House Gods and Shrines in the Ancient Near East and then apply his insights on the
nature and function of personal gods to the covenant relationship Israelite women had
with the Israelite protective goddess Asherah.

Rainer Albertz, in his two books *Persönliche Frömmigkeit und offiziele Religion*
[Personal Piety and Official Religion](1978) and *A History of Israelite Religion in the
Old Testament Period* (1994), develops the theme of personal or family religion as a
stratum separate from state religion and compares it to what can be observed about
“patriarchal religion,” that is, the religion of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the Hebrew
Bible. He states:
So 'patriarchal religion' is to be defined not as a preliminary stage but as a substratum of Yahweh religion. This stratum of family religion is a preliminary stage only to the degree that it shows an amazing similarity to other Near Eastern religions, going as far back as Sumero-Babylonian religion at the beginning of the second millennium. (Albertz 1994:29)

Albertz attempts to describe the development of Israelite religion not as a history of ideas, but from a social basis as a social and theological clash between a plurality of different regional and sociological groups. In this internal religious pluralism, the charge of “syncretism” cannot be leveled at any particular strain; family religion was not any more syncretistic than the official state cult. Albertz wants his reconstructed history to fit all of the data available from the biblical texts, archaeology and history. Although he alludes to material archaeology in both books, he contributes mainly by extracting from texts the concepts ancient Babylonians and Israelites had of the abilities and responsibilities of their personal gods, and what prayer and offering rituals they practiced with their representations in local or household shrines.

Albertz claims that a family member rather than a professional priest led the Israelite cult to personal guardian deities that centered in the household or a local shrine. Hampered somewhat by male bias, he extrapolates from the term “god of my father” and the recorded examples of Abraham (Gen 13:18) and Jacob (Gen 35:7) building altars in sacred spots and Micah (Judg 17:5) appointing his son as “priest” for his family, that a
male fulfilled this function. However, Albertz (1994:33-34) admits that women, their practices, and their ideas that relate to family survival played an amazingly central role:

When one remembers that women in Israel were largely excluded from the official cult, the central role assigned to their world of religious experience in family religion is amazing.

Albertz notes the central role women played in family religion through their reception of theophanic birth promises directly from the personal family deity without an institutionalized mediator. In addition to the series of features related to the promise of a son, the relationship of an Israelite woman to the family deity included the deity's unconditional care in actions like rescuing small children from various threats and preventing infant mortality; biblical narratives like the story of Hagar in Gen 21:16-21 exhibit this care (Albertz 1994:34). Although Hagar is a favorite subject of feminist biblical rhetoric because of her reception of the direct revelatory word of God and her oppressed position as an African slave, her experience has not really been extended to an understanding of Israelites' concerns with prenatal and neonatal mortality and women's religious practices that stem from these concerns. I develop these overlooked themes in a cross-cultural and archaeological study to determine aspects of women's ritual designed to protect themselves and their children. Albertz does not synthesize archaeological data for family religion or for women, an oversight the present study corrects.


---

**Women's Roles in Ancient Israelite Religion**

Phyllis Bird pioneered the analysis of women's roles in Israelite religion in several articles: “Images of Women in the Old Testament” (1974), “The Place of Women in the Israelite Cultus” (1987), “Women’s Religion in Ancient Israel” (1989), and “Israelite Religion and the Faith of Israel’s Daughters: Reflections on Gender and Religious Definition” (1991). She discussed various female roles in the premonarchic period, but claimed that the reorganization of the cultus under the monarchy and again in the postexilic period, with the progressive movement from multiple cultic centers to a central site that finally claimed legitimacy and sole control over certain ritual events, necessarily restricted the participation of women in pilgrim feasts and limited opportunities for women to seek guidance, release, and consolation at local shrines which were declared illegitimate or demolished (Bird 1987:411).

Bird cited ethnographic parallels from sources including Susan S. Sered, *Women as Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Sephardi Jewish Women in Israel* (1986); E. Friedl, “Islam and Tribal Women in a Village in Iran” (1980); E. Fernea, *Guests of the Sheik* (1969); and A. H. Betteridge, “The Controversial Vows of the Urban Muslim Women in Iran” (1980) to show that women react to imbalance of religious authority in various ways: they may accept male definitions as normative and themselves as incompetent religiously; they may develop and lead parallel women's activities; or they...

---

may interpolate religious ritual into traditional secular roles (1989:295). Bird suggested that home-centered religious activities would have replicated the same pattern of male participation and leadership as the patriarchal society at public worship. According to Bird (1989:287), any reconstruction of women’s religion in ancient Israel must depend on analogy to other Near Eastern sources, although these are as male- and public-oriented and fragmentary as those from Israel. She considered archaeological artifacts such as female figurines, cultic installations and paraphernalia to be mute with respect to women’s practice and point of view (Bird 1989:286).

Although Bird has done masterful analyses of the biblical text, she is weak in archaeology and Near Eastern parallels. She limits her use of Near Eastern continuities to brief mentions of topics like the similarity between Israelite laws and those of Mesopotamia and Syria. She has not acknowledged that iconography speaks loudly and that household artifacts can reveal a good deal about women’s daily activities. She states that the ancient Israelite family “is a sphere of activity from which we can expect little or no direct documentation” (Bird 1989:285). She assumes that ancient Israelite women were marginalized and largely excluded from religious expression, so she cites ethnographic parallels on women who have been marginalized in modern patriarchal societies. She does not give much credence to the power ancient Israelite women had as administrators and educators in their households. Bird also has not explored ancient

6 Whereas Albertz uses the term “patriarchal” to refer to the religion Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob practiced, Bird uses the term in its feminist sense of “male-dominated.”
Israelite women’s participation in laments or rituals concerning childlessness, the promise of a son, and child mortality documented in biblical narrative texts such as Genesis 16 and 21 (Sarah and Hagar), Genesis 25 (Rebecca), Genesis 30 and 35 (Rachel), Judges 13 (Samson’s mother), 1 Samuel 1-2 (Hannah), 2 Kings 4 (the Shunammite), and Isa 54:1-6 (metaphor of Israel) and their parallels in ancient and modern Middle Eastern women’s beliefs and practices. Fears of childlessness occasioned by infertility, miscarriage, infant death, or even their own death in childbirth significantly motivated women’s religious expression across the cultures.

*Women’s Role in the Israelite Household*

to increase the work force, a difficult task due to the high death rate of women and children (Meyers 1988:61).

Meyers stresses the centrality of the family household unit in early Israelite society and the pivotal role women played in household functions. She extracts the primary role of women in the socialization and educative process from wisdom metaphors in the Book of Proverbs (1988:149-54; 1991). Moreover, Meyers states that "the material evidence for a private or family religion at any period in Israelite history has yet to be systematically collected and studied (1988:158)," but she suggests that biblical clues to reconstructing the cultic life of Israelite households come from hints at domestic religious activities such as girls' puberty rites (Judg 11:39-40), harvest dances (Judg 21:20-21) and childbirth rites (Lev 12:6-8). Meyers is skeptical about identifying with a goddess the terracotta plaques and statuettes of naked females that come from household contexts, but she considers them votive objects that express female religious life and concern for the role of motherhood. Meyers does not attempt to explain why such votive objects would be found in a house. She says, however, that "if any vestiges of goddess worship existed, women would probably have been directly involved with religious activity in domestic and perhaps also public shrines" (1988:163).

Meyers makes an excellent start at combining the biblical text with archaeology to reconstruct the life of ancient Israelite women. However, she does not delve too deeply into ancient Near Eastern archaeology and texts or modern Middle Eastern ethnographies to find information on women and household shrines. Also, Meyers does not try to investigate the iconography of female figurines or to relate their findspots to ritual use.
She calls for a systematic collection and study of “the material evidence for a private or family religion in Israelite history,” and actually, that is what is needed for an analysis of women’s role in household religion.

*The Role of Religion in the Life of the Israelite and Babylonian Woman*

Using Assyrian and Babylonian cuneiform texts, the Hebrew Bible, and rabbinic literature, Karel van der Toom in his monograph *From her Cradle to her Grave: The Role of Religion in the Life of the Israelite and the Babylonian Woman* (1994) provides a somewhat speculative treatment of the religious activities of women in biographical phases from infancy, childhood and puberty, to marriage and widowhood. This beneficial study of Israelite and Mesopotamian sources draws attention to possible parallels and stimulates further research. Van der Toom gleans his information on household gods and house shrines in Mesopotamia entirely from texts, although he touches on archaeological corroboration: “Such shrines were found at different excavations. They are frequently provided with a niche that we assume housed the divine images” (1994:43). Van der Toom refers to a group of ritual objects found at the biblical city Beer-sheba, adding that “a good many clay models with a cultic meaning have surfaced elsewhere in the ancient Near East” (1994:42). He cites biblical texts that “put the existence of household gods in Israel beyond doubt” and concludes:

Palestinian archaeology confirms the impression given in Old Testament texts. The interpretation of finds that have not been analyzed is problematic; hence, we cannot prove the existence [of] the cult of domestic deities. But much points to images of (domestic) deities in many excavated figurines. (van der Toom 1994:39)
Van der Toorn's valuable textually-based study leaves undone a systematic investigation of what religious artifacts and architecture archaeologists found in Mesopotamian and Israelite houses and a study of whether these can be coordinated in any way with women's activities. He also does not attempt to interpret the excavated figurines.

Summary of Research on the History of Israelite Religion

The study of Israelite religion has taken form in various approaches or "schools of thought" since the late nineteenth century. These approaches have differed in their application of extra-biblical data to the research and in their presuppositions about the uniqueness of Israelite religion in comparison to the religions of its ancient Near Eastern neighbors Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Syria.

Wellhausen combined Vatke's Hegelian model of interpreting Israelite religion with Graf's reconstruction of the development of the sources of the Pentateuch in his "Documentary Hypothesis," which characterized the clergy, sacrifices, sanctuaries, and festivals of each stage, and concluded that the Yahwistic and Elohistic sources documented the fertility stage of Israelite religion, Deuteronomy belonged to the ethical stage, and the Priestly source came from the legalistic stage. Although this critique forced scholars to identify a biblical writer's interests, it interpreted the biblical text exclusively from within from a strictly textual-philological approach without applying knowledge of the religion's historical Near Eastern milieu. Additionally, its anti-Semitic evolutionary bias failed to recognize its early complexity.
The anthropological school represented by Robertson Smith, Frazer, and Durkheim studied the psycho-sociological basis of Israelite religion through comparing its community ritual institutions to worldwide animistic beliefs and practices that involved physical means of manipulating supernatural powers. Although this approach opened the field to human conceptions of magic and religion rather than concentrating on theological debate, its theory derived from observations of external data instead of considering the text’s point of view. It also admitted no contemporary levels of practice.

Scandinavian and British scholars of the myth and ritual school postulated calendrical ritual festivals that ancient Near Eastern communities celebrated by reciting cult-myths and acting them out ritually. This school renewed interest in comparative Near Eastern religions, but overemphasized public and royal ritual as the heart of Israelite religion to the neglect of private family customs that divergent texts and archaeological discoveries suggested.

The History of Religions school attempted to avoid apologetic bias and reference to supernatural factors by applying what they regarded as the scientific method to trace Israelite religious phenomena through historical phases by reference to Egyptian, Phoenician, and Babylonian texts. Although the pan-Babylonian model lost credibility through artificial systematization and lack of attention to the critical evolutionary interpretation of religious history, its revelation of Israel’s involvement in the interrelationships of ancient Near Eastern cultures provided the impetus for further comparative research. Religion-historical scholars who developed form criticism analyzed biblical literary forms and tried to identify the Sitz en Leben that gave rise to
Israelite oral traditions and religious festivals. While religion historians recognized the socioeconomic and cultural influences of Israel's predecessors and neighbors—a problem to theologians who insisted on Israelite religion's unique and final revelation—and studied how the religion adapted outside influences to its own ideology, and form critics brought attention to the socioeconomic and religious interests of common population groups as contrasted to divine king advocates in ancient Israel, almost complete reliance on textual rather than material archaeological data limited their effectiveness.

The Biblical Archaeology movement in American Protestantism challenged the European literary critical presumption that the biblical account was historically unreliable. Although Albright was unable to substantiate the actual historicity of historical personalities and events of the Genesis, Exodus, and Joshua narratives, he developed both textual and material archaeology into a science that recognized the value of the Bible in its historical and literary background. As a result of its fundamental purpose, biblical archaeology focused heavily on political history related to the conquest of Canaan with its public buildings, fortifications, and destruction layers, all dated by pottery sequences, rather than on Israelite religion and its socioeconomic environment. The Israelite village house and what women did there were not interesting to these male clergymen who represented male-dominated aniconic religious and political institutions. Their acceptance of the monotheism of the biblical text and the uniqueness of Israelite religion in contrast to its Canaanite influences biased their investigations. The biblical theology movement as well as several histories written in the 1960's and 1970's reacted similarly to religion historians' relativism by reemphasizing the uniqueness of and
ignoring the socioeconomic influences on Israelite religion, and they continued to focus on theological issues from the perspective of public male-oriented religious institutions.

A resurgence of the earlier sociological approach began to use artifactual as well as textual evidence for the reconstruction of Israelite religion. Although these scholars showed little interest in family religion or women's activities, they highlighted the socioeconomic background of Israel's settlement. They labeled Israelites as former Canaanites who developed their own new form of Canaanite religion. Gottwald's statement, "Only as the full materiality of ancient Israel is more securely grasped will we be able to make proper sense of its spirituality," gave the new archaeology its invitation to locate and describe ordinary citizens' houses, village shrines, and daily activities.

Ugaritic textual scholars who focus on the relation of Canaanite to Israelite religion rarely refer to the archaeological remains of the Canaanite religion that the texts suggest. Cross, building on Alt's analysis of patriarchal clan religion and Albright's work on Near Eastern parallels, reconstructed the origin of Israel's delivering god Yahweh from strands of the Near Eastern world that combined to form Israel's epic tradition. Cross avoided both the extremes of biblical scholars who assert the uniqueness of Israelite religion and the mistakes of those who assume that it continued the Canaanite mythology and rituals unchanged. Dever substantiated studies of Canaanite and Israelite linguistic and textual parallels with archaeological evidence for Late Bronze Age fertility religion traditions that continued in popular Iron Age Israelite religious practice.

Holladay identified and quantified religious attributes of Iron Age religious sites and classified them into establishment, nonconformist, and distributed cults on the basis
of their locations and furnishings. Ackerman shifted attention from the idealistic male-dominated institutional focus of most biblical studies with her work on women’s leadership in goddess worship and her interpretations of prophetic denunciations of idolatry through ancient Near Eastern texts. Berlinerblau highlighted the need to recognize diverse social groupings in ancient Israelite religion. Albertz developed the theme of personal or family religion first introduced by Jacobsen, extracting from texts the concepts ancient Babylonians and Israelites had of the abilities and responsibilities of their personal gods, and what prayer and offering rituals they practiced in local or household shrines. Albertz touched on the central role women played in theophanic birth promises. My synthesis of archaeological data for women’s family religion including the evidence for cultic structures and artifacts from Israelite houses adds considerable detail to these studies.

Bird pioneered the analysis of women’s roles in biblical Israelite religion and considered Israelite women to be marginalized. Although Bird employed ethnographic parallels, she minimized the potential contribution of archaeology, saying it was mute with respect to women’s practice and point of view. Meyers uses both biblical texts and archaeological knowledge to stress the centrality of the family household unit in the highland village setting and women’s pivotal role in the household’s economic and educative functions. However, she does not attempt to define the function of female figurines in women’s household religion. Van der Toom provides little material archaeological verification for the religious activities of the various stages of an ancient
Near Eastern woman's life that he describes based on Assyrian and Babylonian cuneiform texts, the Hebrew Bible, and rabbinic literature.

Scholars have studied Israelite religion in the context of its literary portrayal in the text, in relation to its Near Eastern neighbors, from a background of anthropological and sociological theory, as well as through archaeology. No one has yet done a study of what texts and archaeology show about women's ritual in the Israelite household. Most text-based studies assume a monotheistic patriarchal religion led by priests and kings. They minimize or scarcely notice women's roles. Scholars who attempt a reconstruction of women's role in family religion depend heavily on texts, without examining the archaeological evidence for women's activities. On the other hand, archaeologists who catalog cultic artifacts hesitate to link them specifically with women and to interpret them in the light of the ancient Near Eastern religious milieu. The following chapters attempt the lacking systematic review of the archaeology of household religion, the analysis of women in the archaeological record, and the relation of figurines and other cultic artifacts from Israelite houses to their mythological history.
Research on the Goddess Asherah

"Asherah" is mentioned forty times in the Hebrew Bible and at least four times in conjunction with the divine name "Yahweh" in Hebrew inscriptions from Khirbet el-Kom and Kuntillet 'Ajrud in ancient Judah. Discovery of the Ugaritic tablets showed that Asherah was a Canaanite goddess. Various epigraphers and archaeologists identify the biblical Asherah with the Canaanite goddess through textual and iconographic correspondences. Others because of Hebrew language usage and theological developments argue that attributes of the Canaanite goddess became part of the personality of the god Yahweh, and a sacred tree placed in Yahwistic sanctuaries symbolized this feminine aspect. Due to some Deuteronomistic mentions of Asherah with Baal (Judg 3:7; Judg 6:25; 1 Kgs 18:19; 2 Kgs 23:4) biblical scholars traditionally linked Asherah with Baal. However most modern archaeologists and textual scholars associate Asherah with the cult of Yahweh. Some interpret Asherah as a goddess consort of Yahweh, while others consider Asherah to be a symbol of Yahweh rather than an independent goddess. The remainder of this section provides details of the history of the interpretation of the word "asherah" that occurs in Hebrew texts.

---

7 I present and discuss the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscriptions and the accompanying drawings in Chapter 4: Fertility in Egypt, Ugarit, and Israel.
Wooden Image of the Goddess

*The Asherah and the Old Testament* (1949) by William L. Reed provided the first book-length analysis of references to Asherah in the Hebrew Bible. Reed describes, but rejects various cylinder seals and impressions, bas-reliefs, and terracotta models in early Semitic art that have been interpreted as representing “asherahs.” He argues that “Old Testament references to the cult object “asherah do not appear to speak of a sacred pole or tree, but rather of a wooden image of the goddess whose name was Asherah” (Reed 1949:89). One of his arguments for the “asherah” being an image is that it occurs in lists with *pesilim* “carved images.” However, Reed’s analysis falls short in that it does not allow for the possibility that ancient Israelites may have had other Asherah symbols similar to the Assyrian, Ugaritic, Hittite, and Cypriot examples he describes.

*Asherah Means Shrine*

Edward Lipiński in his 1972 article “The Goddess Atirat in Ancient Arabia, in Babylon, and in Ugarit” argued against the existence of a goddess in Israel. This argument is repeated in his 1986 review article “The Syro-Palestinian Iconography of Woman and Goddess.” According to Lipiński, “asherah” in Hebrew inscriptions and the Bible refers to a Yahwistic shrine and not to a goddess by that name. Lipiński takes the extreme view that “no biblical passage mentions the goddess Atirat or her emblem”

---

*Atirat (or Athirat) is the Canaanite cognate of Hebrew Asherah.*
(1972:116). In order to do this he must eliminate places in the Hebrew Bible where Asherah appears to be the name of a goddess by criticizing them as later glosses or scribal errors (1972:114; 1986:91) or as referring to shrines rather than images in the shrines (1972:112-16; 1986:93). He is unconvincing in this argument because the meaning “shrine” for “asherah,” although used in cognate Semitic languages, is not attested in Hebrew. In addition, even if the “goddess” occurrences are scribal errors or late glosses, their parallelisms with Baal and “the host of heaven” show that the authors did in fact mean them to represent the name of a deity.

Although Lipiński uses a comparative approach to Semitic linguistics to suggest that “asherah” meant “shrine,” he does not accept the use of general Semitic iconographic evidence. In his review article Lipiński denigrated Winter’s (1983) use of Near Eastern iconography and texts to illuminate ancient Israelite religious practice:

Consequently, the problem of the absence of a feminine deity in the Israelite religion of the first millennium B.C.E. can hardly be discussed or illustrated in the light of iconographic sources of earlier times, originating in a different environment and reflecting an urban society which greatly differed from the ancient Israelite patriarchal family and tribal community (1986:91). Winter’s mistake, if one may put it thus, was in supposing that the ability to deal with iconographic sources and interpret them in accordance with textual data leads to a better understanding of ancient religion...and it would have been better, from a methodological point of view, not to intermingle Syrian and Mesopotamian glyptic sources of the third and second millennium B.C.E. with Hebrew written documents from the first millennium B.C.E. (Lipiński 1986:95)

Lipiński’s refusal to accept as valid any historical evidence from a general West Semitic background is inexcusable. He exaggerates in speaking of the third millennium, since Winter uses only second and first millennium seals and inscriptive evidence.
Asherah's epithet "Lady of the Steppe" and her association with the god Amurru make it likely that her cult was taken into Mesopotamia from Syria-Palestine by the Amorites. William Reed (1949:72-74) and John Day (1986:386) cite a consensus of scholarship on this point. There is also a strong link between the Ugaritic mythology and Galilee. Baruch Margalit (1989:473) noted that the Ugaritic poem Aqhat takes place on Lake Kinnereth, which closes the previously supposed geographical gap between Ugarit and Israel. This makes the Canaanite pantheon quite relevant for interpreting the goddess symbolism in Israelite religious texts and figurines. Since Asherah was a prominent goddess in Canaanite mythology, the significance of the cognate term in Hebrew should be investigated in light of its historical antecedents.

_Asherah is Yahweh's Presence in his Sanctuary_

Kyle McCarter ("Aspects of the Religion of the Israelite Monarchy: Biblical and Epigraphical Data," 1987) offers another interpretation of the term "asherah." McCarter (1987:147) postulates a hypostasis for "Yahweh's asherah" analogous to the interpretation Albright (1925) proposed for Anath-Yahu of Elephantine Judaism and Northwest Semitic religions' "Name of Baal" (Ashtart) and "Presence of Baal" (Tanit). In this familiar pattern, "an abstract aspect of a male deity is hypostatized, personified, and worshiped as a goddess, who may then be thought of as the consort of the god" (McCarter 1987:148). McCarter writes that the basic meaning of the Hebrew root ָאָשְרָא is ָשָׁר "leave a trace," and that the wooden "asherah" is the trace of Yahweh's presence in his sanctuary.
McCarter denies that this Asherah is the same as the Canaanite goddess, but he admits that if the Ugaritic deity Asherah was worshiped widely and prominently in the Iron Age, it is difficult to imagine that Israelites did not identify their internally developed goddess with her. Not only the cognate name equates the Hebrew Asherah with the Canaanite prototype. The continuity in iconographic associations—stylized sacred trees, lions, Hathor headdresses, etc.—supports the view that the Asherah in Hebrew texts is a continuation of the Canaanite goddess Asherah.

**Asherah Not Represented in Theophoric Names**

Jeffrey Tigay (*You Shall Have No Other Gods: Israelite Religion in the Light of Hebrew Inscriptions*, 1986; “Israelite Religion: The Onomastic and Epigraphic Evidence,” 1987) argues that Asherah was not a popular Israelite goddess. Tigay (1987:178) claims that deities other than Yahweh were not widely regarded by Israelites as sources of blessing and protection because personal names, salutations, votives, prayers, and oaths found on seals and inscriptions show a very low representation of other deities. The eleven known Hebrew religious salutations and the large stone bowl from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud address only Yahweh, and the libation jar from Khirbet el-Kom is inscribed with ʾEl, a standard epithet of Yahweh in Israel. Tigay minimizes the occurrence of the word “asherah” in the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscriptions, which he claims represent a heterodoxy of one or more Yahwists at a peripheral site exposed to foreign influence.
Tigay rates the popularity of various deities by using statistics from the ancient West Semitic practice of forming theophoric personal names, which consist of clauses with abbreviated deity names such as Abijah "Yah is my father." According to Tigay, goddess names occur in names of both men and women in West Semitic onomastica. For example, in the lists from the Eshmun temple near Sidon, Athtart appears in 23.8 per cent of the theophoric names. At Ugarit, however, Athtart, Athirat, and Anath, all of whom were recipients of sacrifices according to the texts, appeared in very few personal names, an indication to Tigay that the goddesses had relatively important secondary roles in official circles, but not in popular, private religion. Tigay suggests that the onomastic evidence from Israel implies similarly that Asherah was worshiped only in the state religion, only when royal policy dictated it.

Onomastic evidence, however, presents only one source of evidence for popular piety. While it is true that Syro-Phoenician script and art are prominent on the walls at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, the inscriptions are in fact in Hebrew. The pithoi were made near Jerusalem, and the inscriptions, graffiti, and drawings on them exemplify unprofessional, random, popular artistry (Gunneweg, Perlman, and Meshel 1985; Beck 1982), so they cannot be relegated to royal state religion. In addition, the similarly worded Khirbet el-Kom inscription comes from an unambiguously Judean context between Hebron and Lachish. It is so unmonumental as to be almost graffiti. These Hebrew inscriptions support the idea that Asherah, contrary to Tigay’s assertions, was a popular source of blessing in Israel.
Asherah is Living Tree

André Lemaire ("Les inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qom et l'Ashérah de YHWH," 1977; "Who or What was Yahweh's Asherah?,” 1984) argued that references to "asherah" in the Hebrew Bible are Deuteronomistic attempts to attribute idolatrous status to sacred (living) trees. To illustrate his suggestion that an "asherah" was a living tree, Lemaire refers to biblical references to trees planted in Yahwistic cult places: the tamarisk Abraham planted at Beer-sheba (Gen 21:33), the oak in the Shechem sanctuary (Josh 24:26), and the prohibition "do not plant a tree as an asherah" in Deut 16:21.

Lemaire criticized the scouring of the Ugaritic texts for parallels since these were written at least five hundred years earlier in a different country on the northern Syrian coast and in a different language, Ugaritic. For Lemaire (1984a:46) this was “an example of excessive use of religious comparativism to reach an extreme and invalid conclusion.” In addition, Lemaire disputed the claim that Asherah is a goddess-consort of Yahweh in the Khirbet el-Kom or Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscriptions, citing a grammatical obstacle to "asherah” being the name of a goddess as well as lack of evidence for this interpretation in the accompanying drawings. Lemaire (1984a:51) stated that the “asherah” in the inscriptions is a generic name on its way to being personified:

The biblical prophets were fearful that these cultic objects might become sacred to themselves, as a god, and so become rivals of Yahweh.

Lemaire did not give any evidence for his assertion that biblical mentions of Asherah in parallel with gods represent Deuteronomistic redactors’ attempts to eradicate
sacred trees. Neither does he substantiate his interpretation that "asherahs" were always living trees in contrast to stylized wooden poles. For example, his interpretation does not coordinate with Jer 17:2: "their asherim stand by every spreading tree." He does not convince us that sacred "asherah" trees are unrelated to goddesses, in particular the Canaanite goddess named Asherah. In Chapter Four: Fertility in Egypt, Ugarit, and Israel I present evidence that definitively associates sacred trees with the goddess Asherah.

*Asherah is Impersonal Sacred Tree*

Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger (*Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, 1998) question the relevance of the Canaanite El-Asherah connection for the religious symbolism of ninth and eighth century Iron IIB Israel. They take the position that the "asherah" in Hebrew texts is a stylized sacred tree that is a depersonalized symbol of power and sustenance. In this view, symbols of the goddess became more and more independent, increasingly substituting for her. When represented as a palm tree, the goddess is not personal because the palm is depicted as a source of usable agricultural products—perfume and actual food for animals to eat—rather than as a personal entity. Keel and Uehlinger's (1992:233) argument that as early as Iron I (the twelfth and eleventh centuries BCE) goddess symbols ceased to represent the goddess ignores clear examples of goddess iconography from the ninth and eighth and later centuries. While it is true that religious symbols can pass out of use and be revived with new meanings, live symbols tend to migrate, that is they retain their basic value while adopting a new verbalization and explanation in the new culture (Goodenough 1954:36). Keel and Uehlinger compile
various illustrations of sacred trees from the Iron IIB period, but they posit different meanings for them depending on whether they stand with animals, with male government officials, or alone. While their assessment of the stylized sacred tree as a symbol of power as well as or instead of a symbol of fertility merits attention, the history of sacred tree symbolism in Egyptian and Levantine iconography connects it with goddesses who make these powers available to individuals.

Keel and Uehlinger (1992:232) deny that the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscriptions say anything about the function of the cult object or about the goddess herself in spite of the fragment from a wall inscription that reads: “they will give to his Asherah.” This inscription points to the fact that Yahweh's blessing that Asherah transmitted was requested and repaid by votive gifts meant not only for Yahweh, but also for Asherah. Certainly transmitting blessings and receiving votive gifts imply ritual function and a personal subject. It is likely that the Late Bronze Age tree-goddess Asherah, mediator of power and sustenance, retained her identity and function in the Iron Age, even though she accompanied a High God with a new name. The representation of the goddess Asherah as a pillar-base figurine indicates that Israelites maintained a conception of the goddess Asherah and a votive relationship with her in symbolic form throughout the Iron Age. In Chapter Four: Fertility in Egypt, Ugarit, and Israel, I address the issues of stylized sacred tree iconography in more detail.
Canaanite Goddess Imagery Conflated and Attributed to Yahweh

In general, Levantine cultures drastically reduced their second millennium list of deities to far fewer first millennium deities. Iron Age Canaanite-Phoenician inscriptions that mention Baal do not refer to Asherah as his consort or as a goddess, although she had been prominent in the Ugaritic mythology (Mark S. Smith 1990:26, 89, 92; Keel and Uehlinger 1992:229; Lemaire 1984a:46). Astarte took over her titles rbt and "mother" in inscriptions from Sidon, Tyre, Kitton, and Egypt.

According to Smith (1990:16), ʾāšērāḏ in the Kuntillet ʿAjrud and Khirbet el-Kom inscriptions refers to the symbol originally named after the goddess, but during the eighth century it probably did not symbolize the goddess. As early as the period of the Judges, the symbol had "outlived the cult of the goddess who gave her name to it and continued to hold a place in the cult of Yahweh" (1990:94). Smith (1990:5) draws attention to the fact that the Merneptah stela distinguished Israel from Canaan by 1200 BCE, and although Israelite culture emerged from the Canaanite culture and in Iron I was mostly Canaanite in nature, its local deities before and during its emergence cannot be identified by equating Israelite religion with Ugaritic religion. According to Smith’s assessment, during the time of the Judges Israelites related El, Baal, and Asherah to the cult of Yahweh and did not worship them separately as biblical historiography implies. In his theory, by the tenth century Israelites had combined, conflated, and attributed to Yahweh the Northwest Semitic imagery for El, Baal and Asherah.
Smith (1990:82) argues that the Late Bronze Age iconographic depictions of a tree as the fertile and nurturing goddess come from Canaanite strata rather than Israelite. He also questions the use of the Ta'anach cult stand to describe Israelite religion since its significance depends on the identity of the stand's maker and on its accurate dating. Although Ta'anach was politically Israelite, it may have continued its Canaanite cultic traditions, as Judg 1:27 suggests:

Manasseh failed to drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shan, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, and Megiddo and their villages; the Canaanites maintained their hold on that region.

Although he states that Israelite culture emerged from Canaanite culture and in Iron I was mostly Canaanite in nature, Smith argues that depictions of the fertile tree goddess come from Canaanite strata rather than Israelite strata. If archaeologists cannot distinguish Israelite from Canaanite, then they cannot divide strata between the two cultures, nor can they prove that only Canaanites and not Israelites venerated Asherah. Dever (1990:80) and Mazar (1992:343, 347, 354) emphasize the fact that, although the Israelite culture was distinctive socio-economically, excavators substantiate its material culture—including collar-rimmed storage jars, four-room houses, bench-tombs, and farming technology—throughout Palestine in the Late Bronze and early Iron Ages and trace it to Canaanite prototypes. Moreover, Alt, Albright, Cross and Smith had already shown the theological continuities between the religions.

Patrick D. Miller (1986:244-45) uses examples from Mesopotamia to illustrate the absorption by all-powerful male deities like Anu and later Marduk of the feminine
dimension of deity reflected in their goddesses. In Israel’s case, either the goddess was absorbed into Yahweh so that she had no independent existence or character, or the radical integration of divine powers in the male deity effectively excluded goddesses. The problem with Miller’s theory is that the goddesses did not in fact disappear. Biblical texts mention goddesses, and the female figurines certainly must have had some association with goddesses in the minds of those who possessed them. Unfortunately for Miller, Asherah did not disappear as, in his opinion, she should have.

_Cult Symbol of Yahweh Equals Deity_

Saul Oyan’s *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel* (1988) argues against Tigay’s minimization of the importance of the data from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud as evidence of Israelite popular religion. Oyan describes the biblical “asherah” as a stylized tree or pole, and in some cases a wooden likeness of the goddess. He argues “that the asherah was a legitimate part of the cult of Yahweh both in the north and the south, in state religion and in popular religion, finding opposition [only] in deuteronomistic circles” (1988:13). He finds “no evidence that the asherah was opposed by anyone in Israel before the reforming kings” (1988:22). Although Deuteronomistic polemic linked Asherah with the cult of Baal, the goddess Asherah never functioned intimately with Baal in Canaanite religion; extra-biblical evidence, in contrast, suggests that the “asherah” was a legitimate symbol in Yahweh’s cult.

Oyan emphasizes the close relationship between the symbol and the deity in Near Eastern religion, citing archaeological examples of bull iconography. Since naming the
cult symbol of the deity is synonymous with naming the deity herself, the “asherah” named alongside Yahweh in the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud blessing cannot be separated from the goddess Asherah (Olyan 1988:32). Urs Winter (1983:555) also stresses the historic-traditional principle that goddess and cult object cannot be separated. Susan Ackerman (1992:66) says that to associate Yahweh with Asherah’s cult object or with some hypostatized female aspect of Yahweh is to associate Yahweh with Asherah.

The understanding of the “asherah” as a symbol of the goddess Asherah associated with Yahweh in an intermediary relationship fits the Hebrew grammar of the biblical and inscriptional evidence. It also accords well with what we know of Asherah’s intermediary role with El in Canaanite texts. The pillar figurines force us to recognize Asherah as a personal goddess rather than as a depersonalized non-sexually differentiated charm. These assertions are further developed in Chapter Four: Fertility in Egypt, Ugarit, and Israel.

Canaanite Goddess Consort of Yahweh

Several of the scholars who agree that Asherah was a Hebrew goddess associated with Yahweh rather than merely an impersonal symbol of his blessing view the relationship between Yahweh and Asherah as a consort relationship—Asherah is Yahweh’s wife and sexual partner. This idea follows from the Canaanite mythology in which Asherah is the consort of the high god El and mother of the other gods. John Day expounds the epigraphic history of the Canaanite goddess Athirat in “Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature” (1986) and “Asherah” (1992). He
supports the view that the biblical “allusions to a goddess Asherah reflect the goddess of that name known from the Ugaritic texts and elsewhere” (Day 1986:400) and that the “asherim” were stylized trees next to Yahweh’s altar that symbolized his consort (Day 1988:392). Day explains her usual role as El’s consort, “mother of the gods,” in the Ugaritic texts but also cites her occasional name Qudshu in those texts, which links her with the Egyptian fusion of the Canaanite goddesses Qudshu-Astarte-Anat. Although recent scholarship (Wyatt 1995) debates Day’s use of the inscriptive occurrences of qds, his exposition as a whole remains academically credible and enlightening.

William G. Dever explains the inscriptions and motifs on the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud pottery through their background in Bronze Age texts and iconography as evidence for the cult of Asherah in ancient Israel (“Recent Confirmation of the Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel,” 1982; “Asherah, Consort of Yahweh? New Evidence from Kuntillet Ajrud,” 1984). Dever uses Egyptian and Syro-Palestinian material archaeology to demonstrate that the Iron Age inscriptions and iconography at Khirbet el-Kom and Kuntillet ‘Ajrud address and illustrate Asherah, the fertility and mother goddess of the ritual and mythological texts from Late Bronze Age Ugarit. Although Pirhiya Beck (“The Drawings from Horvat Teiman (Kuntillet ‘Ajrud),” 1982) disputes his identification of the lyre figure with Asherah, Dever’s argument for the viability of Asherah as an Israelite goddess integrally related to Yahweh proves thorough and convincing.

Asherah’s identity as Yahweh’s consort rests on her position in the Late Bronze Age Canaanite mythological texts rather than on any such implications in the biblical texts or Hebrew inscriptions. It depends on an acceptance of Asherah as a fertility
goddess in both religions. While Canaanite religion cannot be equated with Israelite
religion and some scholars exaggerate the fertility aspects of both, it is true that a woman
of a pre-modern non-Western culture does not appear in public with a man unless she is
his mother, sister, daughter, or wife. The occurrence of the possessive Hebrew -h “his”
with “asherah” in the Hebrew inscriptions supports the assertion that Israelites associated
Asherah with Yahweh in a close, probably dependent relationship such as a wife would
have with her husband in a male-dominated pre-feminist social structure.

Research on Asherah Summary

Various epigraphers and archaeologists identify the biblical Asherah with the
Canaanite goddess through textual and iconographic correspondences. Others because of
Hebrew language usage and theological developments argue that attributes of the
Canaanite goddess became feminine aspects of the personality of the Israelite god
Yahweh, and a stylistic tree placed in Yahwistic sanctuaries symbolized this feminine
aspect. In the first book about Asherah, Reed decided that biblical references to “asherah”
speak of a wooden image of the goddess whose name was Asherah. Lipiński, on the other
hand, argued that “asherah” in the Bible and Hebrew inscriptions refers to a Yahwistic
shrine rather than to a goddess by that name, since “asherah” signifies shrine in cognate

---

9 A recent trend in Ugaritic studies de-sexualizes family relationships within the pantheon. For example, a
1997 book by Tilde Binger suggests that in the Ugaritic myths Asherah may be El’s mother rather than his
wife. Similarly, Walls (1992) claims Anat was Baal’s sister, not his consort. For further comments on
relationships within the Canaanite pantheon, see Chapter Four: Fertility in Egypt, Ugarit, and Israel and
Chapter Six: Women as Religious Agents in Ancient Israel.
languages. Although Lipiński used a comparative approach to Semitic linguistics to suggest that "asherah" meant "shrine," he rejected the use of general Semitic iconographic evidence that suggested otherwise. McCarter analyzed the wooden "asherah" as the trace of the male deity Yahweh's presence in his sanctuary—one of his abstract aspects personified as a goddess. McCarter finds it difficult to support his assertion that this innovation is not the same person as the Canaanite goddess with the same name. Tigay argues that Asherah was not a popular goddess Israelites regarded as a source of blessing and protection because her epithet does not occur in Hebrew personal names. He minimizes the significance of "asherah" in Hebrew inscriptions, which he claims represent peripheral royal or foreign influences. The archaeological contexts of the Hebrew inscriptions label them as popular rather than royal and Judean rather than Syro-Phoenician and reveal the weakness of Tigay's exclusive use of onomastic evidence as a barometer of popular piety.

Lemaire illustrates his suggestion that an "asherah" was a living tree with biblical references to trees planted in Yahwistic cult places. Keel and Uehlinger assert that the "asherah" in Hebrew texts refers to a stylized sacred tree that Israelites depersonalized and integrated into the service of the royal God, who assimilated the formerly female functions of nurture and transmission of life. The tree thus symbolizes Yahweh's power and sustenance. According to Smith, Israelites related Asherah to the cult of Yahweh and did not worship her separately as biblical historiography implies. By the tenth century they had combined, conflated, and attributed Northwest Semitic imagery for El, Baal and
Asherah to Yahweh. Miller cites examples from Mesopotamia to argue the absorption of feminine deities by all-powerful male deities. Miller’s theory encounters a problem in that goddesses did not in fact disappear from ancient Israel because biblical texts mention goddesses, and the female figurines prove that Israelites remained loyal to a goddess whom the inscriptiveal evidence named Asherah.

Ackerman, Winter, and Olyan employ the close relationship between the symbol and the deity in Near Eastern religion to emphasize the historic-traditional principle that goddess and cult object cannot be separated. To associate Yahweh with Asherah’s cult object or with some hypostatized female aspect of Yahweh is to associate Yahweh with Asherah. Olyan finds no evidence that anyone in Israel before the reforming kings opposed the “asherah,” and although Deuteronomistic polemic linked Asherah with the cult of Baal, the goddess Asherah never functioned intimately with Baal in Canaanite and Israelite religion.

In Chapter Four: Fertility in Egypt, Ugarit, and Israel I elaborate on the Canaanite background of Asherah and her adaptation to Israelite socioeconomic and religious concerns. I will argue that biblical usages in parallel with other deities, mentions of Asherah with Yahweh in ancient Hebrew inscriptions, and the ubiquitous Israelite female figurines demonstrate that the Canaanite goddess Asherah persisted in Israelite religion as a goddess who mediated Yahweh’s powers of fertility, blessing, and protection. The history of research on Israelite figurines and their identification with Asherah forms the topic of the following section.
The Interpretation of Ancient Israelite Figurines

Archaeologists classify and interpret in various ways the female figurines they found in excavations of early Israelite sites. Some identify them with Astarte or Asherah or with an Assyrian or Syrian goddess. Others view the figurines as representations of individual women. Most scholars think they were connected in some way with religion or magic.

Figurines as Magical Representations of Astarte

After major excavations during the 1920's and 1930's provided a large database of plaque and pillar figurines, Albright ("Astarte Plaques and Figurines from Tell Beit Mirsim," 1939) called some figurines "nurturing goddesses," while the pregnant female type was an amulet used for sympathetic magic help during childbirth. Albright wrote in The Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible (1932:110) that the pregnant females' "generic resemblance to the Canaanite Astarte figurines is due to the fact that they were used for a similar purpose. It is reasonable to suppose that they also served as charms to bring fruitfulness to barren women."

Albright worked from a somewhat outdated view of magic and religion. In both Egyptian and Mesopotamian religions the presence and resulting power of gods and goddesses was invoked through their images and their names. In this way divine protective powers resisted evil beings that attempted to sicken and destroy the woman of the house and her young children. I suggest in Chapter Five that figurines represented a
contractual relationship between a woman and a goddess—a goddess who lent her protective powers to the women who needed her help during the period of birth and breastfeeding of an infant.

Kelso and Thorley (Albright 1943:138-41) explain in detail the modeling of the Tell Beit Mirsim figurines. They observed that the pillar looked like "a tree-trunk since it flared out at the bottom like a stump and may have been intended to suggest the tree symbolism of the Asherah cult." The heads and backs of the figurines were roughly finished, so "apparently the Astarte stood against the wall, where the rough finish of the back would not be noticed." They point out that there was yellow paint on the necks to represent jewelry. Their technical analysis provides additional data for the construction of a comprehensive theory on the meaning and function of these figurines. I hope to provide what is still lacking—the relation of such details to Near Eastern iconography and ritual.

The excavators of Tell en-Nasbeh (McCown, Wampler, and Bade 1947:248), biblical Mizpah, divided the "Astarte figurines" into pinched- and molded-head styles and suggested that they were manufactured inexpensively, perhaps by women, for use in local religious ritual. They suggest that "the crudity of the handmade objects, figurines, offering tables, thrones and couches, and animal figures, their small size, their cheapness, all go to show that a token was supposed by some magic of faith and ritual to take the place of the real object in religion." The conventionality of the figurine bases and heads implies to the excavators that they were abstract symbols of the goddess. The "pinched-types" are even more crude and conventionalized, but this does not mean they were necessarily earlier or "a poor man’s substitute." No Tell en-Nasbeh pillar-base figurines
came from tombs, so they were not used in burial ritual. They came from houses, indicating they were household icons or amulets used apart from or as substitutes for religious festivities in a sanctuary. These descriptive details of the figurines provide useful data, and speculations about their use are helpful suggestions on which to begin to form a theory. In this dissertation I integrate this data into a comprehensive study of the underlying mythology as well as the archaeological contexts of women's lives, activities, and concerns.

Unnamed Foreign Fertility Goddess

James B. Pritchard in his monograph *Palestinian Figurines in Relation to Certain Goddesses Known through Literature* (1943) saw the pillar figurines as a direct continuation of the earlier plaque figurines. They symbolically represented womankind, a domestic milk-fertility cult, or a mother goddess, although he did not think they could be specifically identified with any one of the three goddesses Astarte, Asherah, or Anat that the Hebrew Bible mentions. It seems unusual to have so many examples of a goddess figurine without naming the goddess in the culture's literature. We now have information from textual sources to show that in general the pantheons of ancient Near Eastern cultures shrank from the second millennium to the first millennium. In Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia, for example, Astarte is the named goddess. Anat is not mentioned in the Bible except in a few proper names. On the other hand, the word "asherah," sometimes referring to a cult object and a few times to a goddess, occurs forty times in the Hebrew Bible. At the same time, non-concordances between mentions of Asherah and Astarte in
the Bible seem to indicate a confusion or conflation in the conceptions of later editors and translators, a tendency already evident in second millennium Canaanite texts. The discovery of the name Asherah in three inscriptions at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud and one at Khirbet el-Kom confirms the fact that Asherah was the name of the goddess known and revered in Israel. I discuss this topic in more detail in the section “Astarte and Asherah” in Chapter Four: Fertility in Egypt, Ugarit, and Israel.

Olga Tufnell (1953) suggested that pillar figurines from eighth to seventh century Lachish represented “a naked goddess of Assyrian origin.” Kathleen Kenyon (1967:101) viewed the many figurines she found at Jerusalem as “elemental mother-goddess” objects used in “a fertility cult, abhorrent to the worshippers of Yahweh” (Kenyon 1974:141). These views represent a traditional view of Israelite Yahwism as pure, monotheistic, and distinctive, only lately contaminated by foreign imports; whereas, on the contrary, the religion from its inception involved native agricultural fertility festivals and goddess conceptions as part of its Canaanite heritage.

**Figurines Continue Canaanite Tradition as Hebrew Goddess Asherah**

Raphael Patai influenced the field through his popular book *The Hebrew Goddess* (1967) in which he argued that Asherah and Astarte were Hebrew goddesses, not foreign or magical entities. Although he believed that the Bronze Age plaque figures represented Astarte, Patai identified the pillar-base figurines with the goddess Asherah rather than with Astarte. They were “small clay counterparts of the larger wooden Asherah poles which were set up by implanting them into the ground” (Patai 1967:39). He used the
pillar figurines to support the theory that Asherah was Yahweh’s consort. Although Patai makes some folkloric statements and uses archaeological material uncritically, his ideas came to be generally accepted and developed by many later archaeologists. While it is more likely that wooden Asherah poles consisted of sacred tree symbols rather than of actual goddess images, others now agree that the figurines must be representations of Asherah, the only goddess known in epigraphic sources in Iron II Israel and Judah (Engle 1980:34-35; Holladay 1987:121; Dever 1994:151; Kletter 1996:81).

Some scholars interpret the succession of Israelite figurines—plaque and pillar-base—as continuation of the same goddess iconography. Holladay (1987:279-80) explained the time sequence as follows: the plaque-type figurines went into eclipse both in Israel and Judah during the ninth century, while the pillar-base ones came into vogue sometime in the eighth century in the north and in the late eighth or mid-seventh century in the south. Holladay bases this analysis on the presence of the plaque-type in domestic favissae in either Hazor Stratum IX or VIII (ca. 925 BCE, data unclear) and in extrahousehold secondary locations in Tell Beit Mirsim Level B (ca. 1000-925 BCE) contexts characterized by red-burnished pottery, that is, Solomonic or post-Solomonic contexts. Whereas Level B produced plaque figurines, the later levels A1 and A2 had pillar-base figurines, and while the plaque figurines emphasize the female head, breasts and pubic triangle, the eighth to sixth century clay pillar-base figurines consist of heads, heavy breasts emphasized by the arms encircling and supporting them, and solid or hollow conical bodies. The change from one type to another in the same site allows the hypothesis that the figurines, although modified in form, continued to represent the same
goddess. Scholars like Ruth Hestrin have attempted to equate the conical bodies of the pillar-base figurines with the pubic triangles of the plaques through reference to Canaanite fertility iconography.

Fig. 1: Gezer Plaque and Tell Beit Mirsim Pillar-Base Figurine, from Macalister, *The Excavations of Gezer II*, fig. 500; and Albright, *Tell Beit Mirsim III, The Iron Age*, pl. 29.
Hestrin argued vigorously in three articles, “The Cult Stand from Ta'anach and its Religious Background” (1987), “The Lachish Ewer and the ‘Asherah” (1987), and “Understanding Asherah: Exploring Semitic Iconography” (1991), that the fertility motifs on the Ta'anach cult stand and on the Lachish goblet and ewer depicted the goddess Asherah. The ewer exhibits an inscription with the term Elat “goddess,” a name for the high god El’s consort Asherah in Canaanite texts found at Ugarit. According to Hestrin (1987b), the three stylized elements of the pillar figurines parallel the three aspects of the Ugaritic-type pendants: the head and breasts are the same, but the tree trunk replaces the pubic triangle surmounted with a tree as a symbol of the female genitalia. The head is either molded or hand-fashioned, but the breasts and pillar are always shaped by hand. Archaeologists have found molds for ancient Near Eastern solid-pillar figurines, but they are very rare, and only three of the molds known from Israel resemble the Judean pillar-base figurines (Holland 1975:314-17; Kletter 1996:50). Hestrin suggested that hand-fashioning implied special care, so that the breasts and pillar-base were the most significant parts of the figurines. She also argued that the pillar represented the trunk of a tree, which is one of the meanings of the word “asherah” in the Bible (Hestrin 1991:50, 57). She rather successfully challenged the view that the figurines cannot be identified with any particular goddess by identifying the pillar-base figurines with Asherah on the basis of their development from second millennium sacred tree iconography.

Hestrin’s arguments for continuity prove quite convincing, although they present some questions. Is hand-modeling as opposed to the intricately molded heads a sign of extra care or of lack of skill? Does the conical base necessarily represent Asherah’s tree
trunk? Although archaeologists generally talk about figurine styles originating in the Levant and moving westward, the pillar-base form may have been introduced from Cyprus where it was used for males (Bloch-Smith 1992:100) or from Assyria or Phoenicia (Keel and Uehlinger 1998:333). Or the pillar base may be just a technical development to provide stability to the standing figurine or may represent a long robe (Keel and Uehlinger 1998:332). It is not necessary to interpret the pillar-base as a representation of a tree to identify the figurines as a continuation of the Canaanite Asherah tradition. Although there is a slight time gap between the plaque figurines and the pillar-base ones which would allow for borrowing from the northwest, there is a more significant geographical gap between Cypro-Phoenician examples and the Judean ones. Probably the figurines' change in form carried with it a subtle change in meaning and function. The tree symbolism for fertility may have generalized into a protective symbol as Barnett (1975) and Keel and Uehlinger (1998) claim. More important than the equation of the pillar-base with a tree trunk is the dramatization of the eyes and breasts—an indication that the erotic gender aspects are subordinate to the protective nurturing characteristics of the goddess.

Votive Figurines of Worshiping Women

Another trend in scholarship treated the figurines as votive figures of worshiping women. In her study of ancient Israelite women, Carol Meyers (1988:162) expressed skepticism about identifying any of the terracotta statuettes or clay plaques with a goddess. She preferred to think that they depicted human females rather than deific ones
because the Late Bronze Age Canaanite goddess statues described by Negbi (1976) used precious metals or stone, originated in public shrines instead of or as well as in houses, and exhibited some distinguishing symbols of divine identity in headdress, pose, garb, or attached object. Israelite figurines are made of cheap clay, and they are found mainly in houses rather than in public shrines, although one was found in the Arad sanctuary.

However, the findspot of female figurines has little to do with whether they represent deities or individual women. Votive figurines substituting for worshipers as well as deity figurines are prevalent in public as well as in private shrines of iconic cultures. The quality of workmanship and materials of the sacred objects that pertain to public, especially royal temples, usually surpass the luxury of those in private neighborhood and household shrines. Woolley (1982:208) cites the "crudely modelled or moulded small baked clay plaques and figurines representing deities and apotropaic demons" found in Mesopotamian houses, and Yon (1996:416) mentions the mediocre quality as opposed to royal quality of the architecture and contents of the neighborhood "rhyton" shrine she excavated in the central residential district of Ugarit:

Several arguments have also shown that this temple did not have the status of those of the acropolis: this can be observed both in the mediocre quality of the architecture and the common quality of the offerings and furnishings found associated with it. There are no royal aspects.

In hierarchic Canaanite societies like Ugarit, precious metal pendants and stone stelae mingle with clay plaque figurines in all of the housing districts. The wealth and quality of the artifacts depend on whether the shrine is supported by the royal government establishment or whether it is private. The relative luxury of the material that artisans
used to craft deity figurines depended on the socioeconomic level of their clientele. According to Dever (1990:78) although early Israelite pottery was solidly in the LB IIB Canaanite tradition, “the social structure, unlike that of the urban Late Bronze Age, appears to be socially undifferentiated in the extreme” in contrast to the Canaanite hierarchic system, whose kings, administrators, and priests exhausted in lavish religious displays the resources generated by the mass of peasants and herdsmen they exploited through taxation and forced labor (Gottwald 1985:272-73). Predictably fewer precious metal and gemstone cultic artifacts appear under Yahwistic socio-religious ideology. Women wore more bone pendants with ring-and-dot designs than carnelian eye of Horus pendants. Instead of gold electrum goddess pendants such as the ones from the Bronze Age, Israelites manufactured terracotta pillar-base figurines.

Due to the variety, specialists analyzed the figurines from Area D at Philistine Ashdod as votive figures of individual humans who wanted to enhance their fertility or assure female safety by sympathetic magic (Dothan and Freedman 1967; Dothan 1971). However, Kletter (1996:75) does not believe that the Judean pillar figurines represented individual mortal women because of their idealized uniformity:

The great physical and technical uniformity (clay, white wash, decoration, position of hands, schematic lower body) seem to imply the lack of any effort in representing individual women. Even the heads are very uniform. Also, his conclusion that they were used separately and not in groups hints that they symbolized the same figure rather than many individual women. I agree with this analysis.
Another point at issue in Meyers’s skepticism about identifying any of the terracotta statuettes or clay plaques with a goddess is the meaning of “votive.” Meyers does not consider the breadth of meaning of the term. According to Margaret Morden (“Cult from Clay: The Evidence of the Terracottas from the Lower Sanctuary on the East Acropolis of Idalion,” 1997), votive can cover a scale of votary/deity interaction stretching from votive equals deity to votive equals votary, with intermediate possibilities. As I will discuss further in detail, in this view a figurine may represent the goddess or the individual woman, but probably includes both within its symbolic representation of the relationship between the two. Mallowan (1933:209) recognized this fact as he debated the identity of the “eye-idol” he found by the thousands in the Tell Brak Eye Temple and admitted that he did not know whether the form represented a deity or a worshiper:

My own opinion, and this is a purely subjective view, is that the dedicator was projecting himself through the image of the deity—that is to say, that there was a dual concept of god and man, man being expressed in the image and likeness of the god.

Keel and Uehlinger (1998:108), summarizing their discussion on Late Bronze and Early Iron Age so-called “Astarte plaques,” affirm the short-sightedness of denying them deity status and limiting them to representations of individual women:

The modern question about whether a figure represents a goddess or a woman, posing strict alternatives, is too short-sighted. The plaques portray the goddess as a woman, and conversely they identify the female worshipers above the plaques with the goddess.
To summarize, votive figurines that substitute for worshipers as well as those that represent deities both appear in public as well as in private shrines of iconic cultures. The luxury and quality of the sacred objects from public, especially royal, temples often surpass those found in private neighborhood and household shrines. Although the figurines lack specific deity markings, their uniformity precludes their standing for individual women. Rather than denying that female figurines from houses represent a goddess, we should recognize that votive figurines incorporate images of both the woman and her personal goddess, in fact they may demonstrate the relationship between the two.

**Cataloged (Specific) and Cultic (Unspecific)**

T. A. Holland cataloged figurines found by 1975 in his dissertation, which he published as *A Study of Palestinian Iron Age Baked Clay Figurines, with special reference to Jerusalem Cave I* (1977). James Engle’s 1980 dissertation “Pillar Figurines of Iron Age Israel and Ashera/Asherim” presents a seven-fold typology of “classical pillar figurines” based on eye-shape. Engle uses biblical references from William Reed’s *The Asherah in the Old Testament* (1949) and Greek parallels to identify them as asherim, small copies of large cult statues of Asherah. Both Holland and Engle classified female figurines, but neither attached any meaning to the various classes so that their work seems a mere exercise in statistics. Both authors posited a cultic or religious function for the figurines, however they did not furnish evidence for this assertion or develop the idea into a cogent argument. Their main contribution consisted of isolated data, which I will attempt to put into its archaeological and mythological context.
Figurines Non-Cultic?

Mervyn D. Fowler in “Excavated Figurines: A Case for Identifying a Site as Sacred?” (1985) answers his own question in the negative because some figurines, especially the ones from Achzib north of the Carmel peninsula, represent women playing tambourines or fulfilling daily activities such as kneading bread or bathing. Fowler cites figurines in Syria and Mesopotamia used to dedicate and protect houses or to ensure “release from the evil influence of magic or sorcery” as evidence for non-cultic interpretation (Fowler 1985a:340). Fowler holds a simplistic view of what constitutes religious ritual for certain groups of people. Images in the ancient Near East represented the supernatural powers of gods and goddesses and protective spirits. Cultic rituals like invocations and offerings released their power. The Hebrew Bible contains evidence that each of the activities Fowler dismisses as non-cultic occurred in religious ritual in the Israelite religion. For example, women played tambourines to celebrate Yahweh’s victories and his ascent to Jerusalem (Exod 15:20-21; 1 Sam 18:6-7; 2 Sam 6:5) and the law required ritual purification baths before attending temple services (Leviticus 15). Fowler’s arguments for non-cultic figurines remain unconvincing.

Are Figurines Toys?

Another of Fowler’s suggestions is that female and animal figurines might be toys that children formed crudely in their spare time as modern children do at Tell al-Hiba (1985a:341-42). However, the fine detail of the molded heads noted by Kelso and Thorley (Albright 1943:140) militates against this interpretation:
By their sharpness of detail the best of these heads show that the potter had mastered the technique of "pressing," i.e., the pressing of plastic clay into intaglio moulds and the securing of perfect impressions from them in a manner unexcelled by our modern potters. The heads are beautifully modeled. A purely decorative treatment was devised for the hair, while the face shows a fine feeling for sculptural planes. The eyes, though stylized, retain the subtleties of natural form, as do the forehead and eyebrows. The salience of the cheek bones and the transition of planes into the fleshlier qualities of the cheeks are well expressed, while the modeling of the muscles of the mouth confirms an understanding of sculptural values beyond that of the ordinary potter.

Elizabeth Bloch-Smith (1992:94) argues against the toy interpretation as well by stating that Judean burials included figurines, but people never placed frivolous or amusing objects in burials.

*Mother of Generations*

Bloch-Smith (1992:98-99) believes that the symbolic function of pillar figurines in tombs benefited the dead person's surviving childbearing family members; Judahites' concern for the survival of the family line made them beseech adequate lactation to sustain newborns and infants. She suggests that, alternately, the figurines may represent the "Mother of Generations" who provides for and consults the ancestors in a women's cult of the dead (Bloch-Smith 1992:100; Bird 1989:296-97; Sered 1986:29). According to Ackerman (1992), the cult of the dead was strong enough that women's concern with fertility grew out of the necessity of feeding their ancestors and preserving the land as their place of residence more than out of a concern to provide for their personal sustenance. This theory assumes that honored ancestors preserved the patrimonial ancestral lands for the family.
The idea that women were more concerned about ancestral lands than with physical survival seems flatly contradicted by biblical stories that record women and their families who left their ancestral lands in times of famine. The Ruth narrative reports that Elimelech and Naomi left Bethlehem “when there was a famine in the land;” later Naomi returned “because she heard in Moab that the Lord had shown his care for his people by giving them food” (Ruth 1:1, 6). In another case, the woman whose son Elisha had restored to life went to live in Philistia during a seven-year famine (2 Kgs 8:1-6). Although eventually both women returned, in both of these stories personal sustenance took priority over residence in their ancestral lands. I prefer Bloch-Smith’s first interpretation that Israelites placed pillar figurines in tombs to beseech adequate lactation to sustain newborns and infants of the dead person’s surviving childbearing family members to her alternate suggestion that the figurines represent a “Mother of Generations.” The large offered breasts of the figurines seem to favor their association with a concern for lactation and infant survival.

*Clay Figurines do not Define a Locale as Sacred*

Fowler says that the stylistic differences in clay figurines preclude that they all represent one particular deity and that all are used for the same purpose. He admits that metal statuettes symbolize deities, but he disputes de Vaux’s statement that these always resided in sanctuaries by listing examples from the Hyksos and Egyptian periods at Megiddo and the Hyksos quarters north of the temple complex of Middle Bronze Ugarit,
as well as divine representations from North Syria that belonged to private shrines with no connection to a public cult. He (Fowler 1985a:343) concludes:

The size of many supposed cultic figurines suggests that they never stood witness to an act of public worship, as a central object of worship in a temple; rather that they were votive offerings from shrines or household gods. Many terra-cotta female figurines have been recovered from Palestinian private houses, while the distribution of metal figurines found at Megiddo shows that not all come from a sacred area.

I agree with Fowler that small figurines relate to household shrines and personal gods, and in my following analysis I capitalize on the point that few figurines emerged from public sacred areas.

Pan-Syro-Palestinian Iconography

Urs Winter (Frau und Göttin, 1983) studied figurines and cylinder seals that feature a nude Near Eastern goddess, and he determined that the figure was a defending and intermediating goddess central to the Syrian pantheon, a consort of Hadad and Amurru, since on the cylinder seals she sometimes occurs standing on animals, accompanied by wings and a god, or wearing a horned cap. Winter hypothesized that the Judean pillar figurines and other representations of the goddess originated and functioned in the private religion of women. According to Winter, female figurines fulfilled the religious aspirations of women who had a low social and religious status in Israel by identifying them with the ideal, erotic, and powerful woman, and such figurines did not conflict with the official Yahweh cult:

Although it may be an exaggeration to say that all Yahwists accepted the use of figurines, they were very popular in Israelite houses and tombs. For example, at Tell Beit Mirsim 45% of all the houses in Level A produced at least one figurine or model (Holladay 1987:276; Albright 1943:69). They occurred throughout Israel and Judah, with a large number of them in Jerusalem, the center of the Yahwistic cult. In addition, in biblical mentions of “asherahs” they stand next to an altar in a Yahwistic open-air shrine (Deut 16:21; 2 Kgs 18:4; 2 Kgs 23:14, 15) or temple (2 Kgs 21:7; 2 Kgs 23:6). Several scholars equate “asherahs” with sacred trees, and the patriarchs planted trees in Yahwistic cult places (Gen 21:33; Gen 35:4, 7-8, 14-15). While I agree that Israelites who venerated “asherahs” and female figurines did not intend to challenge the Yahweh cult, the symbols probably exemplify the *pesilim* “carved images” and *gillulim* “dung balls”\(^\text{10}\) that the Deuteronomists and prophets disliked.

As I have noted already, it is difficult to believe that the “Syrian goddess” remained unnamed. Composite goddesses in Egypt (Astarte-Anat-Qudshu) and Mesopotamia (Inana-Ishtar) combined in one figure the characteristics of formerly separate deities, but the art and literature named them. From inscriptional evidence it is

---

\(^{10}\) Zevit's comprehensive new manuscript advances this correlation.
probably best to assume that the Judean goddess was named Asherah.

On another point, Winter fails to explain how the power or eroticism of the figurines fulfilled the religious aspirations of women. I will argue that Israelite women did not really occupy a low social and religious status. Their power and fulfillment centered in the household, the economic focus of early Israelite society, where they played key roles as administrators and educators. Their concern for family welfare led to religious expression within this context.

Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger (Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole, 1992; Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel, 1998) trace the iconography and meaning of female pillar figurines to Bronze and Iron Age dove figurines. According to Keel and Uehlinger (1998:31, 323-34, 333-336), doves carry love messages between gods and goddesses on Syrian cylinder seals, and doves designate or substitute for the goddesses Asherah in Judah and Astarte elsewhere. The woman and child figurine from Tell Beit Mirsim connects the full-breasted pillar figurines with a nurturing goddess (Keel and Uehlinger 1992:333). These are interesting ideas, however Keel and Uehlinger do not explain how the figurines as attributes or aspects of Asherah substituted for the goddess in ritual. I build on their research to explain how the figurines represent Asherah in women’s rituals to protect themselves and their children.

Non-Cultic Symbol of Asherah

Raz Kletter’s recent comprehensive work The Judean Pillar Figurines and the Archaeology of Asherah (1996) provides a fine-tuned catalog of types and sub-types, but
he does not attach meaning to the various styles. Kletter relies on studies of prehistoric figurines by Peter J. Ucko, "The Interpretation of Prehistoric Anthropomorphic Figurines" (1962) and *Anthropomorphic Figurines of Predynastic Egypt and Neolithic Crete, with Compatible Material from the Predynastic Near East and Mainland Greece* (1968), and Mary M. Voigt, *Hajji Firuz Tepe, Iran: The Neolithic Settlement* (1983) because of their theoretical value for interpreting figurines unaccompanied by textual explanations. Ucko criticized the blanket equation of female figurines with "mother-goddess." Voigt lists cultic, magical, didactic, amusement (toy), and burial functions of small figurines known from ethnographic sources and suggests that study of wear, damage, breakage, and disposal patterns, as well as archaeological context, relation to other artifacts, and evidence of burning helps to identify function. In a statistical report of the archaeological context of Judean pillar figurines, Kletter concludes that most of the figurines came from domestic (private) contexts; however, he discounts the significance of this with the dubious remark that "domestic contexts are by far the best represented in any excavation" (1996:61). He asserts that Judah was an isolated entity and scholars should not interpret its artifacts in light of "Syrian seal impressions and plaque figurines of the second millennium BC."

Kletter criticizes mercilessly all previous interpretations of pillar-base figurines. He rejects the idea that the pillar figurines represent a general unnamed goddess (great cosmic goddess, fertility goddess, mother goddess) or combination of goddesses (Astarte-Anat-Asherah). He reluctantly allows the figurines to represent Asherah with white magic function:
The function of the Asherah figurines was possibly as a protecting figure in domestic houses, more likely a figure which bestowed "plenty," especially in the domain of female lives (but not necessarily used by women only) ... Other than being a symbol for the goddess and what she can bestow, I doubt if these figurines were object of cult practices. At the most, one can imagine that they were addressed in prayers or wishes, perhaps during times of pressure and need. (Kletter 1996:81)

Although he cites the story of Herostratus bowing and praying for help before a goddess figurine on a journey to Egypt, he says, "It is hard to imagine sacrifices made to the [Judean Pillar Figurines], or persons kneeling before them and burning incense" (1997:78). In this Kletter displays an overly scientific, antireligious bias. He judges the mindset and practices of first millennium BCE by twentieth century humanism. In addition, he adheres to too narrow a view of "cult:"

by cult we mean special activities (e.g. giving votive objects, burning incense, sacrificing animals, praying) held in sacred buildings (shrines, temples, "high places," etc.) with the help of special cultic furniture (altars, incense stands, stone stele, etc.)... Even if the figurines are religious objects, it does not imply that they had a special cult. It seems better to limit the term cult to the definition made above. (Kletter 1996:78)

This definition reveals a modern tendency to compartmentalize life into sacred and secular, religious and scientific, spiritual vs. material. Preindustrialized societies view life holistically and recognize supernatural powers in every aspect of their lives—birth, death, illness, war, agriculture, weather, and so forth. Near Eastern religions exhibit many examples of prayers and incantations related to everyday life. Albé (1978:132) notes that personal piety tends to be less ritualized than public religion. For example, ancient Mesopotamians offered "free prayers" rather than recitations of standardized ones to their personal gods (Jacobsen 1976). Archaeological discoveries of altars and incense stands in
secular living rooms in Mesopotamia and the combination of religious objects with cooking pots, dishes, and weaving implements in Israelite houses confirm that ancient Near Eastern people did not confine their religion to royally-sponsored temples. The following chapters, especially Chapter Two: Cult and the Israelite Four-Room House and Chapter Three: House Gods and Shrines in the Ancient Near East, will develop and substantiate these ideas.

Summary of the Interpretation of Figurines

In the 1940's archaeologists called the numerous examples of female plaque and pillar figurines they discovered in Israelite excavations "Astarte" figurines. Pillar-base figurines conventionalized a nurturing goddess into a more abstract symbol. The excavators found figurines in houses and suggested that women made them for magic or religious rituals. In such a ritual the pillar-base figurine stood against the wall since the base flared at the bottom to stand alone, and the roughly-finished backs of the figurine heads and bodies indicated that the back was not meant to be exposed.

Pritchard's 1943 monograph recognized the pillar figurines as continuations of the earlier plaque figurines; they symbolically represented womankind, a domestic milk-fertility cult, or a mother goddess, although he did not advise identification with any goddess mentioned in the Bible. Tufnell and Kenyon, two women archaeologists, suggested that the female pillar figurines were foreign to the Yahweh cult. Patai argued that Asherah and Astarte were Hebrew goddesses, not foreign or magical entities. Although he believed that the Bronze Age plaque figures represented Astarte, the pillar-
base figurines were small clay counterparts of the larger wooden Asherah poles. Holladay explained the time sequence of the two as follows: the plaque-type figurines went into eclipse both in Israel and Judah during the ninth century, while the pillar-base ones came into vogue sometime in the eighth century in the north and in the late eighth or mid-seventh century in the south. According to Hestrin, the stylized elements of the pillar figurines parallel the Canaanite pendants: the head and breasts are the same, but the tree trunk replaces the tree-surmounted pubic triangle that depicted the female genitalia. Both symbolize Asherah.

Meyers treats the figurines as votive figures of worshiping women because Late Bronze Age Canaanite goddess statues were made of precious metals or stone and came from public shrines instead of or as well as houses. The following observations answer these objections: in the Levant the quality of artifacts reflects the varied economic positions of the royal or peasant patrons of a particular shrine, and both deity and worshiper figurines appear in temples as well as in house shrines. McCown and Kletter both argued that the idealized uniformity of the Iron Age pillar figurines suggests that they were abstract symbols of a goddess rather than of individual worshiping women. It is short-sighted to deny that female figurines from houses represent a goddess. Votive figurines incorporate images of both the praying woman and her personal goddess; in fact, they may demonstrate the relationship between the two.

Although Fowler used examples of figurines of women playing tambourines or performing daily activities as evidence for a non-cultic interpretation, the activities he dismissed as non-cultic frequently occurred in Israelite religious ritual. Another of
Fowler's suggestions—that figurines might be children's toys—is belied by the heads beautifully-modeled beyond the skill of the ordinary potter and by Bloch-Smith's observation that Judean tomb assemblies never included toys. On the other hand Fowler is correct in his claim that clay figurines do not define a locale as a public sacred area.

Holland, Engle, and Kletter cataloged Israelite figurines and suggested that they had a religious function, but they did not attach distinct meanings to the various styles. Using Syro-Palestinian parallels, Winter determined that nude Near Eastern goddess figurines portray a defending and intermediating Syrian goddess who originated and functioned in the private religion of women. Keel and Uehlinger relate female pillar figurines to doves which designate or substitute for goddesses; however, they do not explain how the figurines as attributes or aspects of Asherah substituted for the goddess in ritual. Kletter asserts that Judah was an isolated entity in the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, and that scholars should not interpret its figurines in the light of Syrian or Bronze Age antecedents. Kletter discounts the significance of his own conclusion that most figurines belonged to domestic contexts, and he doubts figurines were objects of cult practices such as incense burning. His narrow view that cult is practiced only in sacred buildings does not accord with archaeological discoveries of altars and incense stands in secular living rooms in Mesopotamia and the mingling of religious objects with cooking pots, dishes, and weaving implements in Israelite houses.

In the current status of scholarship on figurine classification and interpretation, several detailed descriptions of ancient Israelite female figurines extend their scope of reference to the entire West Semitic ancient Near East, while others limit their study to
eighth to seventh century Judah. Some scholars resist calling the figurines deities, and even those who equate the figurines with a goddess from the Near Eastern tradition hesitate to identify the name or function of such a goddess. The few who recognize Israelite figurines as women’s ritual objects provide little suggestion as to how they functioned. Archaeologists who locate the figurines in domestic contexts minimize their religious significance by negating the sacred character of household shrines and activities.

The majority of Israelite female figurines came from private residences of ordinary people. Chapter Two reviews the cultic structures and artifacts that accompany them in houses at four sites. It provides a setting for a discussion of the figurines’ function by discussing the archaeology of Israelite families and the architecture of the houses where they lived.
CHAPTER TWO: CULT AND THE ISRAELITE FOUR-ROOM HOUSE

Archaeology of the Israelite House and Family

Lawrence Stager’s 1985 study “The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel” collects and analyzes the evidence from excavations at early Israelite villages like Ai, Raddana, Tell Masos, and Shechem. He discusses the sizable increase of settlements in the central highlands of Palestine after 1200 BCE and describes the typical house form and its contents that point to the inhabitants as farmers and herders who lived in extended family compounds. Stager maintains that some aspects of the decentralized clan and tribal society continued under the monarchy. The usual Israelite house form consisted of three long rooms separated by pillars, and a rear broadroom. Residents sometimes divided these into smaller rooms. The side rooms were often cobbled or paved, and the central room served as a courtyard. The massiveness of the pillars and remains of stairways indicate that Israelite houses included second stories or work-worthy roofs. According to Stager, Israelites used the flagged side rooms on the ground floor as stables and the upper stories for bedrooms.

Two articles John S. Holladay, Jr. published, “Israelite House” (1992) and “Four-room House” (1997), combine what is known about architectural construction of the Israelite four-room house with functional interpretation of its interior features based partly on ethnographic parallels provided by Carol Kramer (“An Archaeological View of
a Contemporary Kurdish Village: Domestic Architecture, Household Size, and Wealth," 1979, and Village Ethnoarchaeology: Rural Iran in Archaeological Perspective, 1982) and Patty Jo Watson (Archaeological Ethnography in Western Iran, 1979). Holladay suggests that families lived on the second story because of the small size of the ground floor, the massive load-bearing courtyard pillars, and ethnographic parallels. George R. H. Wright (Ancient Building in South Syria and Palestine, 1985) and Ehud Netzer ("Domestic Architecture in the Iron Age," 1992) explain additional details of Israelite domestic architecture. The present knowledge of the architectural plan of Israelite houses provides an appropriate context for a discussion of women's social, economic, and religious activities within its ambience.

In "Life on the Land: The Subsistence Struggles of Early Israel" (1987), David Hopkins draws attention to the demographic and technological difficulties Israelite settlers faced to secure agricultural subsistence. The central highlands of Palestine where the early Israelite population concentrated provided a difficult and unpredictable environment for agriculture. The practically self-sufficient household formed the basic unit of the society. Dever (1997:27) affirms that,

The simplicity, homogeneity, and ideal adaptation of the houses to farm life seem to reflect an unstratified, kin-related, agrarian society and economy, based on the extended, self-sufficient family as the basic unit of production and consumption (what economists call the 'domestic mode of production').

Ethnographic and historical studies on the division of labor by gender demonstrate that men's activities characteristically center on food production and community leadership, while women tend to manage the household economy, including food storage
and preparation, and buying, selling, and trading property (Lowell 1991; Harris 1989; Gero 1992; Hasdorf 1991; Dommasnes 1991; Bruhns 1991). Proverbs 31's description of a good wife reflects this division of labor. The wife "keeps her eye on the conduct of her household" (31:27), whereas "her husband is well known in the assembly, where he takes his seat with the elders of the region" (31:23). Because the household is a woman's domain, she manages directly or indirectly all of its contents. However, items connected with processes of food preparation and storage—grinding stones, ovens, cooking pots, storage jars, and food particles—remain particularly visible in the archaeological record. Prov 31:14-15 describes a woman's labor in food production: "Like a ship laden with merchandise she brings home food from far off. She rises while it is still dark and apportions food for her household, with a due share for her servants."

In the subsistence agricultural setting of early Israel when there was little craft specialization, women spun thread and wove textiles for their family households. Craft specialization perhaps developed in a minimal way under the monarchy; however, even in industrial contexts weavers and spinners were always women. Biblical texts attest that Israelite women assumed the responsibility of weaving textiles and producing clothing for their families and deities. 2 Kgs 23:7 reveals that women wove vestments for Asherah in a room attached to the Jerusalem temple. Proverbs 31 describes the Israelite matriarch's activities of weaving, spinning, and sewing more fully than her other activities:

She chooses wool and flax and with a will she sets about her work. (13)  
She holds the distaff in her hand, and her fingers grasp the spindle. (19)  
When it snows she has no fear for her household,  
for they are wrapped in double cloaks (or, in scarlet). (21)
She makes her own bed coverings and clothing of fine linen and purple. (22) She weaves linen and sells it, and supplies merchants with sashes. (24)

Ancient Near Eastern texts, stone reliefs, and paintings portray women as spinners and weavers. A painting from the Middle Kingdom Khnum-hotep tomb at Beni Hasan, Egypt (2052-1778 BCE), shows women spinning thread and weaving on a loom (Fig. 2). Ugaritic Text 51.2:3-4 mentions the goddess Asherah's spindle, and Asherah threatens to stab Baal with it in the Hittite Elkumirša myth from the second half of the second millennium (Hoffner 1965:6-8; Pritchard 1969:512; J. Day 1992a:484). Hittite texts and a stela from Mar'ash picture spindles and mirrors as women's characteristic accessories.

Fig. 2: Ancient Egyptian Women Weaving and Spinning, from P. Newberry, *Beni Hasan* (1893), plate 29.
Records from ancient Sumer indicate that women did the milling, oil pressing, and weaving (Van de Mieroop 1989; Zagarell 1986; Maekawa 1980). A section of the Šurpu incantation tablets from the library of Assurbanipal at Ninevah depicts the goddesses Ištar and Uttu spinning a thick multicolored thread:

Incantation. Uttu took the thread into her hand. Ištar made the thread of Uttu ready, made the skillful woman sit down to its tot; she spun with a spindle white wool, black wool, a double thread, a mighty thread, a great thread, a multicolored thread, … (Šurpu 5-6:144-153; Reiner 1970:34)

On a stone relief from eighth to seventh century BCE Susa a lady sits on a lion-footed stool holding a spindle and a bundle of fibers she is about to spin into thread (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3: Lady Spinning on 8th-7th century BCE Susa relief, from M. Pézard and E. Pottier, *Catalogue des Antiquités de la Susiane* (1926), plate 13.
Needles, loom weights, cooking pots, dishes, and food remains define women's work areas in Israelite houses. These feminine implements frequently occur together with incense altars and female figurines in house rooms and courtyards. In addition, jewelry and accessories that Israelite women used to deflect evil often accompany their household weaving and cooking tools. The Israelite period houses at Tell Masos, Tell el-Far'ah, Beer-sheba, and Tell Halif provide examples of cultic artifacts and furniture Israelite women employed in household ritual.
Tell Masos

Tell Masos (Fritz and Kempinski 1983; Dever 1990a) in the northern Negev links the Canaanite tradition with early Israelite. Its well-preserved four-room pillared “Israelite” houses exemplify the house form typical of the agrarian society of the Palestinian hill country of the twelfth and eleventh centuries BCE. (Some scholars date these to the eleventh and tenth centuries.) Tell Masos may be the early Israelite town Hormah mentioned in Num 14:45. Several houses at this site show evidence of household religion and women’s participation in it.

House 314

House 314 in Area H Stratum 2 was built in the Canaanite tradition with rooms on three sides of a centrally-situated square courtyard (Fig. 4). In the southeast corner of Courtyard 314, facing the indirect access entrance, a mudbrick bench rests up against the wall of Room 343. Room 307 and its connecting Room 311 along the west side of the courtyard contained artifacts that indicate a special function—worked stone metalworking tools, imported Phoenician and Midianite decorated pottery, a blackened hearth, a .4 m. high mudbrick structure with ash residue, and four anthropomorphic stone figurines similar to votives that workers deposited in the Hathor temple at Timna. Ancient Near Eastern scholars equate Egyptian Hathor with the goddess Asherah who shares many of the same characteristics. The excavators suggest that Room 307 functioned as a workshop and perhaps as a cult room also (Fritz and Kempinski 1983:41). The residents of House
Fig. 4: Tell Masos House 314, from Fritz and Kempinski, *Tel Masos*, plan 14.
314 probably used the hearth and mudbrick structure with ash residue as well as the courtyard bench for metalworking and associated religious rituals invoking the protection of their personal family goddess. Mesopotamian house shrines I describe in Chapter Three: House Gods and Shrines in the Ancient Near East consisted of hearths and raised mudbrick structures for grain and incense offerings to protective housegods and goddesses. Syro-Palestinian cult rooms feature offering benches, sometimes with a raised podium, as their most prominent furniture. House 314 also had an indirect access entrance, a frequent aspect of neighborhood shrines. As I will demonstrate in Chapter Five: Amulets, Evil Eye, and Child-Stealing Demons, the courtyard bench provides a logical location for standing a figurine to guard the house from malevolent evil spirits. The presence in Room 307 of the four figurines typical of votives deposited in the Hathor temple at Timna demonstrates that the residents of this house at Tell Masos had an established relationship with a personal protective goddess that they worshiped in their home in addition to or instead of in a public sanctuary.

Room 304 in the northwest corner of the house stored household foodstuffs since in addition to conventional kitchenware it contained more than thirty storage jars. A bowl "of unknown function" leveled-off on one side with three handles also originated in Room 304. This unusual bowl very likely served for ritual grain offerings to the household deity. Apparently women occupied the two rooms closest to the courtyard bench. Women used Room 343, whose threshold opened next to the bench, for domestic economy. It contained several loom weights, two ovens, and numerous examples of kitchen pottery—nine bowls, seven kraters, three chalices, ten cooking jugs, two cooking
pots, eight regular jugs, one strainer jug, six juglets, nine storage jars, four hole-mouth jars, one amphora, five pyxides, a pilgrim flask, a fragment of a stand, the base of an Egyptian flower pot, and three lamps. In the northeast corner of the courtyard, between the doorway of this domestic economy Room 343 and the adjacent broadroom 331, probably the living-sleeping room, the excavators found numerous other examples of standard household pottery and copper fragments, as well as a bronze sewing needle.

Room 331, which residents entered from the northeast side of the courtyard near the end of the bench, held three offering bowls with pedestal, generally described as incense burners, three lamps, a bead, a large number of shells from the Red Sea, and a Canaanite-Phoenician style ivory lion head. The lion symbolized and accompanied the powerful protector goddesses of the Egypto-Canaanite pantheon, so its presence with the incense burners and lamps in Room 331 suggests that a woman with a newborn child slept there and protected herself and her newborn with shells and beads and by burning oil and incense to welcome the protective household goddess and to deflect the presence of jealous evil spirits. As I will show in Chapter Five, both ancient and modern Near Eastern women have employed lamps, incense burners, shells, and beads in rituals to frighten away child-stealing demons. In addition to demonstrating the wide-ranging international connections developed by the central Negev in the prenational Israelite period, House 314 illustrates artifacts of household cult such as anthropomorphic figurines, incense burners, oil lamps, and an ivory lion head.
House 167

Tell Masos House 167 in Stratum 2 Area A2 also dates to the eleventh or tenth century. It exemplifies an early form of the Israelite four-room house with a broadside rather than a longitudinal entrance. Plaster remains existed only in this house—in its back corner Room 169 and in a storage cellar. The unique Room 169 (Fig. 5) included two benches and walls carefully plastered with loess mixed with a small quantity of straw. The plaster consisted of an outer layer about 2-3 cm. thick and a thinner inside layer. Large body sherds from smashed storage vessels covered Room 169’s northern wall directly behind the bench as a sort of paneling (Fig. 6). The unusual technique of

Fig. 5: Tell Masos Room 169 Benches, from Fritz and Kempinski, Tel Masos, plate 28.
decorating walls with potsherds further distinguishes this room. Fritz and Kempinski (1983:22) report that in its last stage House 167's residents used the plastered Room 169 for storage, because a pithos, store jar, and jug stood on one of the benches. However, I propose that its conspicuous benches, careful plastering, and body sherd paneling indicate that the room also functioned as a household shrine, because the architectural features of plastered and decorated walls with benches around them define domestic cult rooms in the southern Levant, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Three: House Gods and Shrines in the Ancient Near East.

Fig. 6: Room 169 North Wall Bench, Plaster, and Body Sherd Paneling, from Fritz and Kempinski, *Tel Masos*, plate 28.
Several artifacts discovered in the room itself and in and around the house hint at luxury votive offerings—three chalices (one red decorated, another archaic), a decorated black-on-red juglet, an Ashdod ware red slip jug with vertical hand burnish imported from the coastal pottery-producing areas, as well as a bone scaraboid carved with animals and a limestone lion head. In addition to the fact that imported luxury items often serve as votive gifts, animals and lions accompany the goddess Asherah who, according to Canaanite texts and iconography, provided sustenance for flocks and demonstrated her power by standing on or next to a lion. Egyptian art sometimes even portrayed her counterpart Hathor with a lion’s body. Chapter Four: Fertility in Egypt, Ugarit, and Israel provides a detailed discussion of Lion Lady iconography. The House 167 benches, decorated walls, and luxury artifacts with religious motifs suggest that its residents observed a form of household cult. That a woman lived and worked in the house is plain from the cooking pots and copper needle found with the archaic chalice and decorated juglet.

House 42

House 42 in Stratum 2 Area A1 of Tell Masos is a typical early Israelite house in a row of such houses. However, at the center of its outer court sits a strange installation next to a huge ash pit. The .5 m. high structure has on its southwest side facing the house a lower ledge resembling an attached bench. Although the excavators do not attempt to interpret the installation, the elevated stone structure looks like an offering podium. No accompanying artifacts suggest that residents employed the raised structure and attached
bench in technological activities. Rather, as I will show in Chapter Three, raised structures and benches furnish cult areas in the Levant. We cannot be certain that a woman executed offering rituals in this area, but the excavators found a cookpot near the elevated structure, and inside House 42 they discovered a bone amulet with apotropaic ring-and-dot designs, a cooking pit, a fragment of a chalice or incense burner, a decorated stand, as well as jugs and bowls. The cooking pit, cookpot, jugs, and bowls indicate that a woman prepared food in the area near the elevated structure. The bone amulet with ring-and-dot designs, the chalice fragment, and the decorated stand imply women's household religious ritual. Egyptian flowerpots in two of the other Stratum 2 houses exhibit Egyptian influence at the site in the same time period. As I will show in Chapter Five, the ring-and-dot design on women's accessories reflects Egyptian ideas of the Divine Eye of Re, personified in the goddess Hathor who deflects the demonic evil eye of Apopis from disrupting normal life cycles. Houses 221 and 225 in Area B of the same Stratum 2 provide additional implications of household religious ritual—various chalices, including a basalt chalice, and a votive jar.

_Cultic Artifacts in Women's Living and Work Areas_

The late seventh to early sixth century BCE levels at Tell Masos reveal much more evidence of women's religious activity. The Area G rooms, which as a group would have formed a building too large to be a private house, yet too small and weak-walled to be a fortress, demonstrate the close relationship between figurines and women's work. Throughout the rooms the excavators found several female and animal figurines, lamps,
and a furniture model among women's textile production implements such as spindlewhorls, needles, and pins, as well as food storage and preparation vessels like cooking pots, bowls, storage jars, and kraters. For example, Room 708 from Phase 2 contained the underpart of a female figurine, two lamps, an alabaster vessel, decorated juglets, six cooking pots, three small bowls, a store jar, as well as an arrowhead and a hatchet. Phase 3 Locus 778 revealed a female figurine head and a furniture model in a household cluster of needle fragment, cooking pots, holemouth jars, bowls, and a decorated krater. Another Phase 3 locus, Room 718, housed an animal figurine fragment and head together with white burnished bowls and a clay spindlewhorl. A similar group—female figurine head, krater, small bowl, and store jar—came from Phase 4 Locus 741. Additional female and animal figurines, spindlewhorls, and cooking vessels were distributed among the adjoining loci. The presence of ritual artifacts like female and animal figurines, the furniture model, the lamps, and the luxury vessels in the environs of women's clothing production tools and cooking pottery illustrates the importance of household religion to women's daily life. I will elaborate on the significance of women's use of these items in the following.

*Tell Masos—Summary*

The structures and artifacts of several dwellings at Tell Masos suggest that early Israelites maintained household shrines. The presence in Room 307 of the four figurines typical of votives deposited in the Hathor temple at Timna demonstrate that the residents of House 314 depended on an established relationship with a personal protective goddess
whom they worshiped in their home in addition to or instead of in a public sanctuary. Residents probably used the hearth and mudbrick structure with ash residue as well as the courtyard bench for metalworking and associated religious rituals invoking the protection of their personal family goddess. Room 331 which residents entered near the courtyard bench held three incense burners, three lamps, a bead, a large number of shells from the Red Sea, and a Canaanite-Phoenician style ivory lion head. The lion symbolized and accompanied the powerful protector goddesses of the Egypto-Canaanite pantheon, so its presence with the incense burners and lamps in Room 331 implies that a woman with a newborn child slept there and protected herself and her newborn with shells and beads and by burning oil and incense to welcome the protective household goddess and to deflect the presence of jealous evil spirits.

The conspicuous benches, careful plastering, and body sherd paneling suggest that Room 169 in House 167 functioned as a shrine because plastered and decorated walls with benches around them are defining architectural features of domestic cult rooms in the southern Levant. Several artifacts discovered in the room itself and in and around House 167 hint at luxury votive offerings, and a bone scaraboid carved with animals and a limestone lion head reflect the goddess Asherah. At the center of House 42’s outer court next to an ash pit stands a .5 m. high structure with an attached bench. No accompanying artifacts indicate that residents employed the structure in technological activities, and it resembles offering podiums that furnish cult areas in the Levant. A cooking pit, cookpot, jugs, and bowls indicate that a woman prepared food in the area near the elevated
structure. The bone amulet with ring-and-dot designs, the chalice fragment, and the decorated stand suggest women's household religious ritual to deflect demonic forces.

Throughout the late seventh to early sixth century BCE Area G rooms at Tell Masos excavators found female and animal figurines, lamps, and a furniture model among women's textile production implements such as spindlewhorls, needles, and pins, as well as food storage and preparation vessels like cooking pots, bowls, storage jars, and kraters. The presence of ritual artifacts in the environs of women's implements illustrates the importance of household religion to Israelite women's daily life.
Tell el-Far'ah

The plan of tenth century Level 7b Tell el-Far'ah (Chambon 1984), the early northern Israelite settlement Tirzah, shows that most houses conform to the typical four-room house plan in that they have a long courtyard lined with pillars. Small longrooms stand parallel to the courtyard behind the pillars, and subdivided broadrooms generally close the end of the court. Almost every domestic dwelling in this neighborhood housed either a female or an animal figurine. These and other ritual artifacts like model sanctuaries, an incense burner, and magical jewelry, as well as architectural structures reminiscent of ancient Near Eastern shrines, accompany household goods in many house rooms, especially courtyards, and attest to women’s household shrines.

Fig. 7: Harnessed Horse Figurines from Tell el-Far'ah Loci 384, 354, and 355, from Chambon, *Tel El-Far'ah I: L'Âge du Fer*, planche 65.
Several houses in the southern half of the Level 7b settlement held the animal figurine fragments shown in Figure 7. For example, the excavators discovered a horse figurine head with harness in House 384, the southernmost house they investigated. North of House 384 in Building 354 they found a harnessed head and a body from a horse figurine, and in the next Building 355 a horse figurine body. While horse and rider figurines are undoubtedly ritual objects, they are not as obviously connected with women in their findspots and iconography as female figurines. In the above examples, the horse figurines originated in three buildings, only one of which the excavators consider a house. Additional horse figurines came from the defense fosse and the open space facing the city gate. In most of these locations bronze or iron arrows or arrowheads accompanied the horse figurines. In addition, an iron chisel lay near the figurine in Building 355. These co-occurring objects and their public locations imply that fighting men relied on horse figurines as protective amulets.

Horses historically relate to war. On a gold plaque from Late Bronze Age Lachish and a clay model from Tell Qarnayim near Beth-Shean the war goddess Anat stands on a horse. Horse iconography conveyed exclusively a military connotation in the Late Bronze Age (Keel and Uehlinger 1998:68, 141). Many of the Tell el-Far'ah horse figurines show remains of bridles or riders, as do most examples from later Iron II Israelite contexts. Some commentators connect these with the solar cult since 2 Kgs 23:11 states that King Josiah of Judah “did away with the horses that the kings of Judah had set up in honor of the sun at the entrance to the house of the Lord.” In addition to serving as amulets for fighting men, horse figurines in houses may have fulfilled a purpose similar to the
Fig. 8: Tell el-Far‘ah Level 7b Houses, from Chambon, *Tell el-Far‘ah 1*, fig. 3.
protective figurines in Mesopotamian houses that I explain in Chapter Three: House Gods and Shrines in the Ancient Near East.

Whereas the iconography of horses does not connect them specifically with women's concerns, bovines and lions connote fertility and a mother's protection (Chapter Four: Fertility in Egypt, Ugarit, and Israel). House 176 north of Building 355 contained a bovine head from a zoomorphic vessel, a miniature juglet, diorite weights, a spindlewhorl, and a bead. The excavators discovered another bovine spout from a zoomorphic vessel in House 427 near a woman with tambourine figurine and a bead. Figure 9 shows the bovine heads and female figurine from Houses 176 and 427.

Zoomorphic vessels are familiar in cultic contexts. Animal or human heads serve as decorative spouts for many libation vessels called rhytons. Sometimes these are trick vessels termed kemoi, in which the liquid circulates inside a hollow rim and pours out different openings depending on how the vessel is maneuvered. Archaeologists speculate that ancient Near Eastern people used kemoi in divination rituals.

Fig. 9: Bovine Heads and Female Figurine from Tell el Farah Houses 176 and 427, from Chambon, *Tel El-Farah I: L'Âge du Fer*, planches 63-64.
House 427 borders Rue 434 on the eastern edge of the residential neighborhood. House 436 which abuts it to the north along Rue 434 included several luxury objects including an appliqué from the rim of a vessel, a seal picturing a cow nursing a calf, a blue jewelry plaque, a pyxide, a lamp, and a tray, besides household pottery. The bovine heads, the cow nursing calf motif, the beads and blue jewelry plaque, the woman with tambourine figurine, and even the lamp, represent women's religious beliefs and rituals that stem from their wider ancient Near Eastern cultural heritage. As I will explain in Chapter Five, women wore beads and pendants, especially blue-colored jewelry, to guard themselves and their children against evil eye and child-stealing spirits. The bovine heads and cow nursing calf mirror women's fertility and nurturing concerns. No specifically male accoutrements accompany these votive artifacts from Houses 176, 427, and 436. On the other hand, several items like household pottery and the spindlewhorl confirm Israelite women's interest in them.

Three houses along the western edge of the housing development exhibited religiously significant material. Near the doorway to House 187 the archaeologists found a fragment of a female figurine with a hand-modeled base (Fig. 10). Its arms' position

Fig. 10: House 187 Figurine, from Chambon, Tel El-Far‘ah I, planche 63.
resembles that of the House 440 nursing female figurine molded from the same pink clay. In House 149B two beads and a pierced disk rested with a grinding stone, a mortar, a jug, and Cypro-Phoenician juglets. Pit 241 dug in its courtyard yielded a model sanctuary (Fig. 11), an obvious sign of household cult. Examples of Near Eastern model sanctuaries that included goddess figurines confirm that model sanctuaries served as deity niches (Bretscheider 1991). The adjacent House 161 showed signs of artisan activities as well.

Fig. 11: Locus 241 Model Sanctuary, from Chambon, Tel El-Far'ah I, planche 66.
as an ivory pendant and a green faience Egyptian flute-player amulet (Fig. 12). The ivory pendant, flute-player amulet, figurine fragment, model sanctuary, and probably even the beads and pierced disk from these three houses along the western edge of Tell el-Far'ah provide further evidence that Israelites did not confine their religious thoughts and activities to public temples.

Fig. 12: Flute-player Amulet, from Chambon, Tel El-Far'ah l, planche 63.

Houses 442 and 440

Houses 442 and 440 at the northern limit of the town show additional evidence of women’s religious activity at home. A chalice, an incense burner, and beads were unearthed from the enclosed broadroom section of House 442, and four Cypriot bowls and kraters came from its front. The houses at Tell el-Far'ah did not exhibit any remains of stairways or second-story living rooms. Some archaeologists consider that rear broadrooms of Israelite four-room dwellings housed the family’s sleeping quarters. Both ancient and modern Near Eastern women frequently have protected their bedrooms with
incense at childbirth and during the breast-feeding period of child-rearing. Burning incense invokes protective house deities and turns away evil influences. Beads aid toward the same purpose. The chalice and imported bowls could have acted as appropriate containers for votive food gifts at the house shrine.

The adjacent House 440 (Fig. 13) is particularly rich in cultic finds. In the courtyard near the door to the street lay an oven, and near it on the beaten earth floor of the courtyard excavators found a nursing female figurine, a harnessed horse head from a

Fig. 13: House 440 Plan with Bench, from Chambon, Tel El-Far'ah I, planche 11.
Fig. 14: Horse Head, Woman with Tambourine, Model Shrine, and Nursing Female Figurine from House 440, from Chambon, *Tel El-Far'ah I*, planches 63, 65, and 66.
zoomorphic vessel, an alabaster pendant, and six beads. A model sanctuary had fallen into the paved side room to the right of the courtyard. A female with tambourine figurine rested on the beaten earth floor near a .5 m. high 3 m. long stone bench that ran along the rear west side of the courtyard. Fig. 14 provides drawings of the horse head from a votive vessel, the woman with tambourine, the model shrine, and the nursing female figurine from the house.

The mistress of the house possibly used the bench for offerings to the family’s protective goddess since similar furniture characterized Mesopotamian, Canaanite, and Israelite household and neighborhood shrines where families offered food and incense to their personal deity (Chapter Three: House Gods and Shrines in the Ancient Near East). The nursing female figurine indicates that the woman was seeking protection from her personal household goddess during the vulnerable breast-feeding period when she and her infant were especially susceptible to child-stealing demons. Chapter Five: Amulets, Evil Eye, and Child-Stealing Demons explains the ritual covenant relationships ancient Near Eastern women maintained with their protective goddesses.

Biblical and other ancient Hebrew texts like the Khirbet el-Kom and Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscriptions imply that Asherah acted as Israel’s protective goddess. Asherah occurs in the biblical context of the death of King Jereboam I’s son while he was living here at Tirzah. The prophet Ahijah informs Jereboam’s wife that her child will die and God will punish Israel because they have made “asherahs” (1 Kgs 14:15). Then “Jereboam’s wife went away back to Tirzah, and as she crossed the threshold of the house, the boy died” (1 Kgs 14:17). I hope to demonstrate in this dissertation that the
Israelite figurines, including those in Tirzah, represented Asherah. Asherah not only partnered with El/Yahweh in providing children, but she protected mothers and their young children against the continual threats of infant mortality and short female life span. This provides the background against which the prophet Ahijah reprimands Jereboam's wife for making images of Asherah and allows her child to die.
Houses with Courtyard Alcoves

Ancient Near Eastern house shrines and cult rooms often provided offering benches, podiums, or niches for the deity they worshiped. Whereas the text and stone plan of the excavation report interpret the structure along the rear west wall of House 440's courtyard as a bench, the isometric drawing shows an alcove. Several of the Level 7 houses at Tell el-Far'ah included alcoves that may have functioned as niches for protective house deities. Houses 436 (Fig. 15) and 355 of Level 7b had small 1-2 m.

Fig. 15: Isometric Drawing of House 436, from Chambon, Tel El-Far'ah 1, planche 12.
square alcoves near the entrances of their courtyards. House 327 (Fig. 16) from the ninth to eighth century Level 7d had a large dressed stone of uncertain function in the center of its courtyard and beside it a small alcove facing the door to the street. These alcoves possibly served the same cultic purpose as model shrines.

Fig. 16: Isometric Drawing of House 327, from Chambon, *Tel El-Far'ah I*, planche 21.
Women's cooking installations predominate in the House 327 courtyard area. A silo, an oven, and additional cooking implements pertain to the inner section of the courtyard. These alcoves in Israelite houses at Tell el-Far'ah convey the impression of house cult niches where women poured libations from zoomorphic vessels, recited prayers and incantations, and burned oil and incense to the goddess who protected the household. The excavators found a female figurine torso (Fig. 17), a spindlewhorl, a Cypriot bowl, an iron chisel, and a basalt mortar in the courtyard near the alcove. As in the other Tell el-Far'ah houses, the female figurines and zoomorphic libation vessels come from areas where women prepared food and produced textiles.

Fig. 17: Figurine Torso from House 327 (Louvre AO.21687), from Chambon, *Tel El-Far'ah I*, planche 63.
Tell el Far’ah Summary

Most of the Israelite dwellings from the tenth century Level 7b at Tell el-Far’ah, biblical Tirzah, included either a female or an animal figurine in their household commodities. Horse figurines, often accompanied by arrowheads, came from several buildings in the southern section of the residential district as well as from the defense fosse and the open space facing the city gate. While the war goddess symbolism of horse figurines labels those from public findspots as amulets for military men, those from houses must have fulfilled a purpose similar to the protective figurines that guarded Mesopotamian houses. The ivory pendant, flute-player amulet, figurine fragment, model sanctuary, and probably the beads and pierced disk from Houses 187, 149B and 161 from the western edge of the settlement show that Israelites did not confine their religious thoughts and activities to public temples. The bovine heads, the cow nursing calf motif, the beads and blue jewelry plaque, the woman with tambourine figurine, and even the lamp from Houses 176, 427, and 436 represent women’s religious beliefs and rituals their wider ancient Near Eastern heritage associated with fertility and a mother’s protection. No specifically male accoutrements accompany these votive artifacts; on the other hand, several items like household pottery and the spindlewhorl confirm Israelite women’s interest in them.

The northeastern section of the tell is particularly rich in cultic finds. In addition to House 427 where the excavators discovered bovine and female figurines, House 436 included several luxury votive objects, House 442 contained an incense burner and
Cypriot bowls, and their neighboring House 440 produced a nursing female figurine, a harnessed horse head from a zoomorphic vessel, an alabaster pendant, six beads, and another female with tambourine figurine from the beaten earth floor of its courtyard near a 3 m. long stone bench, as well as a model sanctuary. Several of the houses in Level 7 at Tell el-Far'ah have courtyard alcoves that connote niches where women repeated prayers and incantations, poured libations, and burned oil and incense to the goddess who protected the household. Women’s cooking installations predominate in these courtyard areas where excavators also found fragments of female figurines, zoomorphic libation vessels, and women’s textile-producing tools. The Israelite houses from tenth century BCE Tell el-Far'ah demonstrate women’s religious agency in their households.
Tell Beer-sheba

Stratum 2 of Tell Beer-sheba (Aharoni 1973; Herzog, Rainey, and Moshkovitz 1977) dates to the eighth century. Although their sizes differed, the Beer-sheba houses conformed to the general characteristics of Israelite four-room houses—a long courtyard divided by pillars that supported the roof and a rear broadroom. According to Herzog (1997:290-91), the broadroom served as the family’s bedroom and often formed part of the city’s casemate wall, while an extra front room that faced the street functioned as the house’s kitchen. Holladay (1992:310) objects to this proposed arrangement, citing the inadequate size of rear rooms like the 1.15 x 4 m. casemate Room 63 of Beer-sheba House 75. Several houses exhibit remains of staircases leading from the kitchen to the roof, which afforded additional living and work space. Technological installations imply that household residents employed some of the longrooms as craft or industrial workshops. The excavators experienced some difficulty in attributing room spaces to particular houses. Individual family houses may have included two longrooms, although the area plans and isometric drawings present most houses as having three:

There are fundamental problems in establishing the relation of the spaces to the buildings; these will be raised further in the discussion. The area plan and isometric drawing presented buildings with three elongated spaces, but a distribution of buildings with two such spaces is possible as well...Here, too, we face the problem of ascertaining which rooms belonged to it. Were there three front rooms and three elongated spaces, or only two front rooms and two elongated spaces? (Aharoni 1973: 31, 34)

Several of these ordinary houses held extraordinary cultic pottery distributed among household implements women used in daily household activities. I will discuss Houses
76, 75, and 25 in the western quarter, House 430 next to the city gate, and House 808 in the northern section of the city. Fig. 18 provides a map of the site.

Fig. 18: Tell Beer-sheba Site Plan, part of Plate 84, from Aharoni, Beer-Sheba 1.
Western Quarter Houses

Excavators of the western residential quarter at Beer-sheba divided the row of rooms into three houses—Building 76, Building 75, and Building 25. The houses contained many signs of women’s presence and domestic religious activity: fragments of zoomorphic and female figurines occur with magic jewelry, cooking pots, loom weights, lamps, miniature juglets, and a cosmetic stick. Figure 20 on the next page shows a detailed plan of the western quarter rooms.

Building 76 is the northernmost house in the row. According to the excavation report, front Rooms 124, 99, and 93; long Rooms 76, 78, and 87; and casemate Room 66 belong to Building 76 (Aharoni 1973:34). An iron ploughshare rested in Room 99, evidence that the town’s residents still maintained an agricultural economy. Front Room 93 contained a krater with horizontal loop handles incised with the Hebrew inscription qdš “consecrated” (Fig. 19). A similar, but uninscribed krater came from Room 124. The inscription identifies the vessel as a container for votive offerings. Archaeologists

Fig. 19: QDŠ Krater, from Aharoni, Beer-Sheba I, plate 69.
Fig. 20: Western Quarter Houses, from Aharoni, *Beer-Sheba I*, plate 94.
speculate that an Israelite sanctuary occupied the area across the road from the western quarter houses before Hezekiah’s reform replaced it with an administrative building (Herzog, Rainey, and Moshkovitz 1977). Members of the household perhaps saved the ritual bowl from the sanctuary to use for offerings at a household shrine or made it themselves for the same purpose. They could have made it themselves because the site’s excavators interpret a stone and mud installation in the stone-paved courtyard 78 as a potter’s kiln since remains of crude clay between two pillars match the composition of the clay jars in the town’s storerooms.

As I mentioned in the introduction to Tell Beer-sheba, domestic kitchens were generally located in front rooms near the street. Entrance to living and work space on the roof and to rear bedrooms and food storage led through these food preparation areas. For this reason a front room presented an optimal location for a household shrine that honored and invoked the protective deity who guarded against potentially damaging evil spirits that attempted access to the house. According to the Building 76 plan for Stratum 2, the mistress of the house passed through the shrine Room 93 where the votive krater stood and traversed long Room 76 on her way from kitchen 124 to the food storage in casemate Room 66. Numerous items from these rooms demonstrate female presence. Kitchen 124 contained fragments of 4 bowls and a jar in addition to a cooking pot, juglet, polished stone, loom weight, and krater. Room 76, which adjoins the area where excavators discovered the inscribed offering vessel, held a woman’s cosmetic stick, loom weight, tiny juglet, jar, bowl, 3 cooking pots, and 2 jugs, as well as animal bones and fragments of additional cooking pottery. The woman likewise frequented casemate Room 66, as a
stone pendant, mother-of-pearl, loom weight, basket segment, grinding stone, cooking pot, 2 vertebrae, 2 spatulas, 6 bronze or stone weights, kernels of wheat and barley, and numerous food containers attest. Whole pottery vessels and fragments near the door of the room include 10 bowls, 7 juglets, 2 jars, and 3 holemouth jars. These environs demonstrate that the krater inscribed with the qdš label belonged to a female domain.

The excavators assigned casemate Rooms 63 and 383; long Rooms 77, 75 and 28; front Room 94; and the adjoining Courtyard 36 to the middle Building 75. A large hollowed-out stone mortar from Courtyard 75 and a grinding stone, worked stone, and stone hammers from Room 77 suggest a cottage grain industry. Additional artifacts from the longrooms are unremarkable except that Room 77 contained a faience vessel fragment, and Courtyard 75 held 8 loom weights, 4 lamps, a decorated juglet, and a number of large storage vessels. Typical women’s artifacts—cooking pots, bowls, jars, a small juglet, a bronze ring, and a carnelian bead—came from casemate Room 63. Room 28, the extension of entrance Courtyard 36, housed a decorated amphora, a lamp, juglets, cooking pots, storage vessels, and a brick base for a pithos; its casemate Room 383 had only a few small eating bowls and a jug. Women possibly employed the decorated amphora (Fig. 21a), juglets, and lamp from the extension of Courtyard 36 in votive offerings on its benches that I introduce in the following description. Both Rooms 94 and 36 were women’s kitchen domains that included ovens and cooking pots. In addition, Room 94 held a lamp and a fragment of a zoomorphic figurine. The published report does not give details or a picture of the figurine; however, erecting a figurine to guard the entrance and lighting a lamp to attract beneficent deities and deflect evil ones are rituals

Building 25's Pillar-Base Figurine, Model Couch, and Miniature Lamp

The rooms the excavators assigned to Building 25 exhibit the largest number of household cult artifacts as well as the most convincing evidence for the agency of women in household ritual. Room 25 produced a pillar-base figurine, a couch model, and a miniature lamp among women's household economy items, and archaeologists found figurine fragments in two of the other long rooms they included in Building 25. The higher than average number of figurines and figurine fragments discovered in the longrooms assigned to Building 25 militates against these rooms all belonging to the same house. According to Holladay (1987:276), about 45% of Israelite houses at Tell Beit Mirsim and Beer-sheba exhibited cultic artifacts, and these had on the average one figurine per house. It is uncertain whether the southernmost section's Rooms 145 and 44 formed part of the house since its destroyed front part revealed no traces of architectural connections to Building 25 and excavation halted at its southern boundary. A later season of excavation partially uncovered smaller residential dwellings south of Building 25 (Aharoni 1973:37); Rooms 44 and 145 thus could conceivably represent one of these smaller house configurations. The archaeologists combined them with Building 25 on the basis of consistency with their 3-longrooms per house hypothesis.

Although their street-front section is missing due to Persian period construction, the 145-44 combination seems reversed from the other house layouts in that its kitchen is
in the rear section of the house closer to the casemate wall. Room 44 yielded an oven, 30 clay loom weights, several cooking pots, bowls, and jars. Room 145 had an jar inscribed with ʾimʾ (Fig. 21b), possibly another relic of the demolished public sanctuary, and an undescribed figurine fragment. The long central Room 48 of Building 25 contained another figurine fragment accompanied by beads, a bracelet, loom weights, a decorated amphora (Fig. 21c), a button, a few cooking pots, and a large number of bowls and storage jars. Three arrowheads at the highest level of the locus mark the city's destruction, probably by Sennacherib. Two lamps and a few bowls belonged to Casemate Room 46 behind 48. As usual women's jewelry, textile production tools, and cooking equipment surround figurines in Israelite houses, affirming their ownership and ritual importance to women.

Fig. 21: Decorated and Inscribed Jars from Rooms 28, 145, 48, and 25, from Aharoni, Beer-Sheba I, plates 67, 74, 72, and 71.
Room 22 held additional household items; however, the most significant discovery involved the cultic cluster encountered among women’s cooking pots, bowls, juglets, a krater, and a decorated jar (Fig. 21d) in Room 25. The group consisted of a black and white painted pillar base figurine, a couch model, and a miniature lamp that showed traces of burning indicating it had been used as an incense burner (Fig. 22).

![Fig. 22: Figurine, Model Chair, Miniature Lamp, and Juglet from House 25, from Aharoni, Beer-Sheba I, pl. 71.](image)

As I will argue in Chapter Five: Amulets, Evil Eye, and Child-Stealing Demons, Israelite women negotiated a contract with the protective house goddess Asherah stipulating that she protect the mother and her newborn infant from the evil eye and the child-stealing demons. Asherah was invoked by her name, her image, and by burning oil or incense. Historical and ethnographic evidence shows that ancient as well as modern Near Eastern women burned oil and incense with prayers and incantations to encourage the presence of the favorable house deities and to purify the room from threatening evil. The following will suggest that the chair was a miniature offering table symbolizing the
lap of the goddess. The juglets and the red, white, and gray decorated jar doubtless held
the grains and liquid ingredients the women employed in their offerings.

The Room 25 pillar-base figurine has a flattened head and striped neck similar to
the Ashdoda figurine, a combination of female figurine and offering table in which the
head and chest of the goddess form the back of the throne or chair, while the seat of the
chair is her lap (Fig. 23a, Dothan 1971:129). Similarly-shaped “seated female” figurines
with offering table laps come from Assyrian Assur (Fig. 23b). The Ashdoda derives from
Mycenaean black and white striped “divine nurses.” One form stands on a pillar-base and
supports a child; another form seats a goddess on a throne-chair with arms down to hold a

Fig. 23: Seated Female Figurines, from Dothan, Ashdod II-III, fig. 91,
Fig. 24: Mycenaean Divine Nurse Figurines,
from Mylonas, “Seated and Multiple Mycenaean Figurines,” figs. 6a, 7, and 9.
child at its waist (Fig. 24, Mylonas 1956). Later, both at Mycenae and in Philistine Ashdod, artisans rendered the divine nurse more symbolically or even omitted the throne occupant. Archaeologists call furniture models from various excavations chairs, couches, or beds. For example, the Tell Masos excavators found a “bed” model with a female figurine head in Locus 778. Throughout Tell Masos Area G female and animal figurine fragments came from the same loci as spindle whorls, needles, and cooking pots, confirming that women used them in their domestic work areas. The history of the Ashdoda figurine, its similarity to the Beer-sheba Room 25 female figurine, and the discoveries of furniture models with female figurines at Beer-sheba, Tell Masos, and elsewhere, all suggest that the models represent the fertile goddess nurturing her children and lending her protective powers to the mother of the house.

The Beer-sheba Room 25 miniature lamp that served as an incense burner recalls the pillar-base lamp figurines found in Tell Beit Mirsim Stratum A. One example, a tiny version of the typical Iron II lamp, rests between three branches on top of its pillar base. It originated in a house (Loci NW 22-13, -4, -5) that also produced the head and base of a female pillar-base figurine and a zoomorphic vessel. Another ritual lamp came from the rear broadroom of a four-room building at Tell en-Nasbeh (McCown, Wampler, and Bade 1947:208). That whitewashed, red-painted ritual lamp sat on a pedestal among the three branches of a very small tree or bush. All of these lamps burned incense or oil to protect Israelite houses from evil influences by invoking the protective divine presence.

As I will show in Chapter Five, lamps and incense burners generally accompanied household prayers and incantations in the ancient Near East. In Babylonian texts the lamp
represents the divine fire and is on a par with household gods and goddesses in domestic cult. For example, to counteract an ominous dream a person must touch the ground, light the lamp, respectfully greet his god, his goddess and the lamp (nāru) (Dream-book 343r.16-17; Oppenheim 1966). Biblical texts also associate lamps with cultic ritual; the lamps in a Yahwistic sanctuary were lit at dusk and burned until dawn. Prov 31:18 states that a good wife’s lamp (ner) does not go out all night. According to the Mishnah (m. Shab. 2.6), a woman can lose her life in childbirth if she is careless in kindling the lamp. The Talmud (b. Sanh. 32b; j. Ket. 1:25a) indicates that kindling a light frustrates the evil powers that threaten a woman during childbirth since they operate only under darkness (T. Gaster 1980:11). All of these parallels join the appearance of the ritual lamp with the female figurine to support the assumption that Israelite women at Tell-Beer-sheba lit their lamps to expel demonic influences that threatened them and their newborn children.

The Courtyard 36 Offering Structures

Returning to House 25 at Tell Beer-sheba, we note that Room 25, source of the pillar-base figurine, couch model, and miniature lamp cluster adjoins the small entrance Courtyard 36 (Fig. 25). Although the site excavators included Room 25 with Rooms 28 and 145 to posit a large five-roomed house, no actual wall separated Room 25 from Courtyard 36, which may have served as an entrance to Building 25 rather than to the kitchen Room 94 of Building 75 or as the common entrance courtyard for both dwellings. Odd architectural structures border Courtyard 36 on both its northern and southern limits.
A wall base or a bench made of several long flint stones extends inward from the street along the southern boundary of the courtyard between it and Room 25. The flint stones differ from stones used typically in wall-foundations, and the “wall” is about 50 cm higher than other wall foundations at the site. These factors tempted the excavators to identify the structure as a bench rather than as a wall. They doubt that Room 25’s northern wall with Room 28 continued to the street. It is more likely that residents entered House 25 through Courtyard 36. However, since free-standing benches were otherwise unknown in the settlement, they drew a low separating wall between Courtyard 36 and Room 25 in the isometric reconstruction. The probable bench near the street entrance borders the findspot of the pillar-base figurine, the model couch, and the miniature lamp. Its identity as a bench allows its interpretation as an elevated house shrine where women
burned incense to the protective household goddess Asherah in front of her image, and deposited small offerings on the couch, her symbolic lap.

On both sides of Courtyard 36 stand structures which resemble offering benches in recognized cult rooms. On the north side of Courtyard 36, opposite the aforementioned bench, a narrow elevated stone ledge separates the courtyard and the ruined stairway. The unusual shelf does not seem to function as a banister for the stairs because it continues beyond the threshold and obstructs the passage from Courtyard 36 to Room 94. The house builders may have designed both of these raised structures for offerings to the protective house goddess. As Chapter Three: House Gods and Shrines in the Ancient Near East demonstrates, ancient Mesopotamians similarly built raised structures on which to place offerings and house deity images near their doorways. Tell el-Far'ah exhibits additional examples of offering benches or niches in entrance courts, and the entranceway and benchroom at Kuntillet 'Ajrud further illustrate such architectural structures.

*Houses 808 and 430*

Israelites built four-room House 430 (Fig. 26) up against the city's casemate wall just to the southwest of the city gate.¹¹ Yadin attempted to make this house the location of the Stratum 3 dismantled horned altar whose sanctuary an Israelite reforming king demolished and whose stones builders re-used for administrative and fortification projects. However, Herzog, Rainey and Moshkovitz (1977) successfully defended House

¹¹ The dotted square in the Fig. 26 plan of Room 443 depicts the size of the altar in the unrealistic position Yadin proposed.
Fig. 26: House 430, from Herzog, Rainey, and Moshkovitz, "The Stratigraphy of Beer-Sheba," fig. 2.
430 as "an ordinary dwelling like all the others abutting the casemate wall around the city" with no cultic features in its architecture. Rather than sheltering a public sanctuary with an elaborate altar, House 430 enclosed a normal family and its household shrine. Archaeologists found a pillar-base figurine and a model chair or couch in its front Room 443—an optimal position for an image of the protecting house goddess. As I demonstrated in the case of the Room 25 cultic cluster, model chairs that occur with pillar-base figurines represent the lap of the child-protecting goddess. Artifacts from one of the house's long spaces, Room 442, included two cuboidal limestone altars. These doubtless served the mother of the house as incense burners that invoked Asherah.

The Room 442 incense altars resemble the plain stone altars found among cultic objects in Stratum 2 Loci 809 and 866. Locus 809 lies in a domestic area in the northern quarter of the tell near House 808, where the excavators recovered a model chair and a zoomorphic vessel in the shape of a bird. Beneficent bird figurines, especially dove figurines, functioned as symbols of the goddess as early as the Bronze Age shrines at Nahariyah and Megiddo and as late as Iron Age II (Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 31, 323), and the model chair again symbolizes her lap. Thus House 808 provides another example of a house shrine in which women offered grain and incense to Asherah.

Archaeologists discovered the fourth undecorated limestone altar among cultic objects in Building 859 and associated favissa to the northwest. These cultic objects included terracotta, bronze, stone, and faience deity figurines and magic jewelry. A significant object in this assemblage, found among Iron Age pottery, beads, amulets, and the base of a sitting animal above the Stratum 2 (eighth century) floor of Building 859,
but below the Hellenistic floor level, was the spout of a bone incense burner decorated with the shape of a goddess holding her breasts. This breast-incense combination indicates that women burned incense offerings to honor a goddess involved with breast-feeding infants, the same iconography evident in the pillar-base figurines. It is highly unlikely that this iconography represents women's sexual role since the figurines do not portray the female genitalia once prominent for Bronze Age female figurines. As I will demonstrate in Chapter Five, the symbolism of large offered breasts combined with the outlined eyes of the pillar-base figurines relates to mothers of nursing infants who need sustenance and protection.
Tell Beer-sheba—Summary

To summarize, the eighth century BCE Israelite houses in Tell Beer-sheba Stratum 2 provide several examples of cultic artifacts in women’s food preparation, cooking, storage, and weaving areas. Front Room 94, the site of a woman’s oven and cooking pots, held a lamp and a fragment of a zoomorphic figurine. Stationing a figurine to guard the entrance and lighting a lamp to attract the beneficent deity and deflect evil ones are rituals Near Eastern women habitually practiced. Courtyard 36, itself a kitchen, borders both Room 94 on the north and Room 25 on the south, where excavators found a female figurine, miniature lamp, and model couch. Architectural structures that resemble votive offering shelves line the sides of Courtyard 36 where it adjoins these two findspots of votive figurines and lamps. Domestic kitchens in front rooms near the street, because they give entrance to the living and work space on the roof and to the rear bedrooms and food storage, afford natural places for household shrines that honor and invoke the protective deity who guards against potentially damaging evil eyes and evil spirits that attempt access to the house.

A krater with horizontal loop handles labeled qds “consecrated” belongs to a front room household shrine of House 76. A cosmetic stick, stone pendant, mother-of-pearl, loom weights, as well as food remains and containers mark this area as the domain the mistress of House 76 traversed on her way from her cooking and weaving area to the food storage in casemate Room 66. The room combination 44-145 contained an oven, 30 clay loom weights, cooking pots, a jar inscribed with lwm, and a figurine fragment. The long
central Room 48 of Building 25 contained another figurine fragment, beads, a bracelet, loom weights, a decorated amphora, a button, a few cooking pots, and a large number of bowls and storage jars. The women’s jewelry, textile production tools, and cooking equipment that surround the figurines in these Israelite houses affirm that women owned them and incorporated them in their household religious rituals.

Model chairs that represent the lap of the child-protecting goddess appeared with figurines and incense burners in Houses 25, 808 and 430. Additional figurines occurred with lamps. These cultic artifacts from women’s work areas at Tell Beer-sheba indicate that women positioned images of the family protective goddess near vulnerable entrances to their dwellings, provided her with votive offerings, and burned incense and oil to invoke her aid.
Tell Halif

During the 1992 excavation season at Tell Halif (Lahav), the Field 4 team exposed the remains of a household shrine in Stratum 6B. Elements of the household shrine mixed with ordinary household pottery in the ground floor rear broadroom of a late eighth century four-room house Israelites had built into the city wall (Jacobs 1992; Seger 1992a; Seger 1992b; Borowski 1995). On floor G8005 of the room the molded head of a female pillar-base figurine accompanied a ceramic fenestrated incense stand with a broad bell-shaped base and a cylindrical body with rectangular and circular openings (Fig. 27). The stand seems originally to have had attached to its top a bowl for incense burning.

Fig. 27: Limestone Blocks, Incense Stand, and Female Figurine Head, from Seger, “Tell Halif, 1992,” fig. 4.
(Borowski 1995:151). The censor rested between a pair of rectangular, carved limestone blocks with beveled edges and smooth faces. The blocks did not show evidence of burning, so the excavators speculate that they may have functioned as māṣṣēbōt “sacred stelae” or as additional stands for incense bowls.

The household shrine room architecture revealed two phases. Residents modified its initial purely domestic nature by blocking doorways and constructing insulating walls to create a more sacred space in its second phase. Borowski (1995:151) states that what appear to be expansions of the wall foundations in fact may be offering benches. These apparently cultic structures and artifacts occupied women’s work space in the private Israelite house. Many household clay vessels and stone and bone implements dominated the room. An oven outside the room, fish bones, and carbonized remains of grapes, cereals, and legumes indicate that this was a woman’s household food preparation and storage area. According to Borowski (1995:151-52), “The location and character of this structure strongly suggest a private shrine belonging to the owners of the house in which it was found,” and his co-director P. Jacobs “maintains that this shrine room was built and managed by women.” This Israelite house shrine at Lahav affords another excellent example of an incense-burning altar and a female figurine associated with a woman’s work area. Fig. 28 shows the stone plan of the section of the house where the shrine was located.
Fig. 28: Site of Israelite House Shrine, from Seger, “Tell Ḥalif, 1992,” fig. 2.
Cult and the Israelite Four-Room House—Summary

The usual Israelite house form consisted of three long rooms separated by pillars and a rear broadroom. The side rooms were often cobbled or paved, and the central room served as a courtyard. The massiveness of the pillars and remains of stairways indicate that some Israelite houses included second stories or work-worthy roofs. Stager and Holladay suggest that families lived on the second story because of the small size of the ground floor, the massive load-bearing courtyard pillars, and ethnographic parallels. The present knowledge of the architectural plan of Israelite houses provides an appropriate context for a discussion of women’s social, economic, and religious activities within its ambience.

Ethnographic and historical studies on the division of labor by gender demonstrate that men’s activities characteristically center on food production and community leadership, while women tend to manage the household economy, including food storage and preparation. Because the household is woman’s domain, she manages directly or indirectly all of its contents. However, items connected with processes of food preparation and storage—grinding stones, ovens, cooking pots, storage jars, and food particles—remain particularly visible in the archaeological record. In the subsistence agricultural setting of early Israel, when there was little craft specialization, women spun thread and wove textiles for their family households. Even in industrial contexts weavers and spinners were always women. Biblical texts attest that Israelite women assumed the responsibility of weaving textiles and producing clothing for their families and deities.
Ancient Near Eastern texts, stone reliefs, and paintings also portray women as spinners and weavers. Needles, loom weights, food storage vessels, cooking pots, dishes, and food remains define women's work areas in Israelite houses. These feminine implements frequently occur together with incense altars and female figurines in house rooms and courtyards. Often jewelry and accessories that Israelite women used to deflect evil forces accompany their household weaving and cooking tools. The Israelite period houses at Tell Masos, Tell el-Farah, Beer-sheba, and Tell Halif provide examples of cultic artifacts and furniture Israelite women employed in household rituals.

The structures and artifacts in several dwellings at Tell Masos suggest that early Israelites maintained household shrines. The presence in Room 307 of the four figurines typical of votives deposited in the Hathor temple at Timna demonstrates that the residents of House 314 depended on an established relationship with a personal protective goddess whom they worshiped in their home in addition to or instead of in a public sanctuary. Residents probably used the hearth and mudbrick structure with ash residue as well as the courtyard bench for metalworking and associated religious rituals invoking the protection of their personal family goddess. Room 331 which residents entered near the courtyard bench held three incense burners, three lamps, a bead, a large number of shells from the Red Sea, and a Canaanite-Phoenician style ivory lion head. The lion symbolized and accompanied the powerful protector goddesses of the Egypto-Canaanite pantheon, so its presence with the incense burners and lamps in Room 331 implies that a woman with a newborn child slept there and protected herself and her newborn with shells and beads.
and by burning oil and incense to welcome the protective household goddess and to
deflect the presence of jealous evil spirits.

The conspicuous benches, careful plastering, and body sherd paneling suggest that
Room 169 in House 167 functioned as a shrine because plastered and decorated walls
with benches around them are defining architectural features of domestic cult rooms in
the southern Levant. Several artifacts discovered in the room itself and in and around
House 167 hint at luxury votive offerings, and a bone scaraboid carved with animals and
a limestone lion head are connected with the goddess Asherah. At the center of House
42’s outer court next to an ash pit stands a .5 m. high structure with an attached bench.
No accompanying artifacts indicate that residents employed the structure in technological
activities, and it resembles offering podiums that furnish cult areas in the Levant. A
cooking pit, cookpot, jugs, and bowls indicate that a woman prepared food in the area
near the elevated structure. The bone amulet with ring-and-dot designs, the chalice
fragment, and the decorated stand suggest women’s household religious ritual to deflect
demonic forces.

Throughout the late seventh to early sixth century BCE Area G rooms at Tell
Masos excavators found female and animal figurines, lamps, and a furniture model
among women’s textile production implements such as spindlewhorls, needles, and pins,
as well as food storage and preparation vessels like cooking pots, bowls, storage jars, and
kraters. The presence of ritual artifacts in the environs of women’s implements illustrates
the importance of household religion to Israelite women’s daily life.
Most of the Israelite dwellings from the tenth century Level 7b at Tell el-Far'ah, biblical Tirzah, included either a female or an animal figurine in their household commodities. Horse figurines, often accompanied by arrowheads, came from several buildings in the southern section of the residential district as well as from the defense fosse and the open space facing the city gate. While the war goddess symbolism of horse figurines labels those from public findspots as amulets for military men, those from houses must have fulfilled a purpose similar to the protective figurines that guarded Mesopotamian houses. The ivory pendant, flute-player amulet, female figurine fragment, model sanctuary, and probably the beads and pierced disk from Houses 187, 149B and 161 from the western edge of the settlement show that Israelites did not confine their religious thoughts and activities to public temples. The bovine heads, the cow nursing calf motif, the beads and blue jewelry plaque, the woman with tambourine figurine, and even the lamp from Houses 176, 427, and 436 represent women's religious beliefs and rituals their wider ancient Near Eastern heritage associated with fertility and a mother's protection. No specifically male accoutrements accompany these votive artifacts; on the other hand, several items like household pottery and the spindlewhorl confirm Israelite women's interest in them.

The northeastern section of the tell is particularly rich in cultic finds. In addition to House 427 where the excavators discovered bovine and female figurines, House 436 included several luxury votive objects, House 442 contained an incense burner and Cypriot bowls, and their neighboring House 440 produced a nursing female figurine, a harnessed horse head from a zoomorphic vessel, an alabaster pendant, six beads, and
another female with tambourine figurine from the beaten earth floor of its courtyard near a 3 m. long stone bench, as well as a model sanctuary. Several of the houses in Level 7 at Tell el-Far'ah have courtyard alcoves that connote niches where women repeated prayers and incantations, poured libations, and burned oil and incense to the goddess who protected the household. Women’s cooking installations predominate in these courtyard areas where excavators also found fragments of female figurines, zoomorphic libation vessels, and women’s textile-producing tools. The Israelite houses from tenth century BCE Tell el-Far'ah demonstrate women’s religious agency in their households.

The eighth century BCE Israelite houses in Tell Beer-sheba Stratum 2 provide several examples of cultic artifacts in women’s food preparation, cooking, storage, and weaving areas. Front Room 94, the site of a woman’s oven and cooking pots, held a lamp and a fragment of a zoomorphic figurine. Stationing a figurine to guard the entrance and lighting a lamp to attract the beneficent deity and deflect evil ones are rituals Near Eastern women habitually practiced. Courtyard 36, itself a kitchen, borders both Room 94 on the north and Room 25 on the south, where excavators found a female figurine, miniature lamp, and model couch. Architectural structures that resemble votive offering shelves line the sides of Courtyard 36 where it adjoins these two findspots of votive figurines and lamps. Domestic kitchens in front rooms near the street, because they give entrance to the living and work space on the roof and to the rear bedrooms and food storage, afford natural places for household shrines that honor and invoke the protective deity who guards against potentially damaging evil eyes and evil spirits that attempt access to the house.
A krater with horizontal loop handles labeled qds "consecrated" belongs to a front room household shrine of House 76. A cosmetic stick, stone pendant, mother-of-pearl, loom weights, as well as food remains and containers mark this area as the domain the mistress of House 76 traversed on her way from her cooking and weaving area to the food storage in casemate Room 66. The room combination 44-145 contained an oven, 30 clay loom weights, cooking pots, a jar inscribed with īwm, and a figurine fragment. The long central Room 48 of Building 25 contained another figurine fragment, beads, a bracelet, loom weights, a decorated amphora, a button, a few cooking pots, and a large number of bowls and storage jars. The women’s jewelry, textile production tools, and cooking equipment that surround the figurines in these Israelite houses affirm that women owned them and incorporated them in their household religious rituals.

Model chairs that represent the lap of the child-protecting goddess appeared with figurines and incense burners in Houses 25, 808 and 430. Additional figurines occurred with lamps. These cultic artifacts from women’s work areas at Tell Beer-sheba indicate that women positioned images of the family protective goddess near vulnerable entrances to their dwellings, provided her with votive offerings, and burned incense and oil to invoke her aid.

At Tell Halif (Lahav), the Field 4 team exposed the remains of a household shrine in Stratum 6B. Elements of the household shrine mixed with ordinary household pottery in the ground floor rear broadroom of a late eighth century four-room house. On floor G8005 of the room the molded head of a female pillar-base figurine accompanied a ceramic fenestrated incense stand. The household shrine room architecture revealed two
phases. Residents modified its initial purely domestic nature by blocking doorways and constructing insulating walls or offering benches to create a more sacred space in its second phase. These apparently cultic structures and artifacts occupied women's work space in the private Israelite house. Many household clay vessels and stone and bone implements dominated the room. An oven outside the room, fish bones, and carbonized remains of grapes, cereals, and legumes indicate that this was a woman's household food preparation and storage area. This Israelite house shrine at Lahav affords another excellent example of an incense-burning altar and a female figurine associated with a woman's work area.

Israelite women presided over ovens and kitchens in courtyards or ground-floor rooms that opened onto the street. As in other ancient Near Eastern cultures, women protected their living areas from evil forces that attempted to attack them and their children. They placed figurines that represented and invoked protective household deities in the front rooms or courtyards of their houses near doorways that provided access to the house and roof living and work areas. For example, figurines and clearly votive vessels came from front Rooms 93, 94, and 443 and the remaining front half of House 25 including Rooms 25, 48, and 145 at Beer-sheba. Entrance Courtyards 36 at Beer-sheba, 314 and 42 at Tell Masos, and 440, 355, 327, and 436 at Tell el-Far'ah include elevated structures that may have served as niches, podiums, and offering tables for protective house divinities. Figurines came from near most of these elevated structures, especially at Beer-sheba and Tell el-Far'ah. For example, excavators found figurines in the same loci as alcoves or benches in Courtyards 440, 355, and 327 at Tell el-Far'ah and in loci
adjoining Courtyards 436 at Tell el-Far‘ah, 36 at Beer-sheba, and 314 and 42 at Tell Masos.

In many cases incense burners or lamps accompany figurines in Israelite houses to purify the house rooms from evil and to invoke the presence of protective deities. The lamps and incense burners take various forms. They include chalices, fenestrated clay offering stands, miniature votive lamps, normal lamps, clay models that represent the child-protecting goddess’s lap, as well as small limestone incense altars. Depending on the time period, all of these examples occurred in Israelite living spaces with deity figurines and women’s implements.

Overall, women managed Israelite household economies, but they were specifically responsible for food storage and preparation as well as clothing production. Women’s other major contribution consisted in childbearing and education. Figurines and incense burners in rear broadrooms protected sleeping mothers and their newborn infants from flying night demons. While Stager and Holladay place family living space on a second story due to massive weight-bearing pillars and cramped ground-floor rooms, others like Herzog present evidence that families lived in rear broadrooms at sites like Beer-sheba. Rear storage and sleeping rooms at Tell Masos (307, 331, and 169), Tell el-Far‘ah (442) and Tell Halif (G8005) contained evidences of household cult including incense burners or elevated offering structures that invoked deities who protected women and their infants while they worked and slept. Apotropaic amulets and accessories, especially in sleeping rooms, also testify to women’s concerns with protecting their infants from child-stealing demons. For example, apotropaic jewelry accompanied
incense burners and chalices in rear broadrooms of Tell Masos Houses 314 (Room 331) and 42 and Tell el-Far'ah House 442, and it accompanied women’s food storage and preparation artifacts in several other rooms including Tell Beer-sheba casemate Rooms 63 and 66 and Courtyard 48 and Tell el-Far'ah Houses 440, 161, and 436.

These Israelite period houses at Tell Masos, Tell el-Far'ah, Beer-sheba, and Tell Halif reveal the cultic artifacts and furniture Israelite women employed in protective household rituals. The next chapter discusses the private house shrines for protective family deities and semi-public neighborhood cult rooms in the ancient Near East that provide parallels that help to interpret the cultic structures, artifacts, and jewelry these Israelite houses exhibit.
CHAPTER THREE: HOUSE GODS AND SHRINES
IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Biblical scholars and archaeologists have shown that Israelite Yahwistic religion
developed out of its Near Eastern context. This applies especially for the personal aspect
of Israelite religion. A second millennium Mesopotamia movement to personalize
religion initiated laments and petitions addressed to “my god,” “my goddess,” “her god,”
“the divine mother, who gave birth to me,” “the protective god, as father, and the
protective goddess, as mother” and similar titles that indicate a familial relationship with
the gods. Personalization appears in a 1350 BCE Hittite prayer and in an Egyptian
confessional plea for help about 1230 BCE, after the dispersion of Mesopotamian
intellectual writings during the Amarna age. The prayer by the Hittite official Kantuzilis,
probably a son of Suppiluliumas, asks for relief from suffering. Sections of the text (KUB
30:10; Pritchard 1950:400) read:

O god, ever since my mother gave birth to me, you, my god, have reared me. You,
my god, (are) my [refuge] and my anchor. You [my god], brought me together
with good men. You, my god, showed me what to do in time of distress. You, my
god, called me, Kantuzilis, your favorite servant. (obv 6-9)

See! I, Kantuzilis, your servant, have asked for [mercy] and humbled myself.
[See!] I am beseeching you. To the Sun-god I sing. See! I, Kantuzilis, implore my
god incessantly. Would that my god listen [to me]! Whenever in times past I,
Kantuzilis, performed the oil rite for my god, whenever I...[...]ed to my god, you
gave me abundance, you gave me strength. (rev 9-13)
An Egyptian manuscript of model school texts from the late Nineteenth Dynasty manifests the spread of the same tradition to Egypt. The text includes this confessional prayer for help from the sun-god Atum Re-Har-akhti:

Come to me, O Re-Har-akhti, that you may look after me.
you are he who does, and there is no one who does without you,
unless it be that you act with him.

Do not punish me for my many sins, for I am one who does not know himself.
I am a man without sense.
I spend the day following after my own mouth, like a cow after grass...

Come to me...you who protect millions and rescue hundreds of thousands,
the protector of the one who cries out to him!
(Jacobsen 1976:148; Pritchard 1950:379)

Laments and petitions addressed to personal gods highlight their roles as protectors of the individual and family. The religions of the patriarchs and Psalms in the Hebrew Bible reflect this trend in the general Near Eastern cultural environment (Jacobsen 1976:152). This chapter outlines the Mesopotamian antecedents of Near Eastern personal protective gods and household shrines.
Mesopotamian Domestic Shrines

Archaeologists and textual scholars have discovered that in Mesopotamia, in addition to state temples to the great gods, people built semi-public neighborhood shrines, either “cult-houses” or niches in courtyards opening off the street, for lesser deities, as well as private family altars or cult rooms in houses and palaces. Personal gods in Mesopotamia received daily prayers and food and incense offerings in domestic shrines rather than in the large state temples. These shrines were located in the streets of residential neighborhoods or in the courts or living rooms of private houses. A Babylonian wisdom text that dates at the earliest to the Kassite period (1595-1235 BCE) indicates the type of reverence given to personal gods:

Daily worship your god
with offerings, prayers and appropriate incense.
Bend your heart to your god;
that befits the office of your personal god.
Prayers, supplication,
pressing (the hand to) the nose (as greeting)
shall you offer up every morning.
Then your power will be great,
and you will through the god have enormous success.

(Jacobsen 1976:160; Lambert 1960:104)

An Old Babylonian letter mentions an offering given to a housegod as well as to a house goddess:

A first and a second time I wrote to you about the crop share and the house rent for four years, but the crops from my fields you have not remitted. Herewith I send Muballit-Marduk to you. Give him the three lambs you have there, so that my offering can be prepared in the house of my Lady and in the house of the housegod. Herewith I remit to you three measures of flour. The house of my Lady
and the house of the housegod should be fed. Give two shekels of silver to Muballit-Marduk, so that he can give (them) to the *naditu* of the god Šamaš. Send me garlic and onions for two shekels. As you have shown this customary annual (payment) to Marduk-mušallim, the son of Utul-Ištar, buy me three shocks of wood-pigeons and let him bring me them. For two months now he has been nagging me to write you. Send me the birds through him without delay. Once previously you made the Nanna-mansi angry with me and let me go hungry. Now make Marduk-mušallim angry besides! (BM 80440; *Alte-babylonische Briefe* 2:116; Frankena 1966:81.116)\(^2\)

The formula “before God-Name pray” that precedes suggested laments and petitions indicates that people recited them as well as regular morning and evening prayer ceremonies before a deity figurine in the chapels of private houses or in the small neighborhood chapels of housing districts, rather than in the large public temples where professional priests officiated (Albertz 1978:131). Babylonian texts have other echoes of personal religious rituals like the ritual for sprinkling the house (*ABL* 437:19), hands marked or wounded as a result of frequent handling of incense grains in *Babylonian Inscriptions in the Collection of James B. Nies* 7.41:9 and the beer libations mentioned in an Old Babylonian letter:

To Apil—say: thus says Ibbi-Marduk: May Šamaš preserve your life. Since I came to Babel you have not sent me a report of yourself by anyone. You should not treat the tenant badly. He has poured (a libation of) beer on the ground for me, and the 21 (of the month) you gave it back... You should not treat that tenant badly! The tenant who lives in the house should find for you near that place a team of rented oxen along with his “eldest.” Either he’ll need silver there, then give him silver! Or I will give it to his father here. (VAT 7545; *Alte-babylonische Briefe* 6.79:1-10, 19-25; Frankena 1974:53)

---

\(^2\) English translations of Old Babylonian letters are based on Frankena’s Babylonian transcriptions and German translation.
There are various Assyro-Babylonian words for these domestic shrines: *bitu ša ili* biyi “house of the household god” (Frankena 1966:116), *aššartu* “cult socle, small cultic room in a private house” (*Assyrian Dictionary of the University of Chicago* [hereafter *CAD*] 1956f:1.2:436), and *ibratu* “open-air shrine (a niche in a corner on the street or in a court)” (*CAD* 7:4). Located outside the temple, in streets or private houses, open-air shrines generally honored goddesses; they contained a mudbrick cult platform as altar. For example, the expression *u ni-me-di-šá* “the open-air shrine and its cult platform” occurs twice in the *Šurpu* text. Apparently women commonly tended these shrines, because the writer of a Sumerian proverb complains of hunger because “my sister stays at the *ibratu* and my mother is (chatting) at the river” (*CAD* 7:5). *CAD* 1.2.439 includes various textual allusions to sanctuaries in private houses or workshops such as: “if white lichen forms in the *aššartu*-room of a man’s house,” “in the *aššartu*-room of the craftsmen where they constantly mention my name,” and “if there is a cult socle in a man’s house, either on the roof or in the yard.” *KAR* 178.6.36 instructs people to anoint the socles in the house of their god with oil. Archaeological excavations of ancient Mesopotamian towns uncovered what appear to be small domestic shrines such as those mentioned in texts.

Sir Leonard Woolley excavated several shrines in domestic neighborhoods of late Larsa period Ur (Old Babylonian, 2000-1600 BCE). The “Bazaar Chapel” at the corner of “Paternoster Row” and the “Carfax Chapel” consisted simply of a decorated doorway on the street, with a few brick steps leading to an open paved courtyard. Slightly larger, the
“Ram Chapel” in “Church Lane” and the “Hendursag Chapel” had walled-off sanctuaries and subsidiary chambers. Woolley reports that the Hendursag Chapel had a brick altar, a limestone libation altar, and “a closed cupboard in which we found numerous votive objects, a clay model of a chariot, model beds, a clay rattle, whetstones and rubbingstones, and more than thirty stone mace-heads, two of them inscribed with a dedication to Hendursag” (1982:209). Two limestone figures of women worshipers and a small bronze Lama (not to be confused with Lamia, a Greek child-stealing figure) goddess statuette rested on or near the altars, and on the floor lay clay pots including an incense burner and beads from the goddess’s necklace. According to Black and Green (1992:115),

The Sumerian term lama (Akkadian lamassu) refers to a beneficent protective female deity, imagined as human in form...In Neo-Sumerian, Old Babylonian, Kassite and Neo-Babylonian art such goddesses are depicted in a quite consistent form, usually introducing worshippers into the presence of important deities, and wearing a long, often flounced skirt, with one or both hands raised in supplication to the major god.

Private homes at a series of sites had house shrines in rear broadrooms, or altars or niches in a wall of the living room. Large homes in the Isin-Larsa period at Ur included private house shrines in rear broadrooms. A plastered mudbrick bench on which the excavators sometimes found cups and miniature dishes ran along one narrow side of the room. Behind this stood a chimney-like niche for burning incense, and beside it sat a paneled pillar-altar that is familiar from scenes of worship on seals and from excavated Mesopotamian temples. Small, crude molded or modeled clay plaques and deity or apotropaic figurines in some of the houses probably belonged to the shrine, although the
excavators did not invariably find them within the shrine area itself. The neighboring rooms and even the cult room itself contained evidences of secular use, such as conventional household implements and pottery. Although in some cases family graves, especially of children, lay beneath the cult rooms, no regular correlation between family burial vaults and household shrines suggested an association with a cult of deceased kin (Woolley 1982:208).

Akkadian and Isin-Larsa period (2350-1600 BCE) private houses in Khafajah, Tell Asmar, and Tell Agrab of the Diyala region had platforms or pedestals that Delougaz, Hill, and Lloyd (1967:11, 151, 269) interpreted as altars; no graves accompanied any of them. Akkadian period houses in Strata 4A and 4B at Asmar had household shrines in their important longrooms or great rooms. For example, House 37 exhibited a painted pedestal with niches in a corner of its great room. Mayer-Opificius (1979) suggests that the household shrine of the "Haus mit den Bogen" was located in its large Room 21 that had an altar pedestal, rather than in the adjoining manufacturing workshop Room 10 where a sacred figurine group was found. People could move small finds like figurines, and they generally built private worship areas into the largest or most central living spaces of their houses. Residents also placed their household shrines in otherwise secular living areas in Ur III period (2150-2000 BCE) houses at Nippur where poorer private homes had niches in a corner or wall of the living room (McCown, Haines, and Biggs 1967:36-40, 68) and in Isin-Larsa period homes at Tell Harmal and Al Dhiba’i where living rooms similarly had altars (Albertz 1978:252).
These archaeological discoveries corroborate texts that indicate that ancient Mesopotamians revered their personal household gods in domestic shrines located in their residential neighborhoods or in the courts or living rooms of their own private houses instead of in the major temples. Babylonian and Assyrian texts refer to at least three types of personal or family gods: deceased ancestors, personal family gods, and protective spirits. The next sections develop the nature and function of these personal gods and explain from Mesopotamian texts why the protection of personal gods was especially necessary in the home for women and their newborn infants.
Household Gods in Mesopotamia

Assyrian and Babylonian families had various household gods: deceased ancestors, personal family gods, and protective spirits. Archaeologists have not identified any figurines that represented deceased ancestors. Deceased ancestors functioned apparently in divination, which falls outside the central thesis of this research, so I discuss them only to distinguish between deified ancestors and personal gods. Personal family gods and protective spirits together served the purpose of protecting the members and interests of the household.13

Tsukimoto (1985) formulated the hypothesis that the *ilānu* "little gods" as well as the *ētemmū* "spirits of the dead" mentioned in the fifteenth to fourteenth century BCE Nuzi texts represent the dead ancestors of a family, the *ētemmū* being recently deceased family members who can be consulted through necromancy, and the *ilānu* those who through time have lost their names and personalities and been deified. Rouillard and Tropper ("*trpym*, rituels de guérison et culte des ancêtres d’après 1 Samuel XIX 11-17 et les textes parallèles d’Assur et de Nuzi," 1987:357) cite textual parallelism to identify the biblical *trpym* "teraphim, household gods" and *ḥwt* "ancestral spirits" with the Mesopotamian *ilānu* and *ētemmū*:

The same as the *ilānu* of Nuzi, the biblical *trpym* are to be understood as the group of divine ancestors of a family. Present in each domicile under form of

---

13 It is doubtful that ancestors protected the living. On the contrary, they seem to represent malevolence or danger in many cases. For example, ancient Egyptians covered eyes of the dead because they could be evil eyes.
figurines, they are, in the context of a family, the object of common veneration with the 'bwt...The relation existing between the trpym and the 'bwt of the Bible seems to be identical to that which unites the ilānu to the etemmu in Nuzi.

Albertz admits the possible parallelism between the biblical teraphim and Mesopotamian ancestor images that Rouillard and Tropper developed, but he distinguishes between the teraphim and the personal guardian deities of a family. For example, in the biblical narrative in which Rachel steals her family teraphim, Laban makes a treaty with Jacob that depends on the family god of his father Nahor as witness. Since the teraphim are missing, Laban must be referring to another deity:

From Gen. 31 we can conclude that Laban's teraphim which Rachel steals are not identical with the personal guardian deities of the Laban or Jacob family: the loss of the divine figures does not jeopardize the possibility of his calling on the god of Nahor to conclude a treaty (v.53). (Albertz 1994:37-38)

Van der Toom makes a similar distinction between family protective gods and deified family ancestors in ancient Babylonia, at Ugarit, and in Syria-Palestine. In support of this he cites a greeting formula from an Akkadian letter from Ugarit that Rap'ānu wrote to his sister Bin-Šipte:

Peace be upon you!  
May the gods of the land of Tipat  
and the gods of the land of Ugarit,  
and all the gods of our family,  
keep you in good health,  
and give you favor  
and satiate you with old age  
before the gods of [our] family—forever.  
(Ugaritica V:148; van der Toom 1996:168)

This Ugaritic letter follows the Old Babylonian custom of mentioning general gods first, then family gods. According to van der Toom (1996:168), "Considering the parallel with
the gods of Tipat and the gods of Ugarit, the gods of the family must be gods in the ordinary sense of the term. They are to be distinguished therefore, from the family ancestors.” Texts also distinguish between deified ancestors and personal gods with respect to their offerings. Whereas families presented offerings to personal gods daily morning and evening, they made ritual offerings for deceased parents and grandparents only once a year. In addition, Albertz (1978:132, 252-53, n. 157) points out that there is no evidence that the ordinary private citizen, in contrast to the king, made offerings for dead ancestors further back than for grandparents.

On the basis of several texts, van der Toom (1996:84-85) suggests that people gave offerings to personal gods in the neighborhood where they lived. Albertz (1978:131) maintained that people executed prayer and offering ceremonies in the private house shrines archaeologists found at various archaeological sites as well as in semi-public neighborhood shrines such as those Woolley found within the housing districts of Ur. Personal gods were deities known in the public arena of religion, but ones that family members chose as relating principally to their own interests or to the neighborhoods in which they lived. Families or individuals often had both a personal god and a personal goddess whom they related to as “creators” and parents. For example, texts regularly call men “sons” of their personal gods (CAD 7:100-101). Although van der Toom (1996:75) claims that all family members had the same personal deity and a wife’s allegiance to the family deity changed from her father’s god to her husband’s god when she married, the letter of Tušratu to the king of Egypt comes from a woman who had her own personal
goddess: "Ishtar is a deity for me, though she is not a deity for my brother" (El Amarna 23:31). Part of an Assyrian lament to Ishtar exemplifies a person's relationship with her as a protective deity:

O gleaming one, Ishtar, assembler of the host.
O deity of men, goddess of women, whose designs no one can conceive,
Where you look, one who is dead lives; one who is sick rises up;

What have I done, O my god and my goddess?
As one not fearing my god and my goddess I am treated!
Sickness, headache, loss and destruction have befallen me,
Terrors, (people) averting (their) faces (from me),
swelling with anger (at me) have befallen me.
Wrath, rage, and resentment of gods and men.

I have seen, my lady, (but) days of gloom,
months of depression, years of grief;
I have seen, my lady, slaughter, disorders, riots;
death and distress are bringing me to an end.

My sanctuary is silenced, silenced my chapel,
stillness lies poured over my house, my gate, my fields,
the face of my god has turned elsewhere,
my family is scattered, my roof is broken up.
(Seven Tablets of Creation 2.75-84:38-40, 67-78;
Jacobsen 1967:149; Pritchard 1950:384-85)

Ishtar's one hundred eighty niches in the city of Babylon indicate that she was the most popular choice for a personal goddess there (CAD 7:5). On the other hand, van der Toorn cites the paucity of examples of Ishtar as a personal goddess on cylinder seals and the contrasting popularity of her minister Ninšubur who could intercede with Ishtar in the accustomed role of personal god as intercessor with a more powerful deity. According to van der Toorn, while kings chose personal gods from the higher echelons of the pantheon,
ordinary citizens tended to approach major deities through intermediaries. Van der Toorn (1996:81) gives examples from letters as evidence that personal family gods functioned as intercessors with national or city gods:

An Old Babylonian letter from Nippur shows that Ninšubur could indeed be worshipped as family god (‘the god of my father’) precisely because he was able to reach Ištar. Letters to family gods often allude to their role as intercessors: the goddess Ninmug is asked to intercede with her consort Išum, Amurrum’s word is ‘heard before Šamaš’, and an anonymous ‘god of my father’ is asked to plead for the letter-writer with ‘your friend’ Marduk.

The client who asks the goddess Ninmug to intercede with her consort Išum brings to mind the role that Asherah plays when she intercedes for Baal with her consort the high god El at Ugarit. Asherah appears to have a similar function in the Yahweh-Asherah inscriptions from Khirbet el-Kom and Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, which claim Yahweh’s blessing and protection “through his Asherah.”

The evidence from ancient Assyrian and Babylonian texts shows that ancient Mesopotamians served personal protective deities at household altars or neighborhood niches. Personal gods and goddesses functioned primarily in the care and protection of the family. Family members often addressed them as intermediaries with the more powerful high gods. Burning incense or oil invoked the presence of protective deities. Flames and fragrant smoke purified the surrounding area and pleased them. Because of this association, incense burners and lamps accompany prayers and incantations in ritual texts, and they are present frequently in excavated household shrines in the ancient Near East.
The Lamp as Divine Fire

In Assyrian texts the lamp represents the divine fire and equals the importance of personal gods and goddesses. The Šumma ālu omen text indicates that a king will prosper if he repairs his god, his goddess, and the divine lamp (nu-ra). According to Dream-book 343r.16-17 (Oppenheim 1966), to overcome the influence of a bad dream, "you light the lamp, pray to your god, your goddess and the lamp (nūru)." The fragrance of burning oil or incense brings blessing and prosperity (YBC 1828; van Dijk, Goetze, and Hussey 1985:41):

At the(ir) evening banquet the gods,
from the sweet scent of your perfume,
lift their noses to heaven;
You are the...of the perfumer,
fire god, you are the twin renewer together with the sun god of heaven and earth.
When you enter the palace, its reign prospers,
when you cross the threshold, it is a blessing!

As I explained in Chapter Two: Cult and the Israelite Four-Room House, archaeologists discovered several ritual lamps among women’s household economy items in the ruins of ancient Israelite houses. The excavators of the eighth century Israelite House 25 at Beer-sheba found a pillar-base figurine together with a couch model and a miniature lamp with traces of burning that suggest it was used as an incense burner. A tiny version of the typical Iron II lamp rested between three branches on top of a clay pillar in a house at Tell Beit Mirsim. The head and base of a female figurine and a zoomorphic vessel in animal shape accompanied this model. In a four-room building at Tell en-Nasbeh a whitewashed, red-painted ritual lamp sat on a pedestal among the three
branches of a very small tree or bush. All of these burned incense or oil to invoke the
divine presence and protect Israelite houses from evil influences.

Babylonian tablet *KAR* 58 associates the lamp with healing the sick: “you recite
the incantation in front of the lamp placed at the head of the sick man” (58:25) and
driving out demons: “drive out the evil demon with your (Nusku’s) lamp” (58:44). The
lamp also plays an integral part in the *Maqlû* witchcraft ritual (Abusch 1990). Lamashtu
reliefs sometimes include a lamp among their apotropaic symbols (Van Buren
1945b:134). This indicates that women burned oil lamps to protect their infants from
Lamashtu, a demonic goddess who attempted to sicken and steal infants.

*Lamashtu, the Child-Stealing Goddess*

Babylonian texts indicate that women stood a domestic deity figurine in their
household shrines and recited incantations to protect themselves and their infants against
Lamashtu, who was responsible both for miscarriage and cot death of newborns whom
she kidnapped “from the wet nurse.” Lamashtu daughter of Anu was able to destroy the
house shrine by causing the household god to leave. However, women could protect
themselves through personal gods: “may the goddess Annunitu crush the … daughter, the
snatcher-demon *lamaštû*” (*CAD* 9:66) or by wearing amuletic jewelry like the “fourteen
stone beads (as charms) against the *lamaštû*” (*CAD* 9:66). Instructions for making a
necklace to repel the evil goddess Lamashtu call for rolling strands of dyed wool together
with donkey’s hair. First millennium BCE Assyrian and Babylonian texts, tablets, and
cylinder seals picture Lamashtu with donkey teeth and donkey ears, chased away on a
Fig. 29: Lamashtu Amulets from Klengel, "Neue Lamaštu-Amulette," Abb. 3 (VA Ass. 992), 6a (VA 5289), 11 (BM 117759), and 14 (BM 128857).
donkey. So the prescribed necklace exemplifies the idea that a demonic god is frightened by an image of itself.

Ancient Babylonians and Israelites considered women at risk during pregnancy and childbirth and their infants at risk until they were weaned (van der Toom 1994:25-26). According to Lichty (1971:23), the period of extreme danger for mothers and their newborns coincides with the forty-day state of impurity that survives in the later Jewish, Christian, and Islamic religions. Throughout the Islamic world custom forces a new mother to stay home in her house, never leaving the side of her newborn child, until ritual cleansing frees her to retake her position in society. Jewish tradition threatens mother and child with danger for forty days, and especially for the first eight days before the circumcision of the boy child. The Christian tradition of churching a woman after forty days survives in the feast of the Purification forty days after Christmas. Lichty (1971:23) attributes the concern with child-stealing demons to high infant mortality rates:

Birth in Mesopotamia was a precarious affair. Due to the lack of proper medicine and medical knowledge, the lack of proper diet, and the lack of sanitation, miscarriages, stillbirths, and infant mortality ran at a very high rate. For the same reasons death in childbirth was also frequent. The Babylonians and Assyrians felt that these deaths resulted from one of three things: disease, demons, or sorcery. In order to guard against these dangers they built up an extensive collection of incantations, charms, amulets and prescriptions aimed at the protection of both mother and child.

Van Dijk, Goetze, and Hussey (Early Mesopotamian Incantations and Rituals, 1985) have published fragments of several incantations against Lamashtu. These further attest the potential danger Lamashtu posed to women and infants:
19.
She is fierce, she is bad, she is [...] she is wriggling, she is [a goddess].
Not a physician, she bin[ds...]
not a midwife, she wipes off the babe.
She keeps counting the months of women with child.
she is continually blocking the door of the woman in labor,
she follows the track of the cattle,
with the fierceness of...she watches the country.
She seizes the young man in the battle (?),
the maiden in the dance,
the babe from the arm of the nurse.
The twin gods who saw her
and made her go through the window,
made her slip away past the cap of the door pivot (?)
bound her with...[ ]. (1985:26)

20.
she is fierce, she is terrible,
she is a goddess, she is an Amorite
and she is a she-wolf,
the daughter of heaven.
Her...is the nest...
[...of] the threshold is [her] place.
...she drinks blood, her...
She strangles
the babes, the weak (?) ones
she gives water of...to drink. (1985:26)

86.
She broke through the earth, (her) tooth was the tooth of a shark,
she opened (her) mouth: her mouth was the mouth of a small dog;
who carried fat, she slew the fat;
who carried milk, she slew the milk;
the nurses who opened widely,
who spread a little their strong elbows,
she has bitten;
(he) saw this
Asarluhi;
she attacks me, myself;
evil Asakku (who) approached the young lad, away with your breast from here!
(1985:49)
Amulets and incantations also defended women against Lilitu (Ardat-Lilī), a jealous demonic goddess who personified the woman without children, “the woman from the haunted place who returns again and again to the woman in (or through) the window” (CAD 1.2:61). Women rehearsed a ritual “in order that the līlī-demon should not come near the baby” (CAD 9:190). Isa 34:14 mentions the Hebrew cognate Lilith as a flying night bird who haunts the Edomites, and legends about her persisted in Jewish tradition and even are recorded in the Mishnah (Shab. 151b; Sanh. 96a; and Nid. 16b) and Talmudic literature. For example, the Lilith of Midr. Num. Rab. 16 preys on little children and moreover eats her own.

Mesopotamian women frequently used figurines and amulets to protect against demons. In some cases the object represented the hideous feared creature in order to deflect it through fear of its own horrible image or to destroy its influence by sympathetic magic. In other cases patients engraved plaques or figurines in the image of their protective deity whom they trusted to guard against the entrance of threatening demons. Women wore these as amulets or placed them in rooms where they slept or worked or near the doorways of their houses.

Mesopotamian Protective Spirits

Ancient Mesopotamians put a door guardian figurine or an amuletic tablet near the door of the house to protect the house and its inhabitants (Wiggermann 1992; Reiner 1960). Male šedu and female lamassu protective spirits of the house and the hearth “released” people from harm. Magic figurines induced them to come into the home:
may the protective šedu-spirit of the house, the protective lamassu-spirit of the
house (and) the hearth of the house give you release. (CAD 9:64; ABRT 1.57:31)

You write on the magic figurine's side, "This is the one who makes the favorable
šedu-spirit and the favorable lamassu-spirit come in." (CAD 9:63; KAR 298:36)

Cognate with Mesopotamian protective šedu spirits, Deut. 32:17 and Ps 106:37
mention beneficent šēdîm that received sacrifices from Israelite "sons and daughters"
(Ringgren 1966:102). Protective spirits involved themselves in protecting women and
newborn infants against rapacious female demons. In one literary text, when a cow in
trvail called out for help, the moon god Sin responded by sending help in the form of
two female protective spirits with oil and the "water-of-easy-birthgiving" (CAD 9:62). An
Akkadian incantation against the ardat lilîm conjures them by protective deities:

I conj[ur]e you
by heaven, by [ea]rth, the ri[ve]r
by Enšādu and Hadaniš:
the [ho]use I enter,
you shall [not] enter!

Black and Green (1992) provide illustrations of many Neo-Assyrian and Neo-
Babylonian protective figurines that excavators found placed in rooms or buried in
building foundations to ward off demons. These include

Sun-dried clay griffin plaques representing the Seven Sages buried in the
foundations of the royal palace of King Adad-nīrāri (810-783 BCE) at Kalhu
(modern Nimrud).

Sun-dried clay fish figurines representing the Seven Sages in the house foundation
of a priest's family, from the reign of Sargon II (721-705 BCE). Other fish-garbed
figurines were found together at Ninevah, probably from the time of King
Sennacherib (704-681 BCE).
The bull-man on a clay relief found buried in a brick box in the foundations of a Neo-Assyrian building at Assur.

Sun-dried clay plaque-figurine of the protective god Lahmu, with “Get out, evil demon!” and “Come in, good demon!” inscribed on his arms buried in a foundation of a seventh century building at Assur.

Blue clay figurine of the god Lulal with his fist raised found in the corner of a room of the palace of Nabopolassar (625-605 BCE) at Babylon.

Five clay models of dogs in the hollow at the base of a monumental stone relief on one side of a doorway in the palace of Assurbanipal (668-627 BCE) at Ninevah.

According to Lichty (1971:24), Assyrians sometimes put inscribed apotropaic dogs in their house windows or buried them beneath the thresholds. Some found at Ninevah and Nimrud had names like “the one who drives away the Asakku-demon,” “the one who captures the enemy,” “the one who bites his foe,” or “the one who drives out evil.” Asakku was another name for the child-stealing goddess in Lamashtu texts.

Although there is no evidence that ancient Mesopotamians prayed to or directly worshiped the anonymous protective emissaries of their personal deities, texts sometimes equate protective spirit-demons with gods, as in the cry of distress requesting someone to “place the gracious šedu-demon, the interceding protective god (ilu) in front of me!” (CAD 7:99). In addition, quite a few prayer texts address specific deities, especially personal gods of ruling dynasties, with the epithet lamassu “protective spirit.” CAD 9:64 gives examples of prayers to Ishtar, Marduk, Adad, Damgalnuna, Šuqamuna, Šumalija, Asalluhi, and Bau which call them protective spirits.

In summary, ancient Mesopotamian people revered various kinds of household gods and goddesses. Personal family gods and protective spirits guarded the welfare and
safety of their patrons. Figurines that represented either the family god or goddess or their emissaries invoked their guarding presence in houses. Archaeological excavations and texts reveal that people stood these figurines on pedestals on the roofs or in the courtyards of their houses or buried them beneath doorways. In other cases they placed them on guard in bedrooms. Residents burned incense or oil on special incense altars or lamps in their living rooms in order to invite the protecting presence of their personal god and goddess and to frighten away unwanted supernatural beings.

Ancient Near Eastern religions, particularly in their second millennium BCE forms, consisted of hierarchical pantheons in which state gods and goddesses were worshiped as national defenders in elaborate royal temples, city gods and lower deities received offerings in their own shrines and temples, and personal family gods protected houses and their residents from dangerous supernatural forces. Although the number of gods reduced as these cults attempted to centralize their powers in the first millennium, archaeological excavations attest to continued religious activity in local shrines. In Israel, for example, the difficulty of travel to the central temple in Jerusalem encouraged villagers to worship in the many “high places” or open-air shrines that the Deuteronomistic historians and prophets mention and various archaeological surveys and excavations have unearthed. These same archaeological projects attest that, in addition, families, especially women, prayed for the protection of their homes and children in household shrines. This chapter has already discussed the domestic shrines where Mesopotamians served personal family gods, and the following sections describe the architectural structures and cultic artifacts that archaeologists found in Late Bronze Age
Canaanite houses as well as in semi-public neighborhood cult rooms in Iron Age Israel. These structures and artifacts help confirm the religious nature of similar structures and artifacts that continue in Israelite houses the tradition of serving personal protective deities.
The Domestic Cult at Canaanite Ugarit

Recent work at Ugarit in Syria shows the existence of shrines, some with direct access to the street, within blocks of domestic buildings. Archaeologists recognize their sacred character by the offering platforms and benches along the walls. In cases where the architecture is hard to interpret, the objects found in them determine their sacred function. This includes ceremonial equipment such as libation rhytons, cultic stands, and incense burners; figurines or stelae of the deities; as well as items used in magic rituals. Residents built these shrines throughout the city, indicating that they pursued religious activities in all of the housing districts as well as in public sacred precincts. Yon (1996:413) mentions various buildings used for cult within residential districts of the city. Examples of such buildings exist near the royal palace and north of the “Residential District,” as well as in the “South Acropolis” zone. Recently the excavators examined one they termed the “Temple of the Rhytons” near the city center between the “Residential District” and the “South City” zones.

The Temple of the Rhytons

The citizens of Ugarit constructed the small “Temple of the Rhytons” (Yon 1996) across the street from an olive pressing installation in the middle of a housing district. In fact, the south wall of its courtyard forms the north wall of a house. It consists of a main room and several access spaces and storage annexes. The main room features low stone benches against the north and west walls and an offering platform on the east wall.
However, it has no sacrificial area. Looting and destruction of the site scattered small finds and cult artifacts throughout this neighborhood shrine and its vicinity. Yon noted the topographical points of discovery on a plan to define the distribution area, and she determined that the centers of the area were situated approximately at the two entrances to the temple. These furnishings include several small luxury objects like a bronze tripod and an ivory pyxis. The ivory pyxis shows an engraved design of a sacred tree with the ends of the branches curled in a ring-and-dot design which probably symbolizes the protective divine eye. Luxury items and imported pottery, while not cultic per se, often appear in shrines because they are dedicated to a deity.

Mediocre rather than royal quality cult artifacts originated in the "Temple of the Rhytons"—a stela fragment, a small enthroned god statue, a terracotta stand showing the king dressed as a priest, and seventeen conical rhytons, some local and some imported. Religious ritual in cult places often involves rhytons. They are vessels with spouts, or in this case openings at the bottom, that worshipers used for pouring libations. Archaeologists cannot identify the deity portrayed on the incomplete stela fragment, and the ambience of this structure seems too poor for a main El temple. Yon hesitates to interpret the shrine. Since the building was located in the middle of a residential neighborhood, she speculates that it might have been used by a small associated group of people such as a marzihu, but she prefers to leave the interpretation to textual scholars (Yon 1996:416).
According to Ackerman (1992:76) who follows the analysis of J. C. Greenfield ("The marzeah as a Social Institution," *Acta Antiqua* 22(1974):451-55) and others, *marzeah* denotes an upper class social and religious institution organized under the patronage of some god, that owns and supports by land holdings a house for that god where the group celebrates periodic banquets. According to Ackerman, texts attest to the activity of marzeah institutions in the ancient Near East from the Late Bronze Age through the Greco-Roman era. A tessera from Greco-Roman period Palmyra shows the leader of a marzeah offering incense to the group's patron god. Ackerman judges that marzeah members were "upper class" because one Ugaritic text (*PRU* 3.88, 130) indicates that a king and his son were involved in the deeding of marzeah houses. Also possibly Amos 6:1-8 describes wealthy Israelites observing a marzeah banquet, and Greco-Roman period references involve aristocrats.

If marzeah organizations consisted of wealthy landowners, then they may not have been the neighborhood residents who supported the rhyton shrine, because Yon states that its furnishings were of mediocre rather than of royal quality. It is important to remember that a large percentage of the preserved ancient texts come from royal archives that naturally reflect the activities of state political and religious institutions, including royal interests in major gods. Moreover, ethnographic parallels show that even lower echelons of society divert their meager wealth into religious festivity. For these reasons it is premature to conclude on the basis of a few texts that marzeahs or other small socio-religious associations were necessarily elitist.
Ugaritic text *PRU 4.230* implies that marzeah associations correlate with geographical boundaries, because in a political settlement the respective marzeah associations of the towns of Ari and Siyannu received parts of a vineyard of Hurrian Ishtar located between them. Van der Toom (1996:86, 93) provides analogous evidence that personal family gods in Mesopotamia pertain to particular residential neighborhoods:

The available data leave the impression that people chose to worship as their personal god a god in their vicinity, yet different from the divine city patron...The Akkadian devotion to their family god was a devotion to the settlement, the district, or the neighbourhood where the worshippers were born and raised, and usually still lived.

According to Stager (1985:18-23) and Holladay (1992:310), the small clusters of three- or four-room nuclear family houses grouped around shared common space that made up early Israelite villages reflect an extended-family patrilocal residence pattern that biblical references designate *bêt-’āb* "father’s house." Just as in Mesopotamia, early Israelites referred to personal family gods as "god of my father." In the patriarchal narratives families worshiped the personal family deity at a local shrine, and such local "high places" continued in use throughout the monarchical period in spite of the attempted centralization of the Yahweh cult in the Jerusalem temple. The "Temple of the Rhytons" provides just one example from Ugarit of a domestic shrine supported by the residents of a housing district. Similar shrines throughout the city—near the royal palace and north of the "Residential District," as well as in the "South Acropolis" zone—indicate that families accomplished religious activities in all of the housing districts as well as in public sacred precincts. Whether or not the "Temple of the Rhytons" belonged
to a marzeah, it demonstrates that it was not unusual for West Semitic people to have a
close relationship with a deity whom they worshiped at a shrine near their residence in
addition to or instead of at a central state or royal temple. Religious artifacts found in and
around family dwellings and craftsmen’s workshops at Ugarit further demonstrate this
type of personalized, decentralized religion.

Sacred Texts and Divinity Figurines from Houses at Ugarit

The large number and distribution of deity figurines in all residential areas of the
site testifies to the importance of household-based religion at Ugarit. Yon (1992:703-704)
and the excavation team found deity representations in the forms of precious metal
pendants, plaque figurines, and “more humble figurines modeled in terracotta.” The
private houses situated in the residential district east of the royal palace and in the south
city provide examples of the variety of sacred household finds. I compiled the following
list of artifacts from houses Courtois (1979) describes. The excavators named the houses
based on the distinctive artifacts or texts they found in them:

House of the Alabasters: Shells, jewelry, beads and amulets, including a pierced disk
in lapis-lazuli and a small sphinx and uraeus in carnelian; three Mycenaean
ryhtons attached together through their handles and hung on the east wall of a
room; an Egyptianized gray stone male figurine seated on an alabaster pedestal
wearing a curly wig and holding a lotus flower; a bronze statuette of Baal
holding a weapon.

House of the Man of Letters: Fragment of a medical ritual for a pregnant woman,
conjurations and therapies against various evils including demons.

House of Rapʔānu: Two religious texts of “The Pantheon of Ugarit,” an incantation
against evil eyes.
House of the Literary Tablets: Wisdom tablets.

Bronze smelter’s House: Figurine of the supreme god El, two statuettes of Baal, a figurine of a bull on a pedestal.

Metalworker’s House: Cypriot, Mycenaean, and local three-handled and other fine vessels, precious metal earrings.

Sculptor’s House: A small stela of a person wearing a tiara shooting with a bow.

Street corner immediately north of the Sculptor’s House: Large bronze statuette of a robed feminine deity with her right hand raised in benediction, probably representing Asherah of the Sea.

Courtyard 5239 in a metalworking area: Large electrum rhyton, conical rhyton in the style of Aegeo-Myceneaen offering vessels, five electrum and silver bowls, cylinder seals showing a worshiper adoring the sun-god, large engraved bronze double ax, all in a pottery jar.

House of the Hurrian Priest: Clay sheep liver and lung models, large paneled offering stand showing a god and animals, ivory plaques with divinity heads, krater with person serving wine to the god El, mythological and liturgical texts, Lamashtu tablets.

These houses at Ugarit exemplify household cult in ancient Ugarit. Sacred texts and divinity figurines appeared throughout the housing and workshop districts. This indicates that private citizens participated in religious rituals in their homes and workshops instead of limiting their religious expression to the elaborate state and royal temples located in the political center of the city. This is logical because family interests differ from or supplement national interests. Personal religion in the ancient Near East reflects concerns with the everyday physical welfare of individual family members. Personal family gods in Mesopotamia realized this essential function of the care and protection of individuals.
Prayers and incantations and visible images like figurines in the parts of the house or workshop where people were in the greatest danger of accident or harm invoked the protective presence of the personal deity. Religious objects also functioned in Israelite workshops. As noted in Chapter Two, a metalworking room in House 314 in the early Israelite settlement at Tell Masos contained stone votive figurines and luxury vessels as well as metalworking tools. Even if we were to minimize the abundance of stone and metal deity statuettes at Ugarit located in the bronze smelter’s, sculptor’s, and metalworker’s houses, and in a courtyard in another metalworking area by assuming that the metalworkers and sculptors were crafting all of these objects for someone else, this would not divorce them from a domestic context. Metalworkers make precious metal earrings for individual women to wear, and craftsmen construct figurines for household shrines rather than to stand on pedestals in royal temples.

The large bronze statue of Asherah on the street corner north of the sculptor’s house probably was protecting the immediate neighborhood. The wisdom tablets from the “House of the Literary Tablets;” the fragment of a medical ritual for a pregnant woman, and conjurations and therapies against various evils including demons from the “House of the Man of Letters;” Rapšānu’s incantation against evil eyes; and the incantations against the child-stealing Lamasshu from the Hurrian house all indicate that practitioners at the household level assisted their family members or neighbors to deal with practical human life situations and perceived dangers. As I will show in Chapter Five: Amulets, Evil Eye, and Child-Stealing Demons, women depended on these rituals as well as the amuletic shells, lapis lazuli pierced disk, and camelian sphinx and uraeus from the House of the
Alabasters to protect themselves and their households, especially their newborn infants.

The Lamashtu tablets particularly illustrate women’s fears of child-stealing demons and show that home-based religious rituals stemming from this concern were normal in the Levant as well as in Mesopotamia.

*Lamashtu Charms at Ugarit*

The twenty-fifth campaign (1962) at Ugarit in Syria found a collection of texts against the Lamashtu, again portrayed as “une fille déchue du dieu suprême qui poursuivant toute vie dans ce qu’elle a de plus précieux et de plus fragile: les nouveau-nés et leurs mères” (Nougayrol 1964:134), among the medico-magical texts in the “House of the Hurrian Priest.” The Ugaritic version fills the former lacuna in Lamashtu incantation information and examples between the Old Babylonian and the Neo-Assyrian times. These thirteenth century BCE texts are close to versions from the library of Sargon at Ninevah, and they show that the tradition had been carried on in much the same form for the five or six intervening centuries (Nougayrol 1964:135; Nougayrol 1969:404-405).

Selections from the Ugaritic texts against Lamashtu read as follows:¹⁴

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Daily she counts the days of pregnant women,} \\
\text{she pursues women giving birth.} \\
\text{Bring me your sons that you breastfeed,} \\
\text{and your daughters so that I may raise them.} \\
\text{(With waters) of death her breasts swim.}
\end{align*}
\]

She enters the open house
she slips in through the door of the closed (house).

She surmounts every obstacle:
She encounters a lion whose roar is terrible,
  she redoubles it.
She encounters a wolf, she
  returns his barking.
She comes to a river, she troubles its waters...

I expel you, O daughter of Anu, by
  Anu and Antu
  Enlil and Ninlil
  Ea and Damgalnunna,
  Marduk and Sarpanitu
  the moon-god and Amazakanuda,
  the Lady of the gods, the supreme lady...

The enchanter Asalluhi equals you
he contradicts your speech,
he destroys the evil
in the child's body...

To the boy she is hostile,
to the girl she does evil.
She kills the child,
she makes it drink the waters of anguish...

She is terrible, she is a goddess
she is strong
she is furious, the she-wolf, the daughter of Anu.

Nougayrol suggests that knowledge of the Babylonian literary tradition and its use in practical ways in the intellectual life of Ugarit was not limited to rare scribal specialists. An example of the practical use and longevity of the child-stealing belief complex comes in the tiny (2 cm. long, 1 cm. in diameter) seven-sided clay Lamashtu cylinder archaeologists found with a sheet bronze pendant and carnelian, glass, gold, and
frit beads from the necklace of an infant’s skeleton in an undisturbed monolithic sarcophagus from the Greco-Persian Period. The grave lay among the ruins of the large Greco-Persian houses of Leukos Limen directly superimposed on the proto-Phoenician level (late thirteenth to early twelfth century) of Ugarit and contained fifth, fourth, and third century black-burnished Attic sherds. People may have thought that words inscribed in an ancient foreign language would increase an amulet’s magical power (Nougayrol 1969:407-408). The cuneiform inscription on the amulet (RS 25.457) reads:

Incantation: Lamashtu, daughter of Anu,
Elect of the gods,
Lilith,
This child is following the right path.
This child is following the right path.
(Standard closing).

This practical application of Babylonian and local Ugaritic mythology adds to the many sacred texts and divinity figurines distributed throughout the housing and workshop districts of Late Bronze Age Ugarit to demonstrate the realities of family piety. The religious objects from Ugaritic houses exemplify how commoners decentralized the cult by observing it in their own homes and neighborhoods. Household shrines repeated cultic structures and furnishings that belonged to major state sanctuaries and royal temples in less elaborate form with less expensive materials. This allowed people to serve and invoke in a consistent and personal manner the deities they depended on for everyday family care and household protection.
Tel Mevorakh

Excavations by the Hebrew University Institute of Archaeology at Tel Mevorakh near Dor on the Sharon Plain revealed a Late Bronze Age wayside shrine dating to the fifteenth to thirteenth centuries BCE. The walls and floor of the 10 X 5 m. sanctuary were coated with lime plaster, and its plastered furnishings consisted of a rectangular stepped platform in the northwest corner, long low benches along the remaining walls, and two small installations “whose functions are still obscure” (Stern 1973-78).

Artifacts from the cult room included decorated chalices and goblets, imported white-slip Cypriot vessels, two faience disks, two Mitannian-style cylinder seals, a pair of bronze cymbals, a palmette-decorated ring, a few bronze weapons, and a 20 cm. long bronze snake similar to the snakes found in the contemporary sanctuaries at Timna and Hazor. This small shrine exemplifies the usual contents of cult rooms in Israel—decorated offering vessels and luxury items, plus elevated offering structures like podiums, benches, and incense altars on which they were presented to the deity they honored.
Philistine and Phoenician Shrines and Sanctuaries

Philistine and Phoenician shrines and sanctuaries that functioned at the same or similar time as Israelite and Judean examples provide a perspective on what kinds of cultic artifacts and architectural structures usually accompany cultic activity in the southern Levant. These prototypical cult-rooms help identify as religious suspected cultic furnishings in domestic contexts. At Ashdod, for example, archaeologists found figurative and presumably cultic vessels throughout the site, but they concentrated in the Area D sanctuary. The main room in the sanctuary had a whitewashed podium, whitewashed walls, and a bench. Model chairs, a female plaque figurine, and zoomorphic kernos heads, as well as a fenestrated incense stand and "offering vessels" came from the main room and associated storerooms and favissa.

The Area D sanctuary confirms that residents of Levantine coastal areas in the Iron Age continued to show the same type of reverence to their deities as coastal residents in the Late Bronze Age. They offered them incense, libations, and food gifts in small neighborhood shrines that featured altar pedestals, offering benches, and decorated walls. The same figurines and cultic vessels occurred distributed throughout "normal" non-cultic buildings at the site. In another Philistine example, Gitin (1993) identified altar niches in workshop areas, including one altar in its niche in seventh century BCE Ekron. There were also altars in domestic areas at Ekron. These altars show that people in the southern Levant did not limit their religious practice to large state temples, but they intertwined it with work and family concerns.
The eighth to seventh century BCE Shrine 1 at Sarepta (biblical Zarepath) between Tyre and Sidon on the Phoenician coast consisted of a one-room structure with a podium on the back wall and benches around all four sides (Pritchard 1975a, 1975b). Ashes in front of the podium suggest that a broken-out rectangle might have held an incense altar. The room contained eleven or twelve female figurines, some holding a dove or tambourine, some pregnant, and others carved out of ivory. The twelve "ordinary" lamps and one miniature lamp certify the important cultic role of lamps in ancient Near Eastern religious ritual. 25 Egyptian-type faience amulets, a model sphinx throne, 95 beads, a tall red-burnished stand, and a bearded male figurine came from the shrine. In addition, the room held a glass inset decorated with the "sign of Tanit" and an ivory label that said, "The (male) statue which Shillem, son of Mapa'al, son of 'Izai made for Tanit 'Ashtart." As Holladay (1987:264) has noted,

Ashdod, together with Shrine 1 at Sarepta, furnishes us with an example of a functioning non-Israelite or Judean sanctuary, against which Israelite and Judean shrines and sanctuaries of the same or similar date can be seen in greater perspective. Together with Sarepta, Ashdod provides the corporate cultic setting for classes of artifacts whose cultic associations in Israel or Judah have been questioned.

Scholars often compare another Phoenician example, the small eighth century Tell Ta'ýinat "national shrine" between Aleppo and Antioch in northern Syria to the biblical Solomonic temple. The building had one short bench in the northwestern corner of the center cella, and possibly another one against the northern wall of the "sanctuary." The walls were whitewashed, and there were traces of blue and red paint in the inner room. A mudbrick table and a tall stand, probably incense altars, completed the furnishings. Cultic
artifacts and structural elements distinctive to these shrines in Phoenicia and Philistia comprise figurines and models, lamps, zoomorphic libation kernoï, offering benches, incense altars and stands, and special plaster or paint. The ritual use of these furnishings and artifacts in obvious shrines affirms the cultic function of these same classes of objects found in Israelite houses. The benches and unique decorated, plastered walls in House 167 at Tell Masos, for example, suggest that it was a location for worship of a deity. The Philistine and Phoenician shrines explain that the female figurines and models so frequent in Israelite houses were visual images of a votive relationship between a woman and her protective goddess. The chalices, models, and incense stands from Israelite houses continue the Near Eastern tradition of offering incense and gifts to personal deities to invoke their protective presence in the family household. Beginning in the earliest Israelite settlements and continuing under the united and then the divided monarchy, semi-public cult rooms associated with other buildings in ancient Israel display the same religious structures and artifacts, often mixed with everyday household pottery. Although the style of the figurines and incense burners and altars change with the era and ethnic group, and the names of the gods and goddesses vary, the concepts that motivate votive relationships with personal protective deities are continuous throughout the ancient Near East, from Bronze Age Mesopotamia and Ugarit to Iron Age Phoenicia and Israel.
Semi-Public Cult Rooms in Israel and Judah

We can establish the ritual use of architectural structures and artifacts that occur in Israelite houses by comparing them with the characteristics of semi-public cult rooms associated with Israelite secular buildings. For example, Room 65 excavated by J. Marquet-Krause at twelfth century 'Ai was the only room in the Iron Age village with benches. A bench ran around its west and south walls 27 cm. above the floor along the short western wall and 15 cm. high along the south wall. An 80 cm. tall fenestrated incense burner with decorative lion feet protruding near its base (Fig. 30) was sitting on the bench, and inside it were a rose clay quadruped figurine, probably a stone-marten, and a necklace of finely-worked stone and glass beads. Also on or near the bench rested a

![Fig. 30: Cultic Pottery Vessels from 'Ai, from Marquet-Krause, Les fouilles de 'Ay (et-Tell), 1932-35, plate 74.]
bowl with a circle of decorative protuberances around its belly, a large chalice-shaped stand, a lamp, and fragments of other vessels. Marquet-Krause (1949:23) suggested this was a sacred room. The 'Ai cult-room demonstrates the continued use in Iron Age Israel of offering benches, incense stands and burners, lion feet motifs, as well as votive vessels, figurines and jewelry, all of which characterized Late Bronze Age Canaanite shrines and Iron Age Philistine and Phoenician sanctuaries.

Several semi-public cult rooms from tenth century Israel exhibit the same genre of furnishings. At Ta'anach, in a storage location near an olive press dated to the end of the late united monarchy (tenth century BCE), excavators in different seasons found three iconographically elaborate cult stands in the same general area as a mold for female plaque-type figurines, sheep and goat knuckle bones, and chalices, mixed with domestic pottery. A shrine in a corner of the courtyard of an important tenth century residence in Megiddo Stratum VA Locus 2081 contained horned limestone altars topped with burned grain, limestone and pottery cult stands, a group of ring-and-dot bone pendants, chalices, a bowl of sheep or goat knuckle bones, and other bowls and juglets. A steleform stone and a raised stone podium also stood in the room. From the same stratum VA at Megiddo, in and near a building of indeterminate use, Building 10, came three horned altars, two model shrines, a pierced censor, two plaque-type female figurines, and a quadruped-shaped spouted vessel. Cult Room 49, the late tenth century Lachish Stratum VA shrine, was lined with benches, with a raised section of bench serving as podium. A limestone altar, fenestrated stands, chalice-like incense burners that fit into the stands,
and lamps lay on the benches and floor.\textsuperscript{15} Offering benches and/or podiums, and incense stands or altars, characterize these small semi-public cult rooms. They include representations of the deities or their accompanying animals carved on the offering stands or in the form of steleform stones, trees, or female figurines. The combination of these structures and artifacts justifies the contention that female figurines and other symbols of the goddess Asherah indicate that she received incense and grain offerings in small neighborhood or household shrines in Israel. They also substantiate the claim that Israelite worshipers often placed these offerings on raised benches or podiums.

Eighth century discoveries encompass larger groups of figurines and models. Several objects with apparently cultic iconography came from the eighth century Hazor Area B House 3067a and the open space in front of the house. Three torsos of horse-and-rider figurines, a carved ivory pyxis showing a man adoring a sacred tree guarded by a cherub, a jug fragment with a human arm appliqué, a cup-and-saucer vessel, a fragment of a female holding a child figurine, and a cup from a kernos ring make up this unusual cluster. Large groups of religious objects originated in Jerusalem Cave 1 and the Samaria Locus E 207 trench, both probably eighth century deposits, and smaller clusters of cultic artifacts found near cave mouths consisted of large numbers of female figurines, horse-and-rider figurines, other animal and bird figurines, and lamps. The “several baskets-full” of lamps from the Samaria trench (Crowfoot, Crowfoot, and Kenyon, 1957) indicate the

\textsuperscript{15} On a terrace outside the Lachish shrine room archaeologists found a \textit{massebah} “sacred stela” and a burned tree trunk. Archaeologists and biblical scholars generally identify sacred stelae in Yahwistic open-air shrines with the male god Yahweh and sacred trees next to them with the goddess Asherah.
importance of lamps to cultic activity. There were smaller numbers of rattles, model shrines and couches, limestone altars, and fenestrated offering stands. These accompanied pottery used in domestic food preparation and eating and drinking. The presence of altars and offering stands for incense, as well as the keros libation ring and lamps for wine and oil rituals, certify the religious rather than the amusement nature of the accompanying figurines. The adored sacred tree, the woman holding a child figurine, and the large numbers of female pillar figurines occurring in conjunction with incense altars, stands, and lamps exemplify reverence offered to the goddess Asherah.

The most obvious architectural structure of cult rooms in Israel and Judah is the offering bench that scales one or two walls and sometimes the entire room. Sometimes a section of bench stands higher as a podium for the deity. Cult rooms contained figurines, models, incense burners, lamps, libation vessels, and luxury votives. This combination of structures and artifacts defines these areas as locations where Israelites observed sacred rituals. These small neighborhood cult rooms and semi-private household shrines of wealthy individuals provide the pattern which clarifies the religious nature of similar artifacts and furnishings wherever they exist. Because of these small sanctuaries we can be certain that the figurines and incense burners in Israelite houses were religious objects.
**Kuntillet ’Ajrud**

In Chapter Four: Fertility in Egypt, Ugarit, and Israel I will discuss the relevance of the Iron Age Israelite caravanserai at Kuntillet ’Ajrud (Horvat Teiman) in northeastern Sinai for demonstrating the continuity of Canaanite and Egyptian fertility and apotropaic motifs and for the worship of Asherah in Israel. In this section I emphasize the structures and artifacts that define its religious function. The site consists of two buildings; the larger westernmost one is well-preserved with walls 1.5 m. high in places, while the other is badly eroded. Both buildings belong to the period between the mid-ninth and the mid-eighth century BCE (Meshel 1978a:51), and both feature white-plastered entrance rooms decorated with black, red, and yellow paintings and Phoenician inscriptions.

The western building has a bent-axis entry court facing east lined with stone benches and plastered all over with shiny white plaster; part of the walls were painted with colorful flowered frescoes. A doorway leads into a long, narrow white-plastered “bench-room” which runs north and south between the towers. The benches around the sides of the room leave little space between them to walk, suggesting that they represent the primary function of the room—a place where travelers petitioned and thanked the deities for protection for themselves and their flocks on the desert routes. The tower-rooms accessed through window openings over the end benches provided repositories for votives.

Most of the special finds of the site came from the bench-room or from near it: wall inscriptions, two stone bowls inscribed with the names of their donors, one weighing
200 pounds, and two large pithoi with drawings and inscriptions. Meshel restored two decorated pithoi from sherds in or near the bench-room. One of the pithoi was standing on the bench and had probably been there when painted, since two of the drawings come very close to its base. The other pithos probably lay on its side close to the first when an artist painted some of its drawings since the inscriptions go in various directions (Beck 1982:43). Most of the drawings and inscriptions were done in red ink, which is very common for apotropaic motifs (Borghouts 1973:148; Trachtenberg 1961:133).

Outside the building and in the courtyard, but mostly in the southern storeroom, excavators found about a hundred pieces of finely woven and sewn fabric, most of it linen. Some of the textiles have colored red or blue yarn woven in for decoration. A very few pieces are wool or mixed linen and wool. Two piles of loom weights indicate that women wove the textiles at the site on an upright loom; wood beam fragments in the area may have been part of the loom frame. Implements for weaving decorated fine linen suggest to Meshel (1978b; 1979:33-34) a border outpost inhabited by priests; however, no evidence of priestly sacrificial activity or paraphernalia exists at the site. The textile activity witnesses rather to the fact that women resided at the site, since weavers were women in the ancient Near East. Women also probably managed the long food storerooms crowded with close-spaced pithoi and storage jar bases that bordered the courtyard on its south and west and the ovens near the stairways to the roof at the comers of the courtyard.

Beck (1982:61) suggests that the site provided a caravan stop for the incense trade, but that it functioned additionally as a wayside shrine. Kuntillet 'Ajrud was not a
temple, since it lacked the stereotypical features—holy of holies and cultic structures like sacrificial and incense altars—associated with temples. Perhaps Sinai desert traditions inspired it as a pilgrim’s station on the route to Mt. Horeb (Meshel 1979:34). The Kuntillet ʿAjrud semi-public cult room is significant for the study of household shrines because it affords an additional example of elements indicative of local Levantine shrines—offering benches, walls decorated with paint and white plaster, red-painted apotropaic and fertility iconography, and votive vessels. Additionally, as I will elaborate in Chapter Four, it exemplifies the use of protective images and inscriptions on or near entrance doorways, and it connects Asherah with Yahweh in a protective function.
House Gods and Shrines in the Ancient Near East—Summary

In second millennium Mesopotamia a movement to personalize religion produced the innovation of laments and petitions addressed to “my god,” “my goddess,” or similar titles that indicate a familial relationship with the gods. Personal gods in Mesopotamia received daily prayers as well as crisis laments, and their clients honored them with libations, food, and incense offerings in domestic shrines rather than in the large state temples. Texts as well as archaeology indicate that these shrines consisted of incense altars and offering platforms, and they were located in the streets of residential neighborhoods or in the courts or living rooms of private houses. Personal gods belonged to extended families and their residential neighborhoods. While kings chose personal gods from the higher echelons of the pantheon, ordinary citizens tended to approach city and national deities through intermediaries, and for this reason personal gods customarily fulfilled the role of intercessor.

Ancient Near Eastern personal family gods and protective spirits, as distinguished from deceased ancestors, together served the purpose of protecting the members and interests of the household. Their guarding presence in houses was invoked through figurines that represented either the family god or goddess or their emissaries, male šedu and female lamassu protective spirits who kept household residents from harm. Archaeological excavations and texts reveal that people placed these figurines on guard in the courtyards or bedrooms of their houses, hung them in plaque form or buried them near doorways, or stood them on pedestals on the roofs. Residents burned incense or oil
on special incense altars or lamps in their living rooms in order to invite the protecting
presence of their personal god and goddess and to frighten away unwanted supernatural
beings such as Lamassu and Lilith, rapacious demon-like goddesses who threatened
women and their newborn infants.

Houses and small neighborhood shrines at Ugarit exemplify the continuity of
Babylonian religious customs and the practical application of local Ugaritic sacred texts
to family piety. The small “Temple of the Rhytons” had low stone benches and an
offering podium, but no sacrificial area. Its furnishings included mediocre representations
of deities, a terracotta stand for incense offerings, libation rhytons, and small imported
and luxury objects dedicated to the deity. Sacred texts and divinity figurines found
throughout the housing and workshop districts indicate that private citizens at Ugarit, like
those of Assyria and Babylonia, participated in religious rituals in their homes and
workshops instead of limiting their religious expression to the elaborate state and royal
temples located in the political center of the city.

Worshipers replicated cultic structures and furnishings that belonged to major
state sanctuaries and royal temples in their household shrines in less elaborate form with
less expensive materials. This allowed people to serve and invoke in a consistent and
personal manner the deities they depended on for daily family care and household
protection. Logically, family interests differ from or supplement national interests.
Personal religion in the ancient Near East reflects concerns with the everyday physical
welfare of individual family members. The wisdom tablets from the “House of the
Literary Tablets,” the fragment of a medical ritual for a pregnant woman and conjurations
against various evils including demons from the "House of the Man of Letters," Rapšānu's incantation against evil eyes, and the incantations against the child-stealing Lammashtu from the Hurrian house all indicate that practitioners at the household level assisted their family members or neighbors to deal with normal human life situations and perceived dangers.

In the Iron Age southern Levant, figurines and models, lamps, zoomorphic libation kernois, offering benches, incense altars and stands, and special plaster or paint characterize Phoenician and Philistine shrines. The use of these in obvious shrines affirms the cultic function of these same classes of furnishings and artifacts found in Israelite houses. The Philistine and Phoenician shrines explain that the female figurines and models so frequent in Israelite houses were visual images of a votive relationship between a woman and her protective goddess. The chalices, models, and incense stands from Israelite houses continue the Near Eastern tradition of offering incense and gifts to personal deities to invoke their protective presence in the family household. Beginning in the earliest Israelite settlements and continuing under the united and then the divided monarchy, semi-public cult rooms associated with other buildings in ancient Israel display the same religious structures and artifacts, often mixed with ordinary household pottery.

The most obvious architectural structure of cult rooms in Israel and Judah is the offering bench that scales one or two walls and sometimes the entire room. Occasionally a section of bench stands higher as a podium for the deity. Cult rooms contained figurines, models, incense burners, lamps, libation vessels, and luxury votives. The
combination of structures and artifacts defines these areas as locations where Israelites observed sacred rituals. These small neighborhood cult rooms and semi-private household shrines of wealthy individuals provide the pattern which clarifies the religious nature of similar artifacts and furnishings wherever they are found. Because of these small sanctuaries we can be certain that the figurines and incense burners in Israelite houses were religious objects.

The Kuntillet ‘Ajrud semi-public cult room is significant for the study of household shrines because it is an additional example of elements indicative of local Levantine shrines—offering benches, walls decorated with paint and white plaster, red-painted apotropaic and fertility iconography, and votive vessels. Additionally, as I will elaborate in Chapter Four, it exemplifies the use of protective images and inscriptions on or near entrance doorways, and it connects Asherah with Yahweh in a protective function.

Cultic artifacts and structural elements universal to ancient Near Eastern family shrines include deity images and the apparatus necessary for burning incense and oil, pouring libations, and offering grain and luxury items to them. These are usually placed on some type of elevated structure—altar, podium, platform, or bench. Although the style of the figurines, incense burners, and altars change with the era and ethnic group, and the names of the gods and goddesses vary, the concepts that motivate votive relationships with personal protective deities remain continuous across the ages and geographical boundaries of the ancient Near East, from Bronze Age and Neo-Assyrian Mesopotamia to Ugarit and Iron Age Phoenicia, from Late Bronze Canaan to Iron Age Israel.
CHAPTER FOUR: FERTILITY IN EGYPT, UGARIT, AND ISRAEL

As detailed in Chapter One, Near Eastern textual scholars from the anthropological and myth and ritual schools labeled the Canaanite and early Israelite religions “fertility cults,” and historians theorized that these eventually evolved into a later stage of “ethical monotheism.” Most biblical scholars and biblical archaeologists have contrasted Canaanite with Israelite; they interpret the Ugaritic mythology and biblical prophetic metaphors as representative of anti-Yahwistic Canaanite fertility rituals in which altars and images played a key role. Some modern critics deny that the myths had anything to do with real ritual and claim instead that biblical accusations of cultic prostitution were general metaphors for activities unacceptable to the Deuteronomistic school. Texts and artifacts indicate a definite concern for agricultural fertility and human procreation in the ancient Near East.

Meyers (1988:56) makes the statement: “Group survival is dependent on the involvement of its members in three basic kinds of activities: reproduction, defense, and the production of subsistence goods.” Reproduction is closely tied to the production of subsistence goods both pragmatically and metaphorically. Fertility cult addresses the needs of an agricultural society for young humans who will work the land, young cattle and sheep to meet nutritional and clothing needs, and rain to water the crops at the right time. The Canaanite gods El, Athirat, and Baal functioned in these three fertility roles: giver of children, source of nurture for livestock and children, and god of the rainstorm.
The Canaanite and Israelite gods El, Baal, and Yahweh, and the warrior goddesses Astarte and Anat provided defense from warring enemies, the other element necessary to human survival. For this reason, the Canaanite and Israelite cults were not limited exclusively to fertility rituals; politico-military aspects interwove with fertility motifs. Chapter Three: House Gods and Shrines in the Ancient Near East discussed a related aspect of defense—a personal god’s defense of an individual and family against demons and illness.

This chapter outlines the subsistence environment of Syria-Palestine that motivated concerns for fertility in the areas of agriculture, livestock, and human family. It reviews textual and iconographic allusions to deities that fulfill these needs and expectations, and it discusses the textual and archaeological evidence for agricultural and reproductive ritual. It shows that the Israelite cult, like other first millennium systems in Syria-Palestine, developed out of Canaanite religion with a resulting reduction and conflation in its pantheon. It explores the form and meaning of Canaanite and Israelite fertility iconography, including its interrelation with apotropaic symbolism.
The Subsistence Environment of Syria-Palestine

Hopkins (1987) describes the early Israelite struggle to establish a viable agricultural economy in the context of the “desiccating seasonality and variable precipitation patterns” of the Palestinian climate. The most decisive environmental constraint is water availability. The highly intensive rains concentrate in the winter months and are mostly lost to runoff; what meager moisture remains in the ground from the wet season evaporates in the extreme insolation of the summer months. The crops of each planting season depend on rains synchronized to their vulnerable planting, germination, and growth schedules. Rainfall not only varies considerably in its distribution throughout the year, but its average annual accumulation is unpredictable. In three years out of ten, wetness at the beginning instead of the end of the season may produce an agricultural drought. One or two years out of ten may deviate more than twenty-five percent from the mean annual rainfall. Historically these drought years tend to cluster and produce famine.

Fears of famine greatly motivated ancient agricultural societies. Although the Bible repeatedly refers to the Promised Land as “flowing with milk and honey” (Exod 3:8, 17; Exod 13:5; Exod 33:3; Lev 20:24; Num 13:27, Num 14:8, Num 16:13; Deut 6:3; Deut 11:9, Deut 26:9, 15; Deut 27:3; Josh 5:6; Jer 11:5, 32:22; Ezek 20:6, 15), it also reports numerous famines patriarchal and Israelite families faced (Gen 12:10; Gen 26:1; Genesis 41-47; Ruth 1; 2 Sam 21:1; 1 Kings 17-18; 2 Kgs 8:1-2). The prophets Jeremiah,
Ezekiel, and Amos predicted famines as divine punishment. For example, Ezek 5:16 says, “I shall send one famine after another on you and cut off your daily bread.”

The strategies early Israelites developed as a buffer against famine included the grazing of sheep, goats, and cattle (Hopkins 1987:188). These domesticated animals contributed dairy products and wool to the household economy, their manure fertilized fallow fields, and the livestock could be used for food or to trade for food in drought years. Their use as sacrificial animals in Canaanite and Israelite cultic ritual further reflects their key role in the economy. Over the centuries the early Israelites perfected technologies, including cisterns and terracing, that allowed water conservation and control. Terracing has the advantage of reducing the loss of water due to runoff, providing drought resistance, and increasing yields; however, it is labor intensive (Hopkins 1987:183). The topography of the Israelite hill country coupled with the demography of the individual families and villages formed a formidable barrier to the success of an organized agricultural economy.

The Israelite agricultural cult centered around annual festivals that followed the cycle of agricultural production: *Mazzoth* (Unleavened Bread) in March/April (*Abib*) for the barley harvest (Exod 23:15; Exod 34:18), the Feast of Weeks (*šabbu′ot*; Exod 23:16; Exod 34:22) seven weeks later for the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Tabernacles (*sukkot*; Exod 23:16; Deut 16:13) in September/October for the harvest of fruit and grapes (Albertz 1994:89; Hopkins 1987:186). Reflections of this agriculturally regulated calendar appear in the Greco-Roman era solar 364-day religious calendars found at Qumran in the *Halakhic Document* (4QMMT), the *Temple Scroll* (11QT), as well as in
the Book of Jubilees. All these texts give instructions for annual agricultural festivals for barley, wheat, wine, and oil, and these festivals are all fifty days apart. This tradition may be even more ancient than the biblical calendar adopted by the rabbis. The idea that the new year starts with the winter rains that begin the cycle of agricultural production is documented by the tenth to ninth century Gezer calendar in which the first activity is “months of ingathering” and the last is “turn (of the year)” and by the Hebrew Bible which stipulates the festival of “ingathering at the going out of the year, when you gather the fruits of your work in from the land” (Exod 23:16) or “at the coming around of the year” (Exod 34:22). A calendar year based on the agricultural year as well as the scheduling of the Israelite religious festivals to coincide with harvest times within that agricultural year underlines the socioeconomic and religious importance of agriculture in ancient Israel.

Infant Mortality and Short Female Life Span

One of the most crucial problems that confronted early Israelites was small household size in the face of increased labor needs (Hopkins 1987:182; Meyers 1988:61). There were strong pressures on women to reproduce:

For women, the increased labor needs had a double impact: more work meant women became more involved in production; in addition, increased labor needs required a larger work force, which in turn called for larger families...The pressure on all wives, foreign or native, to bear children must have been considerable. (Meyers 1988:61, 71)

Due to plagues and military conquests, the Iron Age began with as much as a four-fifths reduction in population in the East Mediterranean region (Meyers 1988:70). Adult
female longevity, along with infant mortality, presented a major obstruction to fertility; during the whole time span from Upper Paleolithic to the nineteenth century CE in the Near East, the average woman died before menopause (Angel 1972:102). Whereas the life expectancy for men was about forty, women lived on the average only to age thirty (Meyers 1988:112-13). Results of studies of the ecology and population in the eastern Mediterranean region show very high infant mortality for most of the Iron Age (1150-650 BCE). Due to endemic disease and poor socioeconomic conditions, of the average 4.1 births for each female, only 1.9 survived. For the later period (650-300 BCE), at least in Greece, this improved to an average of 4.6 births per female, with 3.0 survivors (Angel 1972:95). Osteological statistics from Palestinian burials at Jericho, Lachish, and Meiron reveal that 35 percent of all individuals died before age 5 (Meyers 1988:112). Data from the excavation of Roman Age Meiron in Upper Galilee indicate that 50% of the individuals identified within the Kokhim and central chamber died before age 18, and 70% of those childhood and adolescent deaths occurred within the first five years of life (Smith, Bornemann, and Zias 1981). High mortality rates probably continually reduced thriving extended families to the small nuclear families that could live in the familiar four-room house (Hopkins 1987:182). Leaving aside the additional devastation that would be occasioned by an epidemic, families would have had to produce almost twice the number of children they wanted in order to achieve optimal family size.

Many biblical clues reveal ancient Israelites' anxieties about infant mortality and short life span. The biblical picture of Jacob's wife Rachel characterizes the archaeological statistics. She has trouble conceiving, then dies during her second
childbirth. Several biblical scholars trace the origin of the Genesis 2-3 narrative to Israelite families’ survival and population problems. The text instructs Israelite couples to be fruitful and multiply; it encourages men to sweat as they work the ground six days a week and mandates women to “increase their toil and pregnancies” (Meyers 1988:105). The table of economic worth of persons presented in Leviticus 27 divides men and women into four age groups. In the youngest age group, 0-5, and in the two older ones, 20-60 and 60+, women who can be sold or redeemed value about 40% of the value of men’s labor. However, in the age group 5-20 when most women become susceptible to the mortality of childbirth, they present more of a risk, thus the system assigns them less economic value. These figures also measure how much of the society’s tasks women assumed; they must have achieved about 40% of the productive agricultural tasks (Meyers 1988:171). The desperate demographic situation of the early Israelites forced them at times to permit foreign wives. For example, even after the Baal Peor incident the Israelites spared Moabite virgins to become their wives (Num 25:1-8; Num 31:9-18).

The skeletal analysis of human remains found in archaeological excavations in the eastern Mediterranean region confirms biblical clues to Israelites’ preoccupation with fertility, infant mortality, and short female life span. The difficult subsistence environment of the Israelite hill country, with its total dependence on rainfall—often unreliable because of famine cycles—and large labor force for successful agriculture, forms the background of the fertility aspects of the Canaanite and Israelite religions.
The Canaanite Origin of the Israelite Cult

Dever (1990:80) and Mazar (1992:343, 347, 354) emphasize the fact that although the Israelite culture was distinctive socio-economically, its material culture defined by collar-rimmed storage jars, four-room houses, bench-tombs, and farming technology diffused throughout Syria-Palestine in the Late Bronze and early Iron Ages and developed from Canaanite prototypes. Cross (1973) and Smith (1990) demonstrate many continuities in theology between the Canaanite and Israelite religions. Smith (1990:5) cites the Merneptah stela as distinguishing Israel from Canaan by 1200 BCE, so that although Israelite culture emerged from the Canaanite culture and in Iron I was mostly Canaanite in nature, its local deities before and during its emergence cannot be identified by simply equating Israelite religion with Ugaritic religion. Although Smith (1990:5), Keel and Uehlinger (1992:232), and Lemaire (1984a:46) question the relevance of the Ugaritic El-Asherah connection, distant in time and location, to the religious symbolism of ninth and eighth century Iron IIB Israel, scholars have noticed the interesting fact that the Ugaritic Aqht myth seems to be set in Galilee:

The poem of Aqht, set along the shores of the Kinnereth, stands at the forefront of the mounting evidence for a “Canaanite” background of the Ugaritic literary texts generally, and for a view of this corpus as (the remains of) a “Canaanite Bible” expressing the Weltanschauung of a West-Semitic people inhabiting northern (Galilean) Canaan and northern Transjordan (Bashan/Golan) in the middle of the second millennium B.C.E. (Margalit 1989:473)

The early literary texts such as Aqhat and Keret do not mention Ugarit, but include toponyms like Mt. Hermon and Udumu in Bashan, near Pella; in fact, Baal-of-Saphon probably refers to Baal-of-Hermon since in poetic Hebrew saphon means “north”
(Margalit 1989:474-75). In this sense, when the northern kingdom of Israel split away from Judah and established its religious centers with Bull El, Asherah, and Baal, it was appealing to a tradition more “orthodox,” or at least more long-standing, than that of the Deuteronomists.

Scholars offer various analyses of the nature of Israelite religion in the period of the pre-state alliance. Ahlström (1984:125) visualizes groups and clans with individual traditions and lifestyles, but joined by their common native heritage of worship of the Canaanite gods El, Baal, Asherah and others, because “the Semitic rule was that you worshipped the gods of the country where you lived because they were the owners and rulers of the land.” Albertz (1994:62-63, 79), on the other hand, says that Yahweh was the true owner of the land for the early Israelite settlers. Their inherently monolatrous religion reflected simple social structure as opposed to the polytheistic religion of the stratified high culture that threatened to dominate them. The Yahweh cult was mainly a decentralized locally-based agricultural cult. That poses the questions: Was the Canaanite religion a “fertility cult”? Which elements of the Canaanite pantheon and cult did Israelites keep in their religion, and which ones did they discard as no longer needed or accepted in the new socioeconomic context? In the words of Albertz (1994:87), “to describe the Canaanite religion as a fertility religion is a caricature created by Protestant prudery;” however, the deities of both Canaanite and Israelite cults sponsored the fertility of the cultivated land, the cattle and the body. Some fertility aspects of Canaanite gods disappear from biblical depictions of Yahweh. For example, Yahweh does not engage in
sex, nor does he die (Vriezen 1967:73; Smith 1990:164). Albertz believes that the Israelite agricultural cult incorporated a female element connected with the high places. Others like Miller (1986:244-45) argue that in Israel either the personality of Yahweh absorbed the goddess so that she had no independent existence or character, or the radical integration of divine powers in the male deity effectively excluded the goddesses. Miller uses examples from Mesopotamia to illustrate the absorption by all-powerful male deities like Anu and later Marduk of the feminine dimension of deity reflected in the goddess. Smith (1990) argues that during the time of the judges Israelites related El, Baal, and Asherah to the cult of Yahweh and did not worship them separately as biblical historiography implies, so that by the tenth century they had combined the Northwest Semitic imagery for El, Baal and Asherah and attributed it all to Yahweh.

The next sections summarize the textual evidence for the personalities and functions of the major Canaanite deities and show which of these continued on into the Israelite religious texts. It seems that Yahweh indeed incorporated many aspects of the Canaanite gods El and Baal. However, I coordinate textual hints with actual archaeological artifacts to demonstrate that Israelite religion in fact included a goddess named Asherah. Rather than attributing goddess imagery to Yahweh, the Israelites conflated and attributed Northwest Semitic and Egyptian imagery for several goddesses to Asherah, whom they worshiped together with Yahweh. Although Asherah was an Israeliite goddess, she was not worshiped separately. She functioned as an intermediary bringing people’s petitions to Yahweh, then served as Yahweh’s instrument for blessing and protection.
The Canaanite Pantheon

Archaeologists excavated two main temples to Baal and Dagan and a royal chapel at Ugarit. In addition to these major central temples, they discovered neighborhood sanctuaries they identified as sacred from their architectural organization and cultic furnishings that were more accessible to the population due to their proximity to domestic living quarters. Representations of divinities, both statuettes and stelae, occurred in conjunction with libation rhytons, cultic stands, incense burners, and amulets in the shrines as well as in houses. These archeological finds substantiate the implication in the mythological and ritual texts that religion was a very important part of life at Ugarit on both a national and a personal level. Although name labels on Levantine stelae and statuettes are rare, iconography matches the figures to certain gods and goddesses known from the texts.

The fourteenth to thirteenth century BCE Ugaritic alphabetic cuneiform texts from Ras Shamra describe and list a pantheon of more than two hundred deities including the patriarchal head god El and his consort Athirat, and the storm god Baal who fights his rivals for kingship—the star god Athtar, sea god Yamm, and Mot (“Death”), god of the underworld. In the mythological texts the warrior goddesses Astarte and Anat assist Baal, and many scholars consider them to be Baal’s consorts.

El, Father of Gods and Humans

Both myth and ritual texts portray El as a patriarchal figure, father of gods and human beings. As a god of fertility he gives children and as a god of child sacrifice he
demands their return (Ackerman 1992:158). His epithets include “father of years,” “father of humanity,” “the father of the gods” in general as well as of individual gods in different contexts. Figuratively he fathers Baal (CTA 3.5.43; CTA 4.1.5; CTA 4.4.47): “Bull El, his father, King El, who created him.” The bull symbolizes strength and fertility. Descriptive names such as “the creator of creatures,” “your patriarch,” “our creator,” and “who created us” (CTA 10.3.6) emphasize El’s procreative role.

In the KRT, vocalized Keret or Kirta, and Aqht mythological texts found in the House of the High Priest between the Baal and Dagan temples, both King Keret and Dan‘el ritually beseech El for progeny. The legend of King Keret (KTU 1.14-16) describes a man who has lost seven childless wives and is without progeny. El promises him a new wife. In the Aqhat legend, El pronounces a blessing on the hero Dan‘el to “fortify” him to impregnate his wife. The Kotharat, the swallow-like daughters of the crescent moon who are experts in “pleasures of the bed of conception, delights of the bed of childbirth” aid him, and after they leave he is counting the months until his heir is born (CTA 17.1, 2). El the progenitor then has claim on all that exits the womb. Various Greek writers who identify El with Baal Hamon and Kronos describe the sacrifice of children to him in times of crisis. According to one myth (PE 1.10.44), El sacrificed his own son in time of war (Ackerman 1992:124-25, 157-58; Cross 1980:24-28, 35-36; Olyan 1988:12) and in another fragment (PE 1.10.33-34) he sacrifices him during a plague (Olyan 1988:12).

There are many indications that the biblical El/Yahweh functioned in the same role of child-giver and child-claimer. In Mosaic law (Exod 13:1-2, 12-13) the firstborn
child belonged to Yahweh: “Every firstborn, the first birth of every womb among the Israelites, you must dedicate to me, both man and beast; it belongs to me.” Various biblical narratives allude to El/Yahweh as child-giver and child-claimer. For example, when the matriarch Sarah proved infertile, Elohim (an El name) intervened to revivify the couple’s reproductive capacities and gave them an heir (Gen 16:1; Gen 17:17; Gen 21:1). Later Elohim/El required the child to be burned as a sacrifice, but as Abraham was about to slaughter him, he supplied a ram as a substitute (Genesis 22). When Rachel complained to Jacob that she bore him no children, Jacob replied, “Can I take the place of God (Elohim), who has denied you children?” (Gen 30:2). An angel tells Samson’s mother that she will conceive and give birth to a son. The son will be consecrated to God from birth (Judg 13:5). Naomi’s village elders and neighbors credit Yahweh with providing her the child-heir Obed, “the offspring the LORD gives you,” through Boaz (Ruth 4:12-14). Yahweh continues in the same role of child giver and child-claimer in 1 Sam 1:11:

Hannah made this vow: ‘LORD of Hosts, if you will only take notice of my trouble and remember me, if you will not forget me but grant me offspring, then I shall give the child to the LORD for the whole of his life, and no razor shall ever touch his head.

In the well-known story of Job’s loss of his animals and of his seven sons and three daughters through the agency of the Adversary, Job (1:21) quotes the proverb:

Naked I came from the womb, naked I shall return whence I came.
The LORD gives and the LORD takes away; blessed be the name of the LORD.
In addition to these narrative allusions to El/Yahweh as child-claimer, the
Deuteronomistic historian reports that the Judean kings Ahaz and Manasseh “passed their
sons through the fire” (2 Kgs 16:3; 2 Kgs 21:6), an expression generally understood to
mean child-sacrifice. Some prophetic passages seem to indicate that Yahweh received
child sacrifices: Mic 6:6-7 lists the sacrifice of a firstborn with inordinate sin offerings to
Yahweh; his breath sets ablaze the fire of Topheth (Isa 30:33); and he makes the Israelites
surrender their eldest sons to idols (Ezek 20:25-26, 31). Although archaeology has never
documented child-sacrifice in the Levant, there is ample evidence for the practice in
Phoenician colonies like Carthage.

Baal

The Ugaritic texts call Baal “the victor Baal,” “rider of the clouds,” and “the
prince lord (Baal) of the earth.” He marshals the rain, and he lives 40 km. north of Ugarit
on Mt. Saphon which receives the heaviest rain in the region. Since Baal is god of the
storm, he is also god of agricultural fertility (Pardee and Bordreuil 1992:706). Baal’s
three women Tallay (Dewy), Pidray (Flashy), and Arsay (Earthy) may reflect his
meteorological and chthonic relationships (Smith 1994:xxiii). The extensive epic Baal
Cycle (KTU 1.1-6), the theme of which is the glorification and kingship of Baal (Albright
1940:176; Smith 1994:xxiv), unfolds the mythology of the storm god. Baal rules the
universe as a political reality comprised of cosmic, human, and natural levels (Smith
1994:xxiv). The first two tablets recount how Baal, after a long struggle with the sea god
Yamm, defeats him with the help of clubs made by the craftsman god Kothar. The clubs
symbolize thunder and lightning (J. Day 1992c:545). The next two tablets describe how Anat demands a palace for Baal, but is refused. After the intervention of Athirat, El grants Baal a palace which Kothar builds. In the last sections Mot (Death) defeats Baal and sends him to the underworld, bringing about a period of dryness and famine on the earth.

Baal then prevails over Death through the agency of Anat:

She seized Mot, son of El;
With the sword she cut him up,
with the sieve she winnowed him,
In the fire she burned him, in the mill she ground him,
In the fire she sowed him
In order that the birds might eat their portion,
in order that they might destroy the seed. (Baal Cycle, KTU 1.6)

This poem identifies the body of a god with grain, probably corn, which is reaped and threshed, winnowed, baked as bread, and ground to meal, then finally sown as grain in the field. Anat executed the ritual to revive Baal through sympathetic action (Albright 1940:177). Some scholars who assume that Baal was in the underworld for seven years interpret the myth to refer to a seven-year famine. Others emphasize allusions in the Baal Cycle to climatic conditions in the seasonal agricultural year. Although the Baal-Mot cycle pictures Baal as resurrected after "months" have passed (KTU 1.6.11.26-27), in the Hadad text (KTU 1.12.11.44-45) and Aqhat text (KTU 1.19.1.42-44) Baal disappears for seven or eight years.

A temple located on the acropolis of Ugarit illustrates the myth and ritual texts. Archaeologists identified it as the Temple of Baal because they found the stela of Baal Saphon and another depicting Baal with sword and thunderbolt there. Remains of a
monumental stone staircase indicate that the structure comprised a tower on whose summit's terrace priests accomplished sacrificial ceremonies (Yon 1992:703) like King Keret's sacrifice at the summit of the tower (KTU 1.14.2.21-22), that of the son whose duty to his father included his "emmer-offering in the temple of Baal" (KTU 1.17.31), and those who went "up to the sanctuary of Baal" to offer food and drink offerings in wartime (KTU 1.119.33). These offerings show that Baal as a deity functioned in both fertility and protective roles.

Baal's essential connection with rain and thus agricultural fertility in the Israelites' mythological heritage explains the fruitless efforts biblical writers expended to try to eradicate Baal as a rival deity to Yahweh. Hebrew prophetic writings reflect the tension between Yahweh's claim to be the source of rain and agricultural fertility and the older Baal tradition. For example, in the context of a condemnation of Baal cult, Jeremiah (2:13) said:

My people have committed two sins;
    they have rejected me, a source of living water,
and they have hewn out for themselves cisterns,
cracked cisterns which hold no water.

In Hosea's (2:1-17) personification of the nation of Israel as an adulteress who has loved Baal rather than Yahweh, Yahweh says:

She does not know that it was I who gave her the grain,
    the new wine, and fresh oil,
I who lavished on her silver and gold which they used for the Baal...
I shall ravage the vines and the fig trees, of which she says, 'These are the fees which my lovers have paid me'...
I shall punish her for the holy days when she burned sacrifices to the baalim...
This poetry suggests that the Israelites executed rituals and burned sacrifices for Baal, perhaps in his local manifestations, to induce him to provide rain for the land’s production of grain, wine, fruit, and oil.

Qedešim and Fertility Ritual in Ugarit and Israel

Some scholars think that Canaanites at Ugarit reenacted Baal’s destruction of Mot and the marriage between El and his two wives Athirat and Rahmay that produces Shachar and Shalim (CTA 23=UT 52) in ritual _hieros gamos_ or nature fertility liturgy annually or occasionally during long spells of dryness (Gibson 1977:29). This view often includes the assumption of illicit female participation modeled on Canaanite “fertility” goddesses. Feminist scholars have shown that such views are not only baseless historically, but they are also guilty of male-oriented bias. Two examples of often-read biblical historians who espoused this view are Martin Noth (_The History of Israel_, 1960) and John Bright (_A History of Israel_, 1981):

The cults which flourished among the Canaanites were the immemorial rites of the great fertility-bestowing mother-deity, generally called Astarte in Canaan, and of a youthful deity who represented the annual blossoming and dying of vegetation. These cults included the celebration of a “holy marriage”...at a holy place, with female representatives of the deity and “sacred prostitution” and the cultic sacrifice of female chastity...The Israelites were bound to reject all this, especially the worship of female deities. (Noth 1960:143-44)

These goddesses, though fluid in personality and function, represented the female principal in the fertility cult...As in all such religions, numerous debasing practices, including sacred prostitution...were prevalent. (Bright 1981:118-19)

The assumption that the myths were reenacted in rituals encounters a problem in that the large number of rituals we know “do not confirm in any way an interpretation of
these poems by the myth and ritual” pattern (Caquot and Sznycer 1980:11). Jo Ann Hackett (1989:73) also disputes the idea that Canaanite religion included sacred prostitution because of lack of historical evidence:

We can see that the consensus scholarly opinion of the Canaanite cult is really a combination of three literary elements: the sacred prostitution accusation aimed at Canaanite religion and derived largely from classical sources; the sacred marriage reconstructed for Mesopotamia; and the Baal myth wherein the fertility of the land depends on the resurrection of the dead god. The first two are rituals for which only scant and scattered evidence can be evinced, and the third is a myth that may or may not have been the basis for some ritual enactment; we have no contemporary texts that describe any such ritual (contemporary to the mythological texts, that is), much less one that included regular or occasional ritual sex. The existence of the fourth element mentioned earlier, hundreds of “fertility figurines” found by archaeologists, is also considered evidence of the degradation of Canaanite religion: worship of a naked goddess as prostitute or patron of temple prostitutes.

The word qđš “consecrated” refers to a class of people in Mesopotamian, Ugaritic, and biblical texts. Ugarit texts and the Bible mention both male and female qđš “consecrated people.” Although some scholars have assumed these “consecrated men and women” were hierodules “sacred prostitutes,” no evidence for this function exists at Ugarit (Westenholtz 1989:250; Albertz 1994:176, n. 119). Besides being a name of Asherah in Ugaritic texts, qđš seems to denote a class of lesser priests who fulfilled levitical functions in the temple and its cult, including that of cantor during sacrifice (KTU 1.112). They do not appear to have had any special status sexually, but appear to have led normal family lives. They could marry and have children, and their status was inheritable (RS 16.132:7; Westenholtz 1989:251). In Mesopotamian texts, the term qadištu cognate with Hebrew qedešā occurs only in the feminine, and designates a
woman who officiated in sacerdotal or exorcistic rituals in the cult of Adad in Assur or Kish, or one who supervised the spiritual aspects of procreation, childbirth, and nurture (Westenholtz 1989:252-55). For example, the Babylonian Flood story says: “let the midwife rejoice in the house of the qad štu-woman where the pregnant wife gives birth.”

Some biblical scholars view mentions of cultic prostitution in the Bible as metaphorical polemic against what Deuteronomistic Yahwists thought Israelites and other cultures did—fertility ritual associated with sacrifices and sacred trees in which a bride might have intercourse with a stranger in order to promote her reproductive powers. On the other hand, it could refer to non-ritual prostitution carried out by a class of temple servants dedicated to Asherah whose proceeds aided the sanctuary economically (Albertz 1994; van der Toorn 1989). Albertz (1994:87) argues against Israelite religion being a fertility religion in which “the high places were centers of orgiastic fertility,” but he interprets the qedēšim of 2 Kgs 23:7 as women who contributed to the income of the temple:

Verse 7 here mentions women who had dedicated themselves ( qedēša ) to the Ashera—probably by an oath (Deut 23:19) and wove linen garments for the goddess. Whatever may be meant by this, the temple prostitution of which the qedēšot are accused (cf. Hosea 4:14) is very probably not to be understood as a cultic act but as an institution for securing income for such women, who were evidently without means; at the same time it contributed to the income of the temple and thus to the veneration of the goddess.

Albertz seems to be correct in this interpretation. It is difficult to explain the parallel occurrences of “consecrated woman” and “prostitute” as entirely polemic and the prophetic metaphor as unrooted in any reality. Van der Toorn agrees with Albertz that the
qdšm probably constituted a group of temple servants who fulfilled a variety of menial tasks in the sanctuary which may have included prostitution in order to provide revenue for the temple. However, based on Deut 23:17-18, which reads:

There shall be no qedeš among the daughters of Israel, nor shall there be a qadeš among the sons of Israel. You shall not bring the hire of a harlot or the wages of a dog into the house of the LORD your God in payment for any vow,

van der Toorn posits a second type of “sacred” prostitution performed by people, especially women, who had made a vow to a deity, but when the time arrived to make payment, they did not have sufficient resources to do so. They hired themselves as secular prostitutes and then used the proceeds to pay their debts at the sanctuary. The woman of Proverbs 7 provides an example of just such a person who seduced a young man in order to pay her vow because her husband was out of town and had taken his money bag with him. These activities are “sacred” in the sense that the money went into the treasury of the temple or sanctuary and could be used for cultic furnishings. Van der Toorn (1989:204) calls for an anthropological updating of the idea, based on uncritically borrowed theories about the magical worldview of ancient peoples, of sexual rites designed to maintain the mysterious force of life.

According to feminist biblical scholars like Hackett (1989:73), since the nineteenth century biblical historians have identified with and propagated the biblical polemic against Canaanite “fertility cult” without recognizing its propagandistic function and their own tendency to share in the context of the biblical metaphor:

This tendency to identify with the Israelites aggravates the perception of Canaanite religion as sex-centered because in the Bible, religious apostasy, falling
away, is often compared with adultery and prostitution. But this is a metaphor, an image, a powerful figure for drawing boundaries between the good guys and the bad guys. Those who practice our religion are blessed and those who have left our religion have, as it were, committed adultery, or gone a-whoring. The presence of female cult personnel in the rival cults makes this metaphor work even better. There were no such women in the official Israelite cult; nor, for that matter, were there in the religious groups to which most nineteenth and twentieth-century biblical scholars have belonged. So these scholars have taken their stand on the side of the Israelites and have often even shared the context of the biblical metaphor (no female cult personnel) and have therefore failed to question how far the metaphor may be removed from any kind of historical reality.

In addition to assuming and condemning religious ritual which has little or no historical basis, biblical scholars refer to all three of the major Canaanite goddesses as “fertility” or “mother” goddesses, while textual evidence emphasizes other aspects of their personalities and points to the male deities El and Baal as the major proponents of fertility. For example, although Asherah was “Lady of the Sea” and Anat and Astarte were war goddesses, Albright (1942:75-77) claimed that sex was the primary function of all three:

All three goddesses were principally concerned with sex and war. Sex was their primary function. In an Egyptian text of the thirteenth century B.C. Anath and Astarte are called “the great goddesses who conceive but do not bear,” i.e., the goddesses who are perennially fruitful without ever losing virginity. They are therefore both mother goddesses and divine courtesans...the erotic aspect of their cult must have sunk to extremely sordid depths of social degradation.

Albright interpreted “the great goddesses who conceive but do not bear,” to mean that Anat and Astarte were perennially fruitful mother goddesses who never lost their virginity, whereas in fact this indicates that they were neither virgins, nor fruitful, and since they never bore children, they certainly were not mothers. According to Hackett (1989:74-75), male scholars’ tendency to assign one-word epithets like “storm” god to
Baal and "high" or "chief" god to El, and to reserve "fertility" for the goddesses reflects an unconscious effort to downplay their more visible female powers by generalizing all women into less threatening fertility or motherhood roles. While I am in complete agreement with Hackett that male biblical scholars exaggerate the importance of sex in the Canaanite cult when they interpret qedsm as "cult prostitutes" in ritual sex ceremonies and reduce all female deities to fertility goddesses, I find it difficult to minimize the sexuality of Late Bronze Age nude female figurines. And as I will demonstrate in Chapter Five, Mesopotamian texts established a precedent for the sympathetic magic use of figurines to produce human fertility. In the final sections of this chapter I discuss and illustrate the iconographic representations of the Canaanite goddesses, especially in relation to lions and trees, but first I address the issue of reducing all of them to fertility functions by evaluating their roles in the literature. The controversy over the role of the goddess Anat epitomizes the debate on fertility.

Anat

Whereas some interpreters understand Anat in the Ugaritic texts as a fertility goddess sexually involved with Baal or El, others claim that there is no clear unambiguous support for her sexuality and procreative power. According to Walls (1992), the term bilt "virgin, young woman who did not yet bring forth male offspring" disqualifies Anat from being Baal's sexual partner in the texts usually cited, because his consort in these cases conceives and delivers offspring. However, her role in procuring a heifer for Baal's affair implies her symbolic association with sex or fertility, even though

Some ancient Near Eastern scholars interpret graphic and textual images of goddesses suckling Canaanite and Egyptian kings as fertility metaphors. A winged goddess on an ivory bas relief on the royal bed from the palace of Ras Shamra who suckles two male youths in a series of panels that depict the life of the Ugaritic king may represent Asherah or Anat, because Tablet 15 of the Story of Keret predicts that Keret’s heir Yassib will be suckled by Anat and Athirat (Asherah):

The woman you have taken, oh Kirta, the woman you have taken into your house the maid you have brought into your court will bear you seven sons eight...for you. She will bear the boy, Yassib to drink the milk of Athirat, to suck the breast of the maid Anath who suckles (KTU 1.15, Story of Keret).
Similarly, a painting in the burial chamber of Tuthmosis III shows the young king being suckled by a goddess in the form of a sycamore tree. The child is nuzzling a large breast held by a human arm emerging from the trunk.

Walls (1992) interprets the suckling of Keret’s heir Yassib by Anat and Athirat as royal rather than fertility imagery. Neo-Assyrian kings drank divine milk at their enthronement to demonstrate divine favor and royal status, so goddesses who suckle kings are not symbols of natural or human fertility. Walls (1992:153) likewise analyzes the imagery of suckling goddesses in Egyptian iconography as politico-military rather than maternal:

Within the context of Egyptian royal ideology, Ramses’ reference to himself as the “suckling of Anaf* should identify the goddess as the pharaoh’s patron and protector rather than a fertility goddess. She is responsible for imparting royal status to her human devotee and Ramses depicts his dependent relationship to the warrior goddess in familial terms. Clearly, this Egyptian portrayal of Anat should not be used as evidence for the maternal or procreative characteristics of the Ugaritic goddess.

Maier (1992) agrees with Walls that Anat’s main characterization is violent and warlike, however he differs from Walls’s denial that Anat had sexual intercourse with Baal. Maier cites various reasons scholars give for Anat’s label “perpetual virgin:”

“Virgin” is not be understood literally, since texts picture her as having intercourse with Baal. Among proposals of scholars are that “Virgin” indicates Anath’s perpetual youth, beauty, and nubility; her never bringing forth offspring; her ability to restore her own virginity; her cultic chastity; or her inaccessibility (as an unconquerable martial deity).

Scholars who emphasize Anat as a violent goddess rather than a fertility goddess seem to be correcting a previous overemphasis on female sexuality, not pursuing personal
agendas. While texts and iconography have led many to affirm annual *hieros gamos* "sacred marriage" ceremonies in ancient Mesopotamia, no evidence for this custom exists at Ugarit. The assumption of ritual prostitution proved to be a similar exercise in pan-Babylonian sensationalism, perhaps especially attractive to conservative clergymen emerging from the Victorian era of sexual silence. On the other hand, late twentieth century feminist interpreters tend to analyze the Canaanite goddesses as career women who were too busy or too independent for heterosexual relationships. The correct view of the feisty Anat lies somewhere in between.

*Astarte*

The Canaanite goddess Anat appears together with Astarte in various Egyptian and Syrian sources. The Ugaritic god lists equate Astarte (biblical Ashtoreth, Ugaritic Athtart) with Mesopotamian Ishtar (*KTU* 1.47.25; *KTU* 1.118.24; with *Ugaritica V* 18.24). Ishtar was the goddess of war and victory of various Akkadian and Assyrian cities (Abusch 1995:849), and her counterpart Astarte attained prominence in the same way as a war and protection goddess in Egypt. According to J. Day (1992b:493-94), Egyptian art depicts Astarte clothed rather than nude and holding a weapon. She is the attested military patron of the pharaohs Amenophis II (ca.1427-1396), Tuthmosis IV (ca. 1396-1386) and Ramses III (ca. 1185-1154) and protector goddess of Pi-Ramesse, the new city of Ramses II (ca. 1279-1213). As consort of Baal at Ugarit she is called “Astarte-name-of-Baal” in Keret’s curse on his son Yassib (*KTU* 1.16.6.54-57) and in the Baal-Yamm myth (*KTU* 1.2.1.8). Astarte appears with Anat in two Ugaritic serpent charm deity lists (*KTU*
1.100.20; *KTU* 1.107.14) and she appears alone or with Anat preparing food at El’s banquet, hunting, restraining Baal from smiting Yamm, and as an example of beauty.

Egyptian magical texts invoke both Astarte and Anat to protect against wild animals and to ward off demons (P. Day 1995:71). The Egyptian Winchester plaque (Edwards 1955) unites Astarte with Anat and Qudshu, and many scholars believe it also unites her with Asherah.

*Asherah, Procreatrix of the Gods*

The Ugaritic ritual and mythological texts name Asherah “Lady Athirat of the Sea.” Ugaritic *th* is equivalent to Hebrew *sh* (ש), and the feminine ending -*t* is equivalent to Hebrew -*h*. She is consort of the supreme creator god El, so she is called Elat “feminine El” (*CTA* 3.5.45; *CTA* 14.4.198; *CTA* 15.3.26), “procreatrix of the gods” (*CTA* 4.1.23; *CTA* 4.3.26, 30, 32, 35), and “mother of the gods” (*PRU* 2.2.43). In one text (*CTA* 23) El seduces her, then she conceives and gives birth, but in general her erotic fertility character at Ugarit remains secondary compared to her role as mother (J. Day 1986:389).

The Keret and Aqhat mythological texts associate Asherah with El as procreatrix and mother of the gods and of humans. The legend of King Keret (*KTU* 1.14-16) describes a man who has lost seven childless wives and is without progeny. El promises him a new wife who will bear his heir Yassib. In response Keret vows to give Asherah (Athirat in the Ugaritic dialect) two or three times his bride’s weight in silver if the mission is successful:
Athirat of Surra and Goddess of Sidian: If I take Hurraya into my house, bring the maid into my court; I will give her double in silver, her triple in gold. (*KTU* 1.14, Story of Keret)

This interchange indicates that Asherah partnered with El in promoting human fertility. Keret vowed to pay votive offerings of silver and gold to her rather than to El.

The Baal Cycle also portrays Asherah as mediator between suppliants and the high god El. When El refuses to give Baal a house, Asherah intercedes for him and is successful (*KTU* 1.4.3-4 = *CTA* 4.3-5). Asherah's role as mediator with the high god in the Ugaritic texts survives as one of her primary functions in Israelite religion. The placement of her stylistic tree symbol in Yahwistic shrines and the Yahwistic blessing formula "by/through his asherah" indicate that Asherah as symbolized by the sacred tree was the means of approaching Yahweh as well as the vehicle of his provision and protection. The Khirbet el-Kom inscription credits Yahweh with rescuing Uryahu from his enemies by his (Yahweh's) Asherah, and the Kuntillet 'Ajrud apotropaic symbols and accompanying inscriptions that apply to "Yahweh and his asherah" for blessing appear to request protection for travelers.

Biblical texts indicate that Asherah received sacrifices as a deity from the Israelites. For example, English translations of Judg 3:7 report that the Israelites forgot Yahweh and served the Baals and the Asherahs, and 2 Chron 24:18 says that they worshiped Asherah poles. The Hebrew verb *qôd* "worship, serve" used in both cases implies that Israelites made ritual sacrifices to Asherah. Isa 19:21 clarifies the meaning of *qôd* when it says that the Egyptians will "*qôd" Yahweh "with sacrifices and grain-offerings." Other biblical passages mention incense altars together with "asherahs." Isa
17:8, for example, predicts that in the future Israelites will not look to altars they have made with their hands or to objects their fingers have made—“asherahs” and incense altars. Isa 27:9 asserts that Yahweh will “pound to chalk all the altar stones, and no sacred poles or incense-altars are left standing.” The presence of “asherahs” with altars at bamot sanctuaries also implies that Asherah received sacrifices (Jer 17:2).

In Canaanite offering lists Athirat receives sheep sacrifices (CTA 34.6; CTA 35.1.15; CTA 36.1.6; CTA 37.3; App. II.16; Ugaritica V 9.7; Ugaritica VII = RS 24.256.23-24), presumably because she provides fertility and sustenance to the flocks. Pictures in Ugarit and Egypt show goddesses giving grain to people and caprids. (See the following sections “The Lachish Ewer and Sacred Tree Iconography” and “The Nurturing and Apotropaic Power of Asherah Trees” for a discussion and illustrations of these goddesses.) The animal fertility motifs that accompany the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud Yahweh-Asherah inscriptions reflect Asherah’s dimension as “mother of flocks.”

The aforementioned Ugaritic texts describe sheep sacrifices and gold and silver offerings for Asherah. The bones of domestic animals in ashes, animal figurines, precious and semi-precious metal and stone jewelry, bronze and silver female deity figurines, and a stone mold for casting them at the 1800-1600 BCE Bronze Age temples at Nahariyah south of Tyre substantiate the actual practice of offering precious metals and sheep sacrifices to a goddess. M. Dothan also uncovered offering bowls, incense stands, precious stone beads, 7-wick lamps, and 7-cup bowls from the seaside cult place. The nature and location of the artifacts at the shrine indicate that “cult practices included oil offerings poured on the high place, gift offerings placed there and in the other areas of the
242
temple, and sacrificial feasts" (Pettey 1990:179). The female figurines positioned their
hands either on their abdomens or holding their breasts, suggesting the mother goddess
Asherah. Asherah's epithet "Lady Athirat of the Sea" also ties her to this location near
Tyre and Sidon. However, opinions vary as to whether the figurines represent Asherah
(Pettey 1990:179) or Astarte (Mazar 1990:221). This difference of opinion demonstrates
the general confusion between the two goddesses Asherah and Astarte.

Astarte and Asherah

The characterization of the Canaanite deities is complex and fluid. The three
goddesses Athirat, Anat, and Attart (later Ashtart or Astarte) function in overlapping and
ambiguous roles in the Ugaritic mythological texts (Miller 1987:55-56). In the fourteenth
century Amarna tablets the names Asherah and Astarte interchange, which may indicate a
lack of clear distinction between the functions and personalities of these two goddesses
(Albright 1942:74; Patai 1967:3). The polytheistic Egyptian, Babylonian, Hittite, and
Canaanite religions often identified or substituted one god for another, or combined them,
or called one god by the name of another (Patai 1967:41). The Ugaritic tablets sometimes
refer to Athirat as qdš "Qudshu" (CTA 16.1.11, 22) which means "holiness" or
"sanctuary." That this was one of her names seems confirmed in the parallel phrases that
identify the gods as "sons of Athirat" (CTA 3.5.46-47; CTA 4.6.46) and "sons of Qudshu"
(CTA 2.1.21, 38; CTA 2.3.19-20; CTA 17.1.4). The Egyptian relief from Thebes labeled
"Qudshu-Astarte-Anat" which shows a nude en face goddess standing on a lion (Fig. 31)
makes the equivalence of Asherah and Qudshu significant. This relief differs from some
usual Egyptian writing and artistic conventions, and it most likely belonged to a group of Semitic workmen (Edwards 1955:51). The label indicates a fusion of the major Canaanite goddesses and provides a key to a series of iconographic identifications. The variable pairings of the gods and goddesses in the Ras Shamra texts and the conflate forms ‘ntw’ttrt (Ras Shamra) and ‘ntrt (Egypt) suggest an early mingling of the Canaanite goddesses (Oden 1977:97-98).

Fig. 31: Qudshu-Astarte-Anat, adapted from I. E. S. Edwards, “A Relief of Qudshu-Astarte-Anat in the Winchester College Collection,” plate 3.
In general, Levantine cultures drastically reduced their second millennium list of deities to far fewer first millennium deities. For example, Iron Age Canaanite-Phoenician inscriptions hardly mention Asherah, although she had played a prominent role in the Ugaritic mythology (Smith 1990:26, 89, 92; Keel and Uehlinger 1998:229). Astarte took over her titles rbt and “mother” in inscriptions from Sidon, Tyre, Kition, and Egypt. The confusion of the names and roles of Asherah and Astarte evident already in the Ras Shamra texts carries over into the Hebrew Bible and its Greek translation, the Septuagint. 1 Kgs 11:5, 1 Kgs 11:33, and 2 Kgs 23:13 agree with late Phoenician evidence that associates Astarte with Sidon, a city which pertained to Elat/Asherah in the Keret (Kirta) Epic. The Greek text translates a reference to Asherah (λαςερα) in the Hebrew text of 2 Chr 15:16 as a reference to Astarte (ἡ Ἀσταρτή). In the same transposition 2 Chr 24:18 denotes Asherah’s cultic symbols ḫd’āšērīm in Hebrew but ταῖς Ἀστάρταις in Greek. The alternation works both ways because Astarte is ḫ’āštārōt in the Hebrew text of 1 Sam 7:3 and 12:10, but τα ἄλσε (7:3) or τοῖς ἅλσεσίν (12:10) in the Greek text, phrases that usually designate Asherah’s cultic symbols.

Biblical texts pair both Astarte and Asherah with Baal, who as Baal Haddu in the Ugaritic myths acts more often as Anat’s mate. Due to some Deuteronomistic mentions of Asherah with Baal (Judg 3:7; Judg 6:25; 1 Kgs 18:19; 2 Kgs 23:4) biblical scholars traditionally linked Baal with Asherah. Recent scholarship (Olyan 1988:14-17; Hadley 1994:240-42; Taylor 1994) analyzes the purported alliance of Asherah with Baal in Deuteronomistic writing as fabricated because the “asherah” almost always stood in a Yahwistic shrine in Israelite religion. Scholars who have studied references to Asherah in
Yahwistic shrine in Israelite religion. Scholars who have studied references to Asherah in the Hebrew Bible agree that all come from the Deuteronomistic editor or later (Hadley 1994:237-38; Reed 1949:59-68; Pettey 1990:203-12). Scholars who doubt the purported Baal-Asherah pairing note that prophets contemporary with the Deuteronomists condemn Baal vociferously but are surprisingly silent on Asherah worship. Only four of the forty biblical mentions of Asherah occur in prophets’ writings. These prophetic passages (Jer 17:2; Is 17:8; Isa 27:9; Mic 5:13 [Eng 14]) do not couple Asherah with Baal; moreover, noted biblical scholars dispute all four occurrences and consider them to be additions or later glosses (Hadley 1994:240; Olyan 1988:14-17).

Only three of the seven verses in the Hebrew Bible that seem to refer to Asherah as a goddess rather than a symbolic stylized tree include a reference to Baal. Of these, Judg 3:7 is a summary of “other gods.” 2 Kgs 23:4 lists Baal and Asherah among deities whose cultic paraphernalia Josiah removed from the temple. The following verse lists the expelled priestly groups associated with those deities; Baal’s priests were expelled, but Asherah’s priests were not. According to Hadley (1994:241):

If Asherah was the consort of Baal, one might expect her to be mentioned in this verse, along with him. But if the Asherah was associated with the worship of Yahweh, perhaps her priests were not mentioned, because they were part of the same temple personnel as those that served the Yahweh cult.

1 Kgs 18:19 includes priests of Asherah along with priests of Baal in the encounter of Elijah with Baal supporters on Mt. Carmel. Biblical scholars explain this as a Deuteronomistic addition because there is no second mention of Asherah’s priests, while Baal’s priests appear throughout the incident. On the other hand, if Asherah’s
priests were not added as a Deuteronomistic attempt to discredit Asherah by associating her with Baal, then apparently Elijah was not opposed to the cult of the goddess. For all of these reasons it appears likely that Asherah was paired with Baal as a tactic of Deuteronomistic polemic.

The Ugaritic Pantheon—Summary

Both myth and ritual texts portray El as a patriarchal figure, father of gods and human beings; as a god of fertility he gives children and as a god of child sacrifice he demands their return. The Keret and Aqhat mythological texts associate Lady Asherah of the Sea with El as a nurturing mother goddess and as procreatress of the gods and of humans. In the Baal Cycle Asherah mediates between suppliants and the high god El. The Ugaritic texts call Baal “the victor” and “rider of the clouds.” He is a war god as well as god of the rainstorm. Anat partners with Baal in the Baal Cycle, a fertility myth. Anat and Astarte accompany Baal in Ugaritic mythology and both function as war goddesses in Egyptian texts. Some of the Ugaritic texts as well as biblical texts confuse Astarte and Asherah. The main Canaanite gods El and Baal and their consorts Athirat, Anat, and Astarte combine and interchange fertility and warrior-protector roles. Canaanite and Egyptian art and iconography express these mythological goddess roles through anthropomorphic and symbolic images. I present two of their most significant representations, which involve trees and lions, in the following sections.
Semitic Goddesses and Fertility Figurines

Asherah, Hathor, and Qudshu Plaques

Commerce between Egypt and Canaan effected the merger of the functionally similar deities Asherah and Hathor during Egyptian rule (Cross 1973:19; Hestrin 1987b:219; Hestrin 1991:55). Southern Palestine exhibits Egyptian motifs and style due to more or less direct influence by Egypt during the Late Bronze Age, and Phoenicia had close ties with Egypt since the time of the Old Kingdom, so that Palestinian art can be termed Egyptianized, either directly from Egypt or indirectly from Phoenicia (Ahlström 1984:133-34).

In Egypt the tree often represents the source of life and food. Several Egyptian paintings portray the goddess as a woman forming the trunk of a tree, offering food to people. Fig. 32 provides an example of this motif as well as a drawing with the name of the goddess on the tree in addition to over her head. An unguent box lid discovered at Minet el-Beida pictures in Mycenaean-style ivory relief a goddess taking the place of the usual tree between caprids rampant, to whom she is offering ears of corn. A plaque from Ugarit shows a female figure holding bundles of grain in either hand and animals feeding from each hand. Both Canaanite examples probably depict Asherah and indicate that the tree between caprids in comparable later iconography is a survival of this symbol of the goddess giving nourishment to the animals flanking her.
Fig. 32: Egyptian Tree Goddesses, from Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, figs. 255, 254.
Egyptian plaques and stelae from the New Kingdom, especially the Ramesside era, show Qudshu holding snakes and lotus flowers, flanked by Min, the Egyptian god of fertility and the Canaanite god Reshef who holds a spear and an ankh, the Egyptian symbol of life (Hestrin 1991:55; Edwards 1955). Figure 31 on page 243 showed one example, and another appears in Figure 35 on page 254. In Egyptian-style art, which generally depicts figures in profile, the unusual frontal position stresses her sexual role by her exposed nakedness. The goddess Qudshu wears the Hathor wig, an almost heart-shaped headdress with a prominent curl at the bottom of each side, and sometimes the Hathor crown or a naos-sistrum with crescent and sun-disk. Archaeologists consistently identify Hathor with the Canaanite goddess shown on the plaques because of their similar attributes. Egyptian paintings portray her variously as a tree or the living soul of trees, as a cow or lioness, and as a nurse of the king of Egypt.

Fifteenth to thirteenth century BCE nude goddess plaques and gold and electrum pendants including Pritchard's (1943) and Negbi's (1976) examples from Ugarit, Minet el-Beida, Akko, and Tell el-Ajjul, all on or near the coast, probably represent Asherah (J. Day 1986:389; Hestrin 1987b:214-15, 220; Hestrin 1991:55; and Pettey 1990:178, citing Schaeffer and Gray). The cut sheet gold plaques of one group show the face, breasts, and pubic region of a stylized human figure, some with a branch or stylized tree engraved above the pubic region. Piriform pendants define the head, breasts, and pubic triangle in repoussé technique, a method of making a relief decoration by pressing or hammering the reverse side. Some of these wear a Hathor hairdress and have a branch above the pubic
region (Fig. 33). In the third type a naked woman with the Hathor wig holds lotus flowers or ibexes, and in a few she stands in front of snakes or on a lion. In a rarer variation of the fertility-protective iconography combination the goddess stands in a similar pose holding two lotus flowers on a war horse on a large gold sheet in the Late Bronze Age Lachish Area P temple and in a clay model from Tell Qarnayim near Beth-shean (Mazar 1990:273; Keel and Uehlinger 1998:66-68). Negbi traces the geographical shift inland of the distribution of female fertility figurines during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages. Evidence shows that the victorious fertility goddess iconography began in the coastal areas and was transmitted inland, an indication that coastal Canaanite traditions influenced the early Israelite figurines.

Fig. 33: Gold and Electrum Pendants from Ugarit and Minet el-Beida, from Schaeffer, Les fouilles de Ras-Shamra-Ugarit (1938), fig. 49; and Ugaritica 2, fig. 10.
**Lion Lady**

One of the principal epithets of the Late Bronze Age war and fertility goddesses was “Lion Lady.” The lion, symbolizing the merged Egypto-Canaanite goddess, occurs in both textual and representational evidence (Dever 1982:39-40; Dever 1984:28-29). The twelfth century el-Khader arrowheads published by Cross and Milik (1954) read "abd labi't(u) “Servant of the Lion Lady,” which closely parallels the Amarna-period king name “Servant of Asherah.” An altar at a twelfth century temple at Jaffa contained a preserved lion skull, and a lion rhyton came from the Str. XI Philistine temple at Tell Qasile. An ivory from Megiddo pictures a Hathor-crowned sphinx. Late Bronze Age lion iconography communicates a client’s dependence on the goddess’s protective powers, and this continues to be expressed in a similar way in Iron Age Israel. In early Iron Age Tell Masos, for example, an ivory lion head rested with incense burners in House 314 and a limestone lion head lay near the House 167 room with benches and unusually plastered and decorated walls.

The terracotta cultic stands from Ta'anach exemplify Lion Lady iconography. Both exhibit lions together with the tree and ibexes motif. Lapp excavated the larger one, which is about 2 feet high and hollow (Fig. 34). Instead of the expected rounded shape produced by a potter’s wheel, the stand is square, probably to mimic a temple building. Its four levels may represent four stories of a tower or four aspects of a one-story building. The top register contains a young bull or horse with a sun-disk that symbolizes Yahweh (Ahlström 1984:130; Taylor 1993:55-61; contra Hestrin 1991). Bulls served as epithets
and thrones for the Canaanite male deities El and Baal. Although Hestrin identifies this figure with Baal, according to Ahlström (1984:130), the sun-disk, seen also between the bull's horns on a royal palace seal impression found at Ramat Rahel, a Judean royal palace between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, makes identification with the fertility god Baal impossible. Biblical texts report that Aaron and Jereboam I made bull calves to represent Yahweh at various sites including Sinai, Bethel and Dan (Exod 32:1-8; 1 Kgs 12:27-33; Hos 8:6). A. Mazar (1990:351) found a .18 m. long bronze bull at a hilltop shrine five miles east of Dothan in the biblical territory of Manasseh. It resembled one from Hazor...
that Yadin dated to a Canaanite level from one or two hundred years earlier. Taylor (1994) argues with the help of two zoological experts that both the Hazor “bull” and the animal on the first tier of the Ta'aranach stand portray horses, symbols of the Yahweh cult mentioned in 2 Kgs 23:11. The second level of the ornate stand consists of a sacred tree flanked by nibbling ibexes and two lionesses. After an empty space that represents either the door to the shrine or the properly aniconic presence of Yahweh, the bottom register depicts a nude female flanked by two standing lions. Archaeologists like Dever (1990:135) and Hestrin (1991:58) argue on the basis of parallel iconography that the tree and the woman, both accompanied by lion figures, represent the goddess Asherah.

At least thirteen examples of Egyptian sculptures feature a goddess standing on a lion. Of the reliefs that have legible inscriptions, four name the goddess Qudshu; one now in the British Museum calls her Kent, possibly a form of Anat; and one labels her Qudshu-Astarte-Anat (Edwards 1955). The Winchester College relief labeled Qudshu-Astarte-Anat appeared in Fig. 31, p. 243, and Figure 35 shows the British Museum stela [191]. A goddess wearing a Hathor wig, probably representing Asherah, stands on the back of a lion in Late Bronze Age plaques. A goddess standing on the back of a lion expresses the concept of a transcendent deity who can subdue the lion, a symbol of ferocity (Dever 1984:25). This explains the background of gods and kings sitting on thrones supported by two lions or by cherubs with lion body and feet, human head, and wings, later stylized to chairs with lion feet. Dever identifies Asherah, not usually pictured as a musician, with the lyre-player sitting on a lion throne near the Yahweh-
Fig. 35: Qudshu Standing on a Lion. British Museum 191.

Asherah inscription painted on a pithos from Kuntillet Ajrud. A similar figure in a dotted garment and shawl sits on a cherub throne on a small electrum pendant amulet from Ugarit, and several other seated or standing bare-breasted goddess figurines and amulets from Ugarit and from MB IIC Gezer wear similar attire. In addition, the coiffure of the Ajrud figure on the lion throne resembles that worn by the Israelite pillar-base figurines of the eighth to seventh century and the Phoenician style hairdo of the sacred prostitutes and sphinxes of the eighth century Samarian, Arslan Tash, and Nimrud ivories (Dever 1984:23-24). Although Beck (1982) questions whether the lyre figure sitting on the lion throne is female and represents Asherah, the drawing presents an example of the imagery of a victorious deity or royal personage who has the power to protect his or her patrons.
In Mesopotamia, in the Akkadian period the lion was a metaphor of fierce goddesses, especially Ishtar (Inana). In the Neo-Assyrian period, the lion also represented the mother goddess Damgalnuna. King Assumasirpal II of Assyria (883-859 BCE) dedicated monumental stone lions to Ishtar at the gateway of her temple in Kalhu (Nimrud), and a goddess stands on a lion on the seventh century Maltai rock panels (Black and Green 1992:118). Mesopotamian amulets often portrayed the child-stealing goddess Lamashtu with a lion’s head. Only an equally fierce or more powerful deity could defeat her machinations. The goddess who stood on a lion symbolized a war goddess or mother goddess transcendent and ferocious enough to subdue her. Lion goddess iconography leads to the conclusion that Israelite women employed the lion figurines in their houses for protective house rituals.

The Lachish Ewer and Sacred Tree Iconography

The thirteenth century inscribed Lachish ewer, a kind of pitcher with a handle, illustrates fertility cult iconography. British archaeologist James Starkey found most of the fragments in a pile of trash outside the wall of the moated Canaanite Fosse Temple at Tell ed-Duweir in 1934. One piece remained on the floor of the sanctuary, so probably a worshiper had used it there just before the building’s destruction. Figure 36 shows the ewer and a goblet with a similar motif. A row of painted animals and trees decorate what was the shoulder of the vessel. First appears a lion with its body stretched to jump followed by a male and a female deer, then a bird and two schematically drawn ibexes flanking a tree that consists of a straight vertical line crossed by three semicircular
Fig. 36: Lachish Ewer and Goblet, from O. Tufnell et al., *Lachish II*, pl. 60.
lines. Above the tree an ancient Semitic inscription reads \textit{mtn. y l(rb)y ²lt}, which Cross (1967:16) translates “Mattan. An offering to my Lady Elat.” The ewer probably held an offering to the goddess Elat, another name for Asherah.

Artists used the stylized tree between two facing animals or other figures as a religiously significant motif from the early second millennium onwards (Hestrin 1987b:215). The design occurs painted in red or in red-and-black on Late Bronze IIA and B pottery from Ta’anach, Megiddo, Lachish, and other Palestinian sites. Several decorated goblets that belonged in the Lachish Fosse Temple exhibit painted sacred trees flanked by ibexes, however on one of them (Fig. 36) the ibexes flank pubic triangles instead of trees. Red paint outlines the triangles, and black dots represent the pubic hair. Details and execution copy the Syro-Palestinian gold pendants. The interchange of tree and pubic triangle, along with the inscription to Elat, show that the tree symbolizes the fertility goddess Asherah. It follows that the pendants and plaques that show a pubic triangle superimposed with a tree also represent Asherah.

The discovery of a Late Bronze Age divine couple figurine set of the smiting god El and his consort Asherah strengthens the argument for the presence of an Asherah cult at Lachish. Excavators also found smiting god and consort figurines at Tell Nebi-Mend and Minet el-Beida. In these ca. 1300-1100 BCE examples the goddess is in Qudshu form (Negbi 1976:141). About 12 m. southeast of the Iron Age Lachish Stratum V shrine stood a tall plano-convex limestone stela near a pile of black ashes 50 cm. in diameter. Archaeologists determined that the ashes remain from a burned olive tree trunk (Aharoni
1975:29), perhaps one of the "trees planted as an asherah beside the altar of the Lord" (Deut 16:21).


One of her manifestations was the sacred tree, which could be a palm, an oak, a terebinth, or a tamarisk. In the hill country the last three species were probably the most common, and were worshipped 'on every high hill.' (1 Kings 14:23)

1 Kgs 14:23 says that Judah under the reign of Solomon's son Reheboam "erected shrines, sacred pillars, and 'asherahs' on every high hill and under every spreading tree."

The fact that Israelites erected "asherahs" under trees signals a distinction between the two, although both of them symbolized the goddess. Lemaire refers to the tamarisk Abraham planted at Beer-sheba (Gen 21:33), the oak or terebinth in the Shechem sanctuary (Josh 24:26) and the Deuteronomistic injunction: "You shall not plant any tree as an Asherah beside the altar of the Lord" (Deut 16:21). The palm tree represents Asherah on seals (Keel and Uehlinger 1998).

The iconography of the Late Bronze Age Lachish ewer and goblet equates the tree with a pubic triangle fertility symbol. In addition, Mattan presented the ewer that pictured the tree bordered by rampant caprids as an offering to the goddess Elat, an epithet for Asherah in the Ugaritic texts. An Ugaritic relief shows a goddess in the same position feeding rampant caprids beside her. All of these examples from archaeology demonstrate that a sacred tree, either living or stylized, represented Asherah, and Canaanites
worshiped her in this form. The burned tree trunk at Iron Age Lachish continues this
tradition in Israelite times.

The Khirbet el-Kom and Kuntillet ‘Ajrud Inscriptions

Whereas the Lachish ewer dates to the late thirteenth century, ca. 1220 BCE when
the Israelites were emerging as a people in the land of Canaan, and the Ta’sanach cult
stands belong to the tenth century, the time of the united Israelite monarchy,
arheological evidence for the cult of Asherah in the time of the divided monarchy
comes from the inscriptions of ninth or eighth century Kuntillet ‘Ajrud and eighth century
Khirbet el-Kom. One inscription from the wall of a typical Judean chambered bench tomb
at Khirbet el-Kom and three on large pithoi at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud appeal to “Yahweh and his
Asherah” for blessing and protection. Their authors wrote them near apotropaic symbols,
which underline the need for protection in those environments.

Khirbet el-Kom is located just within the northern border of a triangle formed by
three important Iron Age sites: Lachish, Hebron, and Tell Beit Mirsim in the southern
Judean foothills near the border of the Shephelah where the soft chalky limestone cliffs
make rock-cut tombs convenient (Fig. 37). Khirbet el-Kom occupies a strategic,
defensible position in the buffer zone between the Philistine plain and the Judean hills;
one mile to the north runs the Wadi Lachish, which would have been the ancient road
between Lachish and Hebron. The town may have served as the secondary inner-defense
fort to Lachish. The Hebrew name qom means “mound” or “heap.” Dorsey (1980:192)
Fig. 37: Map of Khirbet el-Kom and Kuntillet 'Ajrud, adapted from Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, fig. 9.1.
matches it with biblical Makkedah, a region of caves suitable for hiding and burial (Joshua 10) located in the Lachish administrative district (Josh 15:41).

The tombs at Khirbet el-Kom conform to typical Judean eighth to sixth century BCE flat-ceilinged benched chamber tombs (Dever 1970:150; Mazar 1992:521; Bloch-Smith 1992:42, 51). Israelites probably made tombs to resemble houses because they believed in the afterlife (Mazar 1992:521; Bloch-Smith 1992:43). According to Bloch-Smith (1992:105), “Bowls, jars, and jugs were ubiquitously provided, in all burial types throughout the Iron Age, demonstrating the perception that the dead required continued sustenance.” Archaeologists found beads, faience amulets, especially Bes pendants and “Eye-of-Horus” plaques, female pillar-base figurines, zoomorphic vessels and horse and rider figurines, alabaster vessels, and cosmetic palettes in the Khirbet el-Kom tombs. The author of El-Kom Inscription 3 inscribed it on a pillar between two chambers in the butterfly-shaped Tomb II and carved an upside-down hand, about the size of a human hand, into the rock between the upper and lower parts of it (Fig. 38). The right hand with the palm facing outwards from the rock protects the chamber as an amulet with apotropaic force (Hadley 1987a:61-62; Dever 1970:169).

Naveh (1979:27-28) suggests that most ancient graffiti followed the set prayer formula: remembered be/ peace to/ or blessed be (personal name) before (deity name). A man hiding in the tomb who wished to be guarded and delivered from his enemies composed this particular inscription, or someone wrote it as a prayer of thanksgiving and protection for a deceased Uryahu. Someone retraced some of the letters, probably with a fingernail, next to or partly on top of the original writing. The retracing may indicate a
Lemaire (1977:603), who dates Inscription 3 paleographically to the middle of the eighth century, provides the following transcription:

Uryahu the wealthy man had it written:
Blessed be Uryahu by Yahweh
and by his asherah; from his enemies he saved him!
(written) by Onyahu
...and by his asherah
...(and by) his (ashe)ר(ah)

Lemaire, Hadley, and others interpret the word “asherah” to mean a sacred symbol associated with Yahwistic shrines. Naveh, Zevit, and Dever (1984) translate the word to mean the goddess consort of Yahweh.
The caravanserai Kuntillet ‘Ajrud perched on the western plateau of a steep natural hill in the desert about 40 mi. south of Kadesh-Barnea (Fig. 37). Shallow springs at the foot of the hill would have provided a necessary oasis in ancient times. Old maps indicate that Kuntillet ‘Ajrud sat near the junction of three ancient trade routes: the main east-west trans-Sinai route through the Wadi Quraiya; a branch south through Temed to central and southern Sinai; and the Darb-El-Gazza, which runs south from Gaza and Raphiah on the coastal plain through Kadesh-Barnea south to Elat. The two ninth to eighth century hilltop buildings feature white-plastered entrance rooms decorated with black, red, and yellow paintings and Phoenician inscriptions. Prominent offering-type benches, repositories, inscribed stone bowls, and two pithoi painted with drawings, Hebrew inscriptions, and graffiti suggest that the site had religious significance (Meshel 1978a-b, 1979). Its art work imitates Syro-Phoenician and desert traditions; the stratigraphy and techniques of the pithoi drawings and inscriptions indicate that they were done by several craftsmen at different times (Beck 1982).

The two decorated pithoi Meshel restored from sherds in or near the bench-room boast red-ink drawings as well as the Hebrew inscriptions. Motifs on Pithos A that occupy the shoulder area and the space between the handles on both sides, beginning at the top and moving downwards, include a horse, a boar, a lion, the hindquarters of an animal, a tree and ibexes, and a lion. Artists drew a chariot horse, an ibex and garland, two Bes figures and a lyre player, and a cow and calf on the reverse side. Less skillfully executed drawings below the shoulder and near the base of Pithos B include an ibex, an archer, a lion’s tail, a cow, a procession of worshippers, and a bull. As on the Ta‘anach
cult stand, the horses probably represent El/Yahweh. The bull on pithos A represents either Yahweh or Baal; the ‘Ajrud inscriptions name both. The cow drawings on Pithoi A and B attempt to reproduce a cow and calf motif derived from Egyptian Old Kingdom artistic tradition that was popular on Syrian and Anatolian cylinder seals and Phoenician ivory plaques. This motif originally symbolized the suckling goddess and may retain some fertility symbolism (Beck 1982:11; Mallowan 1966:526-7, 570; Barnett 1975:143-45; Dever 1984:27). Figure 39 shows the Pithos A cow and calf drawing.

![Cow and Calf from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud Pithos A](image)

**Fig. 39: Cow and Calf from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud Pithos A,** from P. Beck, “The Drawings from Horvat Teiman (Kuntillet ‘Ajrud),” fig. 5.

A pointed leaf or bud tops the tree between ibexes; its stems end in lotus flowers, and lotus buds sprout from the tree trunk. Many details like the capital with volutes and the combination of lotus flower and bud relate the ‘Ajrud tree to Phoenician sacred trees known from ivories and reliefs and to Cypriot trees painted on vases (Beck 1982:15; Barnett 1975). The sacred tree between two ibexes over a lion represents Asherah in a
form reminiscent of Qudshu plaques and reliefs in which the goddess offers grain to two animals feeding from her hands. A lion figure stands just below the tree and ibex drawing. The forepart of a lioness posed for attack also appears on Pithos A. Lions similarly accompanied tree and ibex scenes on an enameled brick of the Neo-Elamite period at eighth to seventh century Susa and on the Ta‘anach cult stand (Beck 1982:17-18). The motif of guarding lions is well-known in the Levant (Mazar 992:266), and I have shown its relation to Asherah as a victorious protective deity. Figure 40 depicts the sacred tree between the ibexes with the lion just below it. The cow suckling a calf, the sacred tree between ibexes, and the lions all signify the goddess Asherah.

Fig. 40: Kuntillet 'Ajrud Sacred Tree, Caprids, and Lion, from P. Beck, "The Drawings from Horvat Teiman (Kuntillet 'Ajrud)," fig. 4.
Red drawings of two Bes figures and a lyre player appear on pithos A. The lyre figure sits above the level of the Bes figures, facing right on a low-backed chair with animal paw feet. As explained already in connection with “Lion Lady” motifs, Dever (1984:30) identifies the “Asherah” of the Pithos A inscription with the lyre player on the basis of the figure’s garments and coiffure, the lyre, and the chair. Whereas the left headdress typified Egyptian Bes, the right one resembles his form on faience amulets and later cylinder seals (Beck 1982:31; Hadley 1987b:191). The breast nipples drawn as small P-shaped appendages on the collar bone of the right-hand Bes do not indicate that the figure is female because artists often draw breast nipples on the male Bes (Beck 1982:29). Beck prefers to credit the dots on the Bes, lyre figure, and other anthropomorphic figures to Midianite design traditions, however she mentions that dots appear on Bes figures in two Egyptian Bes pictures. The dots on Bes probably stand for degenerated Horus eyes that emphasize his apotropaic function (Hadley 1987b:193-95) since Bes’s primary function was apotropaic, and dots usually symbolize protecting divine eyes. I discuss Egyptian apotropaic eye motifs more completely in Chapter Five: Amulets, Evil Eye, and Child-Stealing Demons. The general tenor of the drawings and inscriptions is apotropaic, which may explain why the dots cover other figures as well. The dots on the various drawings seem to be added imprecisely by a later person (Beck 1982:40). The site’s residents placed the pithoi near the entrance, where the Bes figures could guard it (Hadley 1987b:207-208). Figure 41 shows a drawing of the Bes and lyre figures.
Fig. 41: Kuntillet 'Ajrud Pithos A Inscription and Drawings, from Meshol, *Kuntillet 'Ajrud*, p. 12.
On Pithos B five humans face left with their arms raised. Although of entirely different style than the ʿAjrud scene, people processing with outstretched arms portray adoration, supplication, or mourning in Egyptian art and bear offerings on one Nimrud ivory (Beck 1982:40). Dever (1984:29) notes that processional scenes such as the one on a Megiddo ivory are “most common in ancient Near Eastern art and always portray presentations to kings or deities.” This scene helps confirm the thesis that Kuntillet ʿAjrud had a religious function of some kind.

Several different individuals wrote the Kuntillet ʿAjrud inscriptions in various scripts; most seem to be praises, requests, prayers, or blessings (Meshel 1978a:53; Meshel 1978b:np). In his compilation of ancient Hebrew inscriptions, G. Davies (1991:78-82) dates these to the first half of the eighth century. Most personal names at ʿAjrud end with the theophoric element ｙｗ (yo or yau), the form of Yahweh northern Israelite names used between the mid-ninth and mid-eighth century BCE, so the people who prayed at this caravanserai probably came from Israel rather than from Judah.

Three Yahweh-Asherah inscriptions occur on the two large pithoi densely painted with graffiti, apotropaic and deity symbols, abecedaries, and votive inscriptions. On Pithos A a long blessing inscription runs along the shoulder of the jar; the last words overlap the large Bes figure. On Pithos B three abecedaries and several isolated words appear above and beside Inscription 2; Inscription 3 overlaps the first two lines of Inscription 2 on the shoulder of the pithos. According to Naveh (1979:30), the abecedaries may comprise copying exercises or they may present a magical connotation.
(Naveh 1979:30). Hadley’s (1987a) transcription of the three blessing inscriptions reads as follows:

Inscription 1 (Pithos A):
X says: say to Yehal[lePel] and to Yo‘asah and [to Z]:
I bless you by YHWH of Samaria and by his asherah.

Inscription 2 (Pithos B):
Amaryau says: say to my lord: Is it well with you? I
bless you by YHWH of Teman and by his asherah.
May he bless you and keep you and be with my lord…

Inscription 3 (Pithos B):
Whatever he asks from a man, may it be favored[
and let Yahweh give unto him as he wishes (according to his heart)

Keel and Uehlinger (1998:227) add the following fragment at the beginning of
Inscription 3: “by Yahweh of Teman and his Asherah.” Although Cross and Naveh date
the inscriptions to the end of the ninth century, Lemaire (1984b:135-36) puts them in the
first three quarters of the eighth century. McCarter (1987:138) postulates a date of 800
BCE during the reign of Jehoash of Israel when Judah was under Israelite control.

These inscriptions imitate a greeting formula senders included in the salutations of
letters, in which the standard address formula naming the sender and addressee precedes a
question about the person’s welfare and a blessing (Naveh 1979:29; Chase 1982:65;

Weinfeld (1984:124-25) compares the last part of Inscription 2,

May he (YHWH) bless you and keep you
and be with my lord—
to Gen 28:15: "I will be with you and keep you wherever you go." Hadley (1987b:187) sees a closer parallel to Num 6:24: "May the Lord bless you and keep you." In Num 6:24 as in the 'Ajrud blessing, the speaker is telling a second person to bless a third party (Yahweh—Moses and priests—Israelites, Amaryau—Yahweh—my lord). Barkay and Hadley found two seventh century silver amulets in the Ketef Hinnom cave near Jerusalem with inscriptions almost identical to Num 6:24-26. The Numbers passage has *ybrkk*, and the eighth century 'Ajrud Inscription 2 and the Jerusalem amulets have *ybrk*.

Near Eastern blessing formulas usually name the deity that the individual has contracted with to be his or her personal god or goddess. For example, in ancient Mesopotamia a writer began a letter by saying something like: "Thus says B: May god C and god D keep you in good health." Generally the writer mentioned the national or universal god first, then the personal god of the recipient (van der Toom 1996:68-70). An Edomite potsherd from Horvat Uza, a Phoenician letter from Saqqara, an Ammonite potsherd from Tell el-Mazar in Transjordan, a Phoenician jar inscription from Sarepta, as well as many Greco-Roman period Jewish inscriptions all request help for someone in the name of a deity obligated to the writer or recipient. For example, the Phoenician inscription from Saqqara says, "Say to my sister *RST: Your sister *BS* says:...I Bless you by Saphon and by all the gods of Tahpanhes." In a combination similar to the Kuntillet 'Ajrud blessing, a fragment of abecedary accompanies the Sarepta inscription. The same formula that opens letters is used when individuals dedicate a gift to a god on behalf of a relative or friend (Naveh 1979:29).
Ancient Near Eastern incantations and prayers for protection from demons also name the head or national god and his associates. For example, the Babylonian incantations against Lamashtu found at Ugarit name the protecting divine pairs:

I expel you, O daughter of Anu, by
Anu and Antu
Enlil and Ninlil
Ea and Damgalnunna,
Marduk and Šarpanitu
the moon-god and Amazakanuda,
the Lady of the gods, the supreme lady...(Nougayrol 1969:397)

An inscription from northern Syria against child-stealing night demons names Baal-and his wives (Cross and Saley 1970; T. Gaster 1947). Greco-Roman period and later Jewish and Christian incantations against Lilith name a form of Yahweh (Yahu, Iao, or Shaddai) and one or more mythologized biblical characters such as Solomon, Michael or the Virgin Mary as Yahweh's agent-protectors (Goodenough 1953; T. Gaster 1947, 1980; Montgomery 1910, 1913). In other words, the Kuntillet Ajrud blessing inscription that names Yahweh and Asherah falls in the ancient Near Eastern tradition of naming the national god along with the client's personal god or agent-protector.

Parts of two red wall inscriptions remained near the entrance to the west storeroom; the drawing of a human head accompanied one of them. Inhabitants of the oasis also wrote three inscriptions in black ink in Phoenician script on the plaster doorjamb and wall of the Kuntillet 'Ajrud bench-room. The doorway inscriptions seem to be requests, blessings, or prayers. Meshel (1978) emphasizes the parallel between the prayers written on the Kuntillet Ajrud doorjambs and the biblical injunction to write
God’s words on doorposts and gates. Epigraphers encountered difficulty in deciphering the fragmentary bench-room wall inscriptions. The *in situ* inscription is “almost completely illegible,” but a fragment fallen beneath it contains part of an ancient theophanic poem reminiscent of Deut 33:2. It describes the revelation of God in a similar way to biblical poetry, but presents El and Baal in parallel (Meshel 1994:100; Weinfeld 1984:126):

-And when El rose up-
  and hills melted and peaks were pounded-
  bless BAAL in the day of war-
  (bless) the name of EL in the day of war-

This wall inscription shows that the people who built the shrine revered El and Baal and believed that they would protect them in war.

Fragmentary lines from a second wall inscription bless someone and promise that they will be rich and Yahweh will do them good. As a result they will give offerings to Asherah:

Line 1: blessed (or long) be their day and they shall be rich
Line 2: Yahweh will do good
Line ?: they will give to his Asherah...
(Davies 1991:80.8015; Keel and Uehlinger 1998:244)

The extant fragments of this second wall inscription indicate that when Yahweh enriches a person that individual will give a gift to Asherah to repay the favor. This exemplifies a working partnership similar to the Canaanite El-Athirat roles in the Keret Epic. In that story Keret asks El for a new wife who will provide him offspring. Keret promises to pay Asherah double his wife’s weight in silver and triple her weight in gold if his mission is
successful. This wall inscription also shows that Israelites gave votive offerings to Asherah.

In summary, several eighth century BCE Israelites inscribed prayers for blessing and protection on plaster, stone, and pottery in a Khirbet el-Kom tomb and the Kuntillet ʿAjrud caravanserai-shrine. The inscriptions confirm some aspects of Israelite religion the biblical text mentions, such as prayers of dependence on Yahweh and Asherah for protection, veneration of Baal, and local hilltop shrines. The animal fertility motifs at Kuntillet ʿAjrud attest to its use as a caravanserai by herdsmen. But the apotropaic symbolism is equally striking. The herdsmen as well as the trading and military expeditions who painted its doorways and furnishings were seeking protection on the roads to and from the oasis and within its walls. I have already discussed the alliance of fertility and protective powers in the Egyptian, Ugaritic and Israelite conceptions of deity. One symbol that most clearly exemplifies this alliance is the stylized sacred tree. The Khirbet el-Kom and Kuntillet ʿAjrud inscriptions that link Asherah with Yahweh as a source of blessing and protection have sparked a debate over the iconography of stylized sacred trees. The next section treats the main point of discussion—whether the Israelite “asherah” tree symbolizes the personal goddess Asherah or whether it is a depersonalized sign of prosperity.
The Nurturing and Apotropaic Power of Asherah Trees

Several scholars dispute the personality of Asherah on the basis of biblical and other ancient texts. Hebrew scholars who have studied the Kuntillet Ḥjrud and Khirbet el-Kom inscriptions point out the grammatical difficulty with interpreting the word ṣrth as the name of a goddess, since there are no examples in Hebrew of a proper name being possessed (Lemaire 1984a, Emerton 1982, Keel and Uehlinger 1998, Hadley 1994).

According to Mark Smith, ṣrth "his asherah" refers to the symbol originally named after the goddess, but during the eighth century it probably no longer symbolized the goddess because as early as the period of the Judges the symbol had "outlived the cult of the goddess who gave her name to it and continued to hold a place in the cult of Yahweh" (Smith 1990:16, 94). Keel and Uehlinger argue similarly that after Iron I goddess symbols no longer represent the goddess—both the head on the Hazor VI ointment spoon (Fig. 42, p. 277) and the stylistic tree-over-lion on Kuntillet Ḥjrud Pithos A connect the tree with the goddess as a natural source of blessing for individuals rather than as a personal entity. They claim that the goddess is not personal because these occurrences of the sacred tree depict the palm tree as a source of usable agricultural products—perfume and actual food for animals to eat—rather than standing for a personal entity.

Neither the biblical text nor material archaeology support this notion. Of the forty occurrences of the word "asherah" in the Hebrew Bible, most refer to a carved wooden object; however, in at least five instances the word seems to refer to the goddess Asherah. Some of the strongest support for the personality of Asherah as a goddess in the Bible
comes precisely from reports about the period of the Judges (see, for example, Judg 3:7; 1
Sam 7:3; 1 Sam 12:10), and attestations to the worship of a goddess or goddesses referred
to with the singular or plural appellations Asherah/Asheroth or Ashtoreth/Ashtaroth
continue throughout the united and divided monarchy. For example, we are told that
Solomon built a temple for Ashtoreth, goddess of the Sidonians (1 Kgs 11:5), Asa
removed the queen mother Maacah from her position for making some cultic object for
the worship of Asherah (1 Kgs 15:13), and the household of Jezebel supported four
hundred prophets of Asherah (1 Kgs 18:19). Ahab set up an image of Asherah at Samaria
(1 Kgs 16:33) which was still there when Jehoahaz son of Jehu was king (2 Kgs 13:6).
Manasseh king of Judah likewise placed an image of Asherah in the Jerusalem temple (2
Kgs 21:7), and dedicated women wove fabrics there in honor of her until Josiah’s reform
removed her image (2 Kgs 23:6-7). Moreover, while these biblical texts warrant
recognizing Asherah as a personal goddess worshiped throughout the centuries in Israel,
the more numerous texts that refer to “asherah” as a cult object also call for this
interpretation because of the close association between a deity and the symbol of that
deity in the ancient Near East.

On the basis of this close relationship between the symbol and the deity in Near
Eastern religions, Olyan (1988) argues for the importance of the data from Kuntillet
‘Ajrud as evidence of a continuing Israelite fertility religion. He cites archaeological
examples of bull iconography such as the bull statue at the clearly Israelite “Bull Site” to
illustrate the equation of the symbol with the god it represents. Since naming the cult
symbol of the deity is synonymous with naming the deity herself, the “asherah” named
alongside Yahweh in the Kuntillet ʿAjrud blessing cannot be separated from the goddess. Ackerman (1992:66) agrees that to associate Yahweh with Asherah’s cult object or with some hypostatized female aspect of Yahweh is to associate Yahweh with Asherah. Winter (1983:555) also stresses the tradition-historical principle that goddess and cult object cannot be separated. A suppliant crafts a cult object or a deity image for the express purpose of invoking the presence of the divine patron represented and for sustaining a votive relationship by reminding the deity and the suppliant of the contract they have established. Because of this principle the “asherah” cult symbol mentioned in the several Yahweh-Asherah blessings at Khirbet el-Kom and Kuntillet ʿAjrud and repeated so many times in the biblical texts refers to a personal goddess.

Over and above the testimony that these texts afford to a Hebrew goddess behind the symbol, material archaeology demonstrates that goddesses did not disappear from Israelite religion by being absorbed by a putative radical integration of divine powers into an all-powerful male deity. Examples of obvious goddess iconography from the ninth and eighth and later centuries such as the goddess head over the tree trunk on the Hazor incense spoon and the ivory “woman at the window” plaque from eighth century Samaria (Fig. 42) as well as the ubiquitous female figurines contradict the claim that as early as Iron I (the twelfth and eleventh centuries BCE) goddess symbols like the stylized sacred tree ceased to represent the goddess. The Israelites who made and revered the figurines clearly associated their blatant female character—in particular the pillar figurines’ distended breasts—with a goddess rather than with Yahweh himself.
Fig. 42: Hazor Incense Spoon and Lady at the Window from Samaria, from Yadin, *Hazor II*, plate 168, and Crowfoot and Crowfoot, *Early Ivories from Samaria* (1938), plate 13.
Keel and Uehlinger’s assertion that the stylized sacred tree in Israelite iconography was a sexually undifferentiated symbol of power appropriated by the male royal god is based on seals which show men worshiping a tree. For example, a scaraboid from late eighth century Tell en-Nasbeh and the iconographic side of a Judean seal of \textit{hlqw bn pdy} in which the palmlike tree is flanked by two human worshipers (Fig. 43) depict the tree as a symbol of the greatness of the divine or royal throne of the central political system of Iron Age IIIB–C in Israel and Judah (Keel and Uehlinger 1998:235-36).

Fig. 43: Tell en-Nasbeh Scaraboid and Judean \textit{hlqw bn pdy} Seal, from McCown, \textit{Tell en-Nasbeh}, plate 55, and Keel and Uehlinger, \textit{Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God}, fig. 233b.
There is no contradiction in the idea of men worshiping a sacred tree as a symbol of a goddess. This is attested in Egypt and also in the Hebrew Bible. The “asherah” was an integral part of Yahwistic “high places” and apparently men were involved in the Asherah cult in the Jerusalem temple because we are told that Josiah “pulled down the quarters of the qedešim attached to the house of the Lord, where the women wove vestments in honor of Asherah” (2 Kgs 23:7). Several of the Ramesside Egyptian kings claimed Canaanite goddesses as their protective patron deities and appeared with them in paintings in the form of children being suckled by goddesses or trees (Fig. 44). These examples of men worshiping goddesses demonstrate that men worshiping a tree on a seal do not require that the tree symbolize a masculine god.

Fig. 44: Tree Goddess Suckling Pharaoh Tuthmosis III, from Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, fig. 253.
On the other hand, Keel and Uehlinger’s idea that the stylized tree represents power rather than fertility is germane to the discussion of Israelite women’s protection of their infants from child-stealing demons. According to these glyptic specialists, the elaborate interweavings of palm and lotus trees on the Gezer šbnyhw seal and the sacred tree watched and protected by two winged sphinxes with falcon heads on the middle register of two eighth century amuletic seals from Megiddo (Fig. 45) symbolize the “garden of God,” specifically the temple and palace area, but more abstractly the ordered life made possible in an ordered earthly cosmos. According to Keel and Uehlinger, Israelites integrated the tree into the service of the royal God, who took on the formerly female functions of nurture and transmission of life.

Fig. 45: Sacred Tree Seals from Gezer and Megiddo, from Keel and Uehlinger, Gods, Goddesses and Images of God, figs. 230 and 231a-b.

The transmission of life was never, in fact, limited to goddesses as opposed to gods in the ancient Near East. And the ordered life made possible in an ordered earthly cosmos was provided by goddesses like Hathor as well as by gods in Egypt. When cataloging the Nimrud ivories, Barnett (1975:88-89) determined that the history of the horned animal and tree motif in Mesopotamian art shows that the stylistic tree may
symbolize either the male fertility deity Tammuz or fertility which in a secondary way has acquired apotropaic power. An apotropaic sign deflects evil in order to protect a person from harm. The history of sacred tree symbolism in Egyptian and Levantine iconography connects it with goddesses rather than with gods, but the same dual function of the symbol holds true. On Egyptian paintings goddesses form the trunks of trees to feed both men and women, and in this guise they provide grain for humanity and also represent the divine power and authority afforded the king to be a victorious ruler. In both fertility and apotropaic functions the sacred tree in Egyptian, Ugaritic, and Israelite iconography symbolizes a personal goddess as the source.
Reproduction, Sustenance, and Protection

The skeletal analysis of human remains from archaeological excavations in the eastern Mediterranean region confirms biblical clues to Israelites' preoccupation with fertility, infant mortality, and short female life span. The difficult subsistence environment of the Israelite hill country, with its total dependence on large labor force and rainfall—often unreliable because of famine cycles—for successful agriculture, forms the background of the fertility aspects of the Canaanite and Israelite religions. One of the most crucial problems that confronted early Israelites was small household size in the face of increased labor needs. There were strong pressures on women to reproduce. Due to plagues and military conquests, the Iron Age began with as much as a four-fifths reduction in population in the eastern Mediterranean region. Adult female longevity, along with infant mortality, presented a major obstruction to fertility. The average woman died at age thirty. Study results show very high infant mortality; of the average 4.1 births for each female, only 1.9 survived. Data from the excavation of Roman Age Meiron indicate that 50% of individuals died before age 18, and 70% of those occurred within the first five years of life; that 35 percent of the population died before age 5 confirms to general osteological statistics from Palestinian burials.

At one time it was popular for Near Eastern textual scholars to call the Canaanite and early Israelite religions "fertility cults" and to teach that they eventually evolved into a later stage of "ethical monotheism." Some archaeologists and biblical scholars separated Canaanite from Israelite; they interpreted the Ugaritic mythology and biblical
prophetic metaphors as representative of Canaanite *hieros gamos* and agricultural fertility rituals in which altars and images played a key role. Some modern critics deny that the myths reflected real ritual and claim instead that biblical accusations of cultic prostitution were general metaphors for activities unacceptable to the Deuteronomistic school. However, texts and artifacts indicate a definite concern for agricultural fertility and human procreation in the ancient Near East.

If we take as a given the principle that group survival depends on its members' involvement in the three areas of reproduction, production of subsistence goods, and defense, it follows that a group's religious system requires the participation of their deities in these same three areas. Egypto-Canaanite texts and iconography show both gods and goddesses as sources of fertility as well as participants in the defense of societies and individuals through their politico-military and protective powers. The Ugaritic mythical texts depict El as the giver of children and Baal as the source of rain for agricultural fertility. Texts articulate less clearly the role of the Canaanite goddesses, but amuletic pendants, paintings, stelae, and plaques delineate pictorially their reproductive, nurturing, and protective powers for animals and humans. While not entirely parallel because some Canaanite male figurines were found, this textual-iconographic mix parallels Israelite cultic remains: textual evidence emphasizes the male deity both as the source of defense and fertility, whereas the female powers of reproduction, sustenance, and protection are reflected mainly in the iconography. The prominence of male over female deities in texts without doubt stems from male authorship.
Both myth and ritual texts portray El as a patriarchal figure, father of gods and human beings. As a god of fertility he gives children and as a god of child sacrifice he demands their return. The Keret and Aqhat mythological texts associate Lady Asherah of the Sea with El as a nurturing mother goddess and as procreatrix of the gods and of humans. In the Baal Cycle Asherah mediates between suppliants and the high god El. The Ugaritic texts call Baal “the victor” and “rider in the clouds.” He is a war god as well as god of the rainstorm. Anat partners with Baal in the Baal Cycle, a fertility myth. Anat and Astarte accompany Baal in Ugaritic mythology and both function as war goddesses in Egyptian texts. Canaanite and Egyptian art and iconography express these mythological goddess roles through anthropomorphic and symbolic images. Two of their most significant representations involve trees and lions.

The controversy over the role of the goddess Anat epitomizes the debate on fertility. Whereas some interpreters understand Anat in the Ugaritic texts as a fertility goddess sexually involved with Baal or El, others claim there is no clear unambiguous support for her sexuality and procreative power. Male scholars’ tendency to assign one-word epithets like “storm” god to Baal and “high” god to El, but to reserve “fertility” for the goddesses reflects an unconscious effort to downplay their more visible feminine powers by generalizing all women into less threatening fertility or motherhood roles. The main Canaanite gods El and Baal and their consorts Asherah, Anat, and Astarte combine and interchange fertility and warrior-protector roles.

Ugaritic and Israelite evidence demonstrates that Levantine people oriented religious rituals involving prayers and offerings, sometimes through empowered images,
to El and Asherah for the birth of children, to Baal for rain and agricultural productivity, and to Asherah for the sustenance of livestock and newborn infants. Ancient Near Eastern gods and goddesses also defended the royal dynasty of the state as well as the individual. In biblical texts Yahweh assumes this responsibility, although royal patronage of Baal and Asherah in passages such as 1 Kgs 18:19 and 2 Kgs 21:3, 7 hints that these deities functioned in this role as well. One of the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscriptions and various biblical texts indicate that Asherah received sacrifices as a deity from Israelites.

Some of the Ugaritic texts as well as biblical texts confuse Astarte and Asherah. Due to some Deuteronomistic mentions of Astarte and Asherah with Baal, biblical scholars traditionally link Asherah with Baal, who as Baal Haddu in the Ugaritic myths acts more often as Anat’s mate. Recent scholarship analyzes the purported alliance of Asherah with Baal in Deuteronomistic writing as fabricated because the “asherah” almost always stood in a Yahwistic shrine in Israelite religion. Scholars who study references to Asherah in the Bible agree that all come from the Deuteronomistic editor or later. For these reasons it appears likely that Deuteronomistic polemic paired Asherah with Baal.

Parallel phrases that identify the gods as “sons of Athirat” and “sons of Qudshu” seem to confirm that Qudshu was one of Asherah’s names on the Ugaritic tablets. The Egyptian relief labeled “Qudshu-Astarte-Anat” which shows a nude goddess standing on a lion makes the equivalence of Asherah and Qudshu significant. The label indicates a fusion of the major Canaanite goddesses and provides a key to a series of iconographic identifications. The variable pairings of the gods and goddesses in the Ras Shamra texts and certain conflate terms suggest an early mingling of the Canaanite goddesses.
Commerce between Egypt and Canaan effected the merger of the functionally similar deities Asherah and Hathor during Egyptian rule. Southern Palestine exhibits Egyptian motifs and style due to more or less direct influence by Egypt during the Late Bronze Age, and Phoenicia had close ties with Egypt since the time of the Old Kingdom, so that Palestinian art can be termed Egyptianized either directly from Egypt or indirectly from Phoenicia. Egyptian plaques and stelae from the New Kingdom, especially the Ramesside era, show Qudshu holding snakes and lotus flowers. The goddess Qudshu wears the Hathor wig, an almost heart-shaped headdress with a prominent curl at the bottom of each side, and sometimes the Hathor crown. Archaeologists consistently identify Hathor with the Canaanite goddess shown on the plaques because of their similar attributes. Egyptian paintings portray her variously as a tree or the living soul of trees, as a cow or lioness, and as a nurse of the king of Egypt. Negbi shows that victorious fertility goddess iconography began in the coastal areas and was transmitted inland, an indication that coastal Canaanite traditions influenced the early Israelite figurines.

One of the principal epithets of the Late Bronze Age war and fertility goddesses was “Lion Lady.” The lion symbolizes the merged Egypto-Canaanite goddess in both textual and representational evidence. The larger terracotta cultic stand from Ta'anach exhibits the Lion Lady together with her lions and tree and ibex motifs. A goddess standing on the back of a lion expresses the concept of a transcendent deity who can subdue the lion, a symbol of ferocity. Mesopotamian amulets frequently portrayed the child-stealing goddess Lamashtu with a lion’s head. Only an equally fierce or more powerful deity could defeat her machinations. The goddess who stood on a lion
symbolized a war goddess or mother goddess transcendent and ferocious enough to subdue her. Lion goddess iconography leads to the conclusion that Israelite women employed the lion figurines in their houses for protective house rituals.

In Egypt the tree often represented the source of life and food. Several Egyptian paintings portray the goddess as a woman forming the trunk of a tree, offering food to people. The iconography of the Late Bronze Age Lachish ewer and goblet equates the tree with a pubic triangle fertility symbol. In addition, Mattan presented the ewer that pictured the tree bordered by rampant caprids as an offering to the goddess Elat, an epithet for Asherah in the Ugaritic texts. A relief from Ras Shamra shows a goddess in the same position feeding rampant caprids beside her. These examples from archaeology demonstrate that a living or stylized sacred tree represented Asherah, and Canaanites worshiped her in this form. The burned tree at Iron Age Lachish continued this tradition in Israelite times. Whereas the Lachish ewer dates to the late thirteenth century BCE when the Israelites were emerging as a people in Canaan, and the Ta'anach cult stands belong to the tenth century united Israelite monarchy, archaeological evidence for the cult of Asherah during the divided monarchy comes from ninth or eighth century Kuntillet 'Ajrud and eighth century Khirbet el-Kom.

One inscription from the wall of a typical Judean chambered bench tomb at Khirbet el-Kom and three on large pithoi at Kuntillet 'Ajrud appeal to “Yahweh and his Asherah” for blessing and protection. Their authors wrote them near apotropaic symbols, which underline the need for protection in those environments. Several different individuals wrote the Kuntillet 'Ajrud blessing inscriptions in various scripts. Additional
prayer inscriptions that inhabitants of the oasis wrote on the plaster doorjambs parallel the biblical injunction to write God’s words on doorposts and gates. The extant fragments of one wall inscription indicate that when Yahweh enriches a person that individual will give a gift to Asherah to repay the favor. This exemplifies a working partnership similar to the Canaanite El-Asherah roles in the Keret Epic in which Keret asks El for a new wife who will provide him offspring and promises to pay Asherah double his wife’s weight in silver and triple her weight in gold if his mission is successful. The Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscriptions show that Israelites presented votive offerings to Asherah as Yahweh’s intermediary.

Smith (1990) argued that during the time of the judges, Israelites related El, Baal, and Asherah to the cult of Yahweh and did not worship them separately, so that by the tenth century they had combined the Northwest Semitic imagery for El, Baal, and Asherah and attributed it all to Yahweh. It seems that Yahweh indeed incorporated many aspects of the Canaanite gods El and Baal. However, Israelite religion in fact included a goddess. Rather than attributing goddess imagery to Yahweh, the Israelites conflated and attributed Northwest Semitic and Egyptian imagery for several goddesses to Asherah, whom they worshiped together with Yahweh. Although Asherah was an Israelite goddess, she was not worshiped separately. She functioned as an intermediary bringing people’s petitions to Yahweh, then served as Yahweh’s instrument for blessing and protection of individuals.

A supplicant crafts a cult object or a deity image for the express purpose of invoking the presence of the divine patron and for sustaining a votive relationship by
reminding the deity and the supplicant of the contract they have established. Because of this principle the “asherah” cult symbol mentioned in the several Yahweh-Asherah Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Kom blessings and repeated so many times in the biblical texts refers to a personal goddess. Over and above the testimony that these texts afford to a Hebrew goddess behind the symbol, material archaeology demonstrates that goddesses did not disappear from Israelite religion by being absorbed by a putative radical integration of powers into an all-powerful male deity. Examples of obvious goddess iconography from the ninth and eighth and later centuries, for example, the goddess head over the tree trunk on the Hazor ointment spoon and the ivory “woman at the window” plaque from eighth century Samaria, as well as the familiar female figurines, contradict the claim that as early as Iron I (the twelfth and eleventh centuries BCE) goddess symbols ceased to represent the goddess. The Israelites who made and revered the figurines clearly associated their blatant female character—in particular the pillar figurines’ distended breasts—with a female deity rather than with a male god.

Although in the Near East the stylized sacred tree symbolized both fertility and protection, and both gods and goddesses provided fertility, protection, and ordered life in an ordered cosmos, the history of sacred tree symbolism in Egyptian and Levantine iconography connects it with goddesses rather than with gods. On Egyptian paintings goddesses form the trunks of trees to feed both men and women, and in this guise they provide grain for humanity and also represent the divine power and authority afforded the king to be a victorious ruler. In both fertility and apotropaic functions the sacred tree in
Egyptian, Ugaritic, and Israelite iconography symbolizes a personal goddess as the source.

Asherah's role as mediator with the high god in the Ugaritic texts survives as one of her primary functions in Israelite religion. The placement of her stylistic tree symbol in Yahwistic shrines and the Yahwistic blessing formula “by/through his asherah” indicate that Asherah as symbolized by the sacred tree was the means of approaching Yahweh as well as the vehicle of his provision and protection. The Khirbet el-Kom inscription credits Yahweh with rescuing Uryahu from his enemies by his (Yahweh's) Asherah, and the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscriptions that apply to “Yahweh and his asherah” for blessing appear to request protection for travelers. These inscriptions attribute more powers to Asherah than female and animal fertility since they protect men in a tomb and caravanserais and contain lexical items such as “save from his enemies” and “bless you and keep you.” The several apotropaic symbols such as Bes figures, an upside down hand, and abecedaries that accompanied the el-Kom and Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscriptions support Asherah as a protective force in addition to being a fertility goddess.¹⁶

Just as the gods of Canaanite mythology and iconography functioned in both fertility and defense roles, the stylized tree of life symbolized both divine aid in fertility and divine protection for men and women, their children and animals, and their political territory. The deemphasis on the sexual aspect of the Israelite figurines as compared with

---

¹⁶ Carved headrests in the form of the Hathor hairdress in Jerusalem bench tombs dating to ca. 800-700 suggest that Asherah protected the dead.
the Late Bronze Canaanite ones suggests that Asherah's power in Israelite thinking focused more on the nurture and protection of children than on enabling conception. The "asherah" symbol at Kuntillet 'Ajrud and at Khirbet el-Kom attests that the Israelite "asherah" was available for the blessing of individuals. As I elaborated in Chapter Three: House Gods and Shrines in the Ancient Near East, the gods' defense of individuals included the idea of fending off evil spirits, especially child-stealing gods and goddesses who threatened pregnant women and infants. The next chapter explains how women's fears and rituals concerning child-stealing demons and evil eye remain remarkably similar across time and geographical boundaries in the ancient Near East.
CHAPTER FIVE: AMULETS, EVIL EYE, AND CHILD-STEALING DEMONS

Apotropaion, the frightening away of evil spirits; exorcism, the expelling of spirits from a person; and sympathetic magic, the use of empowered images, constituted the accepted ingredients of ancient Near Eastern magic. Although sometimes practiced separately from the official state religion, they interacted with it through legends about the magical powers of certain gods, amuletic deity symbols, and godfigures. Archaeology and texts show that ancient Israelite women employed these forms of magic. This chapter discusses the relationship between magic and religion and reemphasizes the connections between Israelite religious rituals and their Near Eastern context. It explains the widespread use of eye and breast amulets, including figurines that emphasize eyes and breasts, as a response to persistent beliefs about how the evil eye and child-stealing demons sicken and drain newborn infants and their mothers.
The Near Eastern Context of Israelite Magic and Religion

Recent archaeological discoveries (Holladay 1987; Dever 1990, 1994) have modified old understandings of Israelite religion as a unique monolithic product of divine revelation. Holladay (1987:281-82) distinguishes between an official aniconic cult and a “distributed” popular cult:

The “distributed” cultic remains and iconographic “clustered” phenomena, both of which seem totally isolated from the life of the official shrines and sanctuaries, are probably best explained as popular phenomena, probably dependent upon traditions of folk religion stretching back into the Bronze ages, but revitalized by foreign contacts—particularly with Phoenicia (e.g. Kuntillet ‘Ajrud)—during the great age of mercantile activity which immediately preceded, and probably occasioned, the Assyrian and Babylonian takeovers of the two kingdoms.

The eighth century BCE Samaria E 207 and Jerusalem Cave 1, where large quantities of small female figurines and associated models as well as animal statuettes were found exemplify the distributed cult. Elizabeth Bloch-Smith (1992:94) understands the presence of these figurines to mean that sympathetic magic played a significant part in Israelite religion:

The presence of figurines in a ‘cult center’ near the Temple indicates that either factions with different views on iconographic representations and the acceptability of invoking sympathetic magic coexisted in Jerusalem, or the use of such figurines for sympathetic magic was a practice accepted by all.

Although it may be an exaggeration to say that all ancient Israelites accepted the use of figurines for sympathetic magic, their undeniable ubiquity in excavations of Israelite houses and tombs attests to their great popularity. For example, at Tell Beit
Mirsim, 45% of all A level houses (eighth and seventh century BCE) produced at least one figurine or model (Holladay 1987:276; Albright 1943:69).

Kuemmerlin-McLean (1992:470) notes two interpretive approaches to magic in the Hebrew Bible—(1) scholars who interpret magic negatively blame it on foreign imposition or survival of pre-Yahwistic practices, and (2) those who view it as an integral part of indigenous religion see a magical underpinning to many biblical practices and personages. Interpreters can best understand Israelite magic within its ancient Near Eastern context, in which cultures exchanged ideas and practices through trade and migration and adapted them to their indigenous religions. The medieval view of magic as opposed to (Church) religion, held also by late 1800’s and early 1900’s apologetic interests that deemed magic as foreign to or opposed to an Israelite religion distinct from its Near Eastern neighbors, has given way to seeing magic and religion as complementary or operating on a continuum. Magic and religion intertwined in ancient Near Eastern cultures.

Dever (1994b) clarifies his use of terms such as “Canaanite” and “syncretism” by saying that,

By “Canaanite,” I do not imply that those features of Israelite religion “borrowed” from Late Bronze Age Canaan were not then regarded as authentically “Israelite,” but only that they were later and in that sense derivative. If “syncretistic” means “combining differing beliefs in religious belief and practice” (as commonly held), then ancient Israel’s religion was indeed syncretistic.

So although many magical terms and practices in the biblical texts have Akkadian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Hittite, and Canaanite analogs, they were not necessarily imported
as foreign to Israel. When discussing the magical or religious significance of Egyptian type pendants found in Late Bronze Age Palestine, for example, McGovern (1985:102) posits a shift in ideology from their definite relation in Egypt to specific deities to new Palestinian symbols:

For Palestinians, there may have been some appreciation of the Egyptian meaning, but there would always be the unconscious tendency to recast Egyptian ideas into forms more compatible to the Palestinian mind (e.g., wdʒt = 'evil eye'). While individual city-states or regions of Palestine may have been attached to specific gods, Syria-Palestine as a whole placed primary emphasis on central male and female deities (Negbi 1976:141). This proclivity is apparent from the pendant evidence.

Dothan (1971:133-35) describes another example of an international adaptation in which changes in form followed ideological change—the Ashdoda-type offering table figurine, which in Iron I was female, by Iron II had lost all female characteristics.

Ancient Near Eastern peoples expressed many of the notions connected with magical and apotropaic practices in ways similar to their neighbors. This chapter will stress the commonalities in ancient Near Eastern apotropaic rituals, especially those related to mother and child protection, and the continuity between religion and magic. It will demonstrate that protective rituals depend on legends about the magical powers, both for evil and for good, of certain gods and goddesses or their agents whose names change, but whose functions remain remarkably similar throughout four millennia of Near Eastern history.
Social Science Models of Magic and Religion

Several social science models (Kuemmerlin-McLean 1992) which can be summarized in the following list influenced the study of magic in the Hebrew Bible:

Evolutionary—Magic is prereligious.
Animistic—Magic is a method of controlling spirits and supernatural forces.
Psychological—Magic gives individuals a feeling of control and confidence.
Prelogical/prescientific—Magic does not acknowledge a distinction between the material and the spiritual.
Sociological—Magic is used to advance individual as opposed to community well-being, which is advanced by religion.

The sociological explanation serves fairly well for the ancient Near East. Scurlock (1992) and Englehard (Hittite Magical Practices: An Analysis, 1970) note a division of labor in the ancient Near East between priests and exorcists, as well as a further distinction in Mesopotamian and Hittite cultures between black and white magic—antisocial magic was punishable by death. Religion involves “priestly activities such as the maintenance of the daily cult and the celebration of regularly scheduled festivals,” whereas magic consists of problem-oriented rituals. Mischa Titiev (“A Fresh Approach to the Problem of Magic and Religion,” 1979) similarly distinguishes between calendrical, communally-based religious activities, and magic, which consists of critical ceremonies designed to advance individual well-being and meet personal emergencies. The social science model does not necessarily imply rivalry between magic and religion. This model, although helpful, does not fit sacrifices by public figures at sacred sites in times of national emergency, the use of magic such as divination ceremonies during military campaigns (Ezek 21:21), elements of magic that prophets incorporated into their symbolic acts like those Matheney
(1965) described, and the acceptance and use of necromancy by Yahwistic clergy in Jerusalem (Isa 28:7-22; van der Toom, 1988). These events reveal community religious personnel crossing over the hypothetical line from regularly-scheduled daily and festival religion into problem-oriented rituals to deal with emergencies. For this reason they suggest a synthetic model in which magic and religion operate on a continuum. Scholars attest this type of continuity between religion and magic both for Mesopotamia and for Egypt.

Westenholz (1976) describes four levels of Mesopotamian religion: popular religion, incantation priests not associated with the temples, practitioners attached to the temples, and the royal cult of the city-states, with loose boundaries between the levels. These levels worked not competitively, but complementarily. While we can assume that the popular religion and the incantation priests not associated with the temples served the daily as well as the crisis physical needs of the populace, the royal family necessarily followed similar customs and experienced the same everyday problems. While the royal cult oriented its activities toward political ends, we can assume that ordinary citizens participated to some extent in national concerns and joined in such city and state religious festivals as the calendar prescribed. Magic and religion interacted as the situation dictated, and both depended on each other. Incantation rituals derived power from the deity they named, and prayers to deities caught their attention through flames, incense, images or some other ritual instrumentality.

Van der Toom (1994) comments on how magic and religion, gods and demons, interact and are interwoven in Mesopotamian texts. A perusal of the inscriptive data
compiled in *The Assyrian Dictionary of the University of Chicago* (1956f) confirms that the categories “gods and demons” do not correspond to “religion and magic” or “good and evil powers,” but indicate independent as opposed to dependent supernatural powers. Both good and evil gods and goddesses operated independently under their own wills. The literature marks their names with a divine name determinative. “Demons” or “spirits,” on the other hand, served these deities as emissaries of their powers. Witness, for example, the case when a cow in travail called out for help, and the moon god Sin responded by sending help in the form of two female protective spirits with oil and the “water-of-easy-birthgiving” (CAD 9:62). In another example, a person greets his father in an Old Babylonian letter with these words: “to my father, to whom his god, who created him, has given a permanent *lamassu*-spirit” (CAD 7:95). That the distinction between god and demon in Mesopotamia relates to hierarchy rather than to good and evil or to religion and magic is also verified by the plaque figurine of the protective god Lahmu who has inscribed on his arms: “Get out, evil demon! and “Come in, good demon!” As a deity, Lahmu had authority over both good and evil demons. When discussing Lamastu, Black and Green (1992:115-16) explain:

> Although she is usually described in modern works as a ‘demoness’, the writing of the name of Lamaštu in cuneiform suggests that in Babylonia and Assyria she was regarded as a kind of goddess. As a daughter of Anu (An), she was above the common run of ‘evil’ demons. Unlike such demons who acted only on the commands of the gods, Lamaštu practised evil apparently for its own sake—and on her own initiative.

These illustrations from Mesopotamia show that a modern definition of religion as a way people relate to gods understood as good supernatural beings and magic as a way they
deal with demons understood as evil beings does not fit the ancient Mesopotamian pattern.

Ritner (*The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 1987) perceives Egyptian magic and religion as forming a continuum. Egyptians used the same word for good magic and sorcery, and they attempted to manipulate their gods in the same way as demons (Scurlock 1992; Borghouts 1978). According to Ritner (1987:246-47), amulets, images, and ritualized spells, like temples, constituted primary ingredients of Egyptian ceremonial practice during its whole existence, and they cannot be compartmentalized in "magic" as opposed to "religion."

Even the presence of foreign elements in the latest Demotic spells does not constitute an "alien magic," divorced from traditional religion. The practice simply continues the syncretistic nature of Egyptian theology, absorbing Nubian, Greek, and Semitic elements as the New Kingdom had assimilated the gods (Baal, Astarte, Reshef, and Huruna) and spells of its neighbors (Cretan and Semitic). Far from being stagnant and moribund, late Egyptian religion still assimilated its traditions to contemporary thought. The clearest expression of this dynamic interaction between traditional practice and contemporary thought is found in the Egyptian influence upon the development of Neoplatonist Theurgy ("performing the works of god"), a melding of philosophy, religion, and ceremonial "magic." In its positive recognition of "magic" as a technique within religion, Theurgy reflects Egyptian notions of $hk^2$ rather than Latin concepts of *magia*, and the term provides perhaps the best designation of Egyptian "magico-religious" theology.

Because ancient Near Eastern categories of magic and religion do not correspond to modern Western classifications and boundaries, it is best to think of them as facets of each other in ancient Israel. They both emphasize the ideas of powerful god names and empowered images. This explains Israelite women's use of figurines to protect their homes and children. Figurines were not magical devices devoid of religious function and
meaning. Images symbolize powerful deities. When accompanied by prayers, they invite their protecting presence. When incantations occur with images, they repel presumptuous unwanted deities. Even this vocabulary unnecessarily demarcates between religion and magic. According to Webster (1986:924, 608), prayer is “an address (as a petition) to God or a god in word or thought,” whereas an incantation is “a use of spells or verbal charms spoken or sung as a part of a ritual of magic; also: a written or recited formula of words designed to produce a particular effect.” Prayers as well as incantations conform to formulas, and in Mesopotamia incantations commonly supplemented prayers. For example, Pritchard’s (1950:283) introduction to the “Prayer of Lamentation to Ishtar” states that it was “a prayer to be accompanied by a ritual of incantation.” This further illustrates that ancient Near Eastern people did not view religion and magic as separate, nor did they practice them independently.
Women and Magic

“Magic” refers to “methods associated with the gaining of suprahuman knowledge and power or with influencing suprahuman powers” (Kuemmerlin-McLean 1992:471). Procedures that pre-Hellenistic Near Eastern peoples used included apotropaion or exorcism (frightening a spirit away before or after it took up residence in a human being), propitiation (buying off a spirit), and transfer (giving an evil to someone or something else). The use of magic to assist in childbirth, to combat impotence, and to ward off evil eye, illness and bothersome animals recur as themes of magical texts from Mesopotamia, Hittite Anatolia, Egypt, and Ugarit (Scurlock 1992:465-66). Both men and women participated in various aspects of magic. Hittite documents list old women and court ladies among the legitimate Hittite diviners and exorcists. The Hebrew Bible condemns sorcerers, diviners, charmers, and necromancers (Deut 18:10-11). These terms generally occur in the masculine plural, which can include feminine. Biblical texts mention both male and female necromancers (Lev 20:27; 1 Sam 28), and single out female practitioners of kešep “sorcery” for the death penalty (Exod 22:18). In the next sections I show that women particularly used amuletic jewelry and figurines to protect themselves and their young children.

Although in many cultures beads function as symbols of wealth and prestige, “the power of beads is essentially a magic power” (Erikson 1969:133). Magic provides a method of controlling elements of life over which humanity has little or no power. The color of the beads and whether they are worn close to the body matters because of two
basic principles of magic anthropologists like Frazer (1959) describe: like produces like, and contact implies permanent contagion. Magic power derives from the type of stone, its color, and its representational design (Erikson 1969:136; Budge 1968). Inscribed words increase the protection an amulet provides.

Floral and faunal shaped pendants found in Iron I and II sites such as Tell el-Far‘ah, Deir el-Balah, Lachish, and Megiddo probably communicated a religious or magical significance. The lotus, mandrake, falcon, and crescent/horns, which to a modern-day Westerner appear purely ornamental, reflect important roles in ancient mythologies. Ancient peoples thought these plants and animals embodied the divine numina and brought divine favor and protection to both humans and deities (McGovern 1985:102). Van Buren (1945a:21, 22) quotes from a Babylonian story to exemplify the use of amulets by the goddess Ishtar:

Ishtar arrayed herself in majesty...She grasped the all-calming rod of lapis lazuli, and fastened a string of little lapis lazuli stones round her neck. On her breast lay the double numnuz-stone, and she slipped a golden ring on her finger. The breast-ornament, which compelled men to go, hung low down in front.

Barkay’s excavation of the Ketef Hinnom caves in Jerusalem produced a great wealth and variety of jewelry:

In addition to the silver and gold jewellery, there were numerous beads of a rich variety of materials, shapes, and sizes, some of semi-precious or rare stones (agate, carnelian, rock-crystal), and some of more common materials (glass, faience, shell etc.). Among them the coloured glass eye-beads are especially lovely. One of the finest items is a small faience amulet in the shape of the “eye of Horus” with a silver pupil. The Jerusalem jewellery reflects both the wealth of the city and its cultural ties, as well as the foreign influences and fashions which were current in the city during the First Temple and Babylonian periods. (Barkay 1986:26)
Barkay states that Jerusalem women owned and wore all of this jewelry. While we cannot know for certain that women exclusively rather than men wore it, Isa 3:18-21 also describes the jewelry that Jerusalem women of that era flaunted:

anklets, discs, crescents, pendants, bracelets, coronets, headbands, armlets, necklaces, lockets, charms, signet rings, nose-rings.

Budge (1968:215) asserts that all of the jewelry pieces Isaiah mentions were amulets.

McGovern (1985:101-102) cites evidence from Mesopotamia, Syria, and Egypt that indicates a minimal use of pendants as ornaments. Women primarily wore pendants for magical or religious reasons—to induce divine favor and protection. He reports that women have worn stone drop pendants since prehistoric times and some of these represent a pubic triangle, which symbolizes fertility (McGovern 1980:227). In addition, people rarely use eye beads as expressions of wealth or status; they generally wear them for protection against the evil eye (Dubin 1987:312). Erikson (1969:151-52) says stones carved to represent gods approach “the borderline between sculptured beads and miniature sculpture stones.” Worn on the person, they “assure the proximity of the deities.” In ancient Mesopotamia young mothers wore semiopaque cream-colored stones called “milk-stones” to ensure a copious supply of milk (Van Buren 1945a:18). All of this indicates that jewelry had a magical function in ancient times.

Judean Iron Age burials tell us little about amuletic jewelry and gender because they were family cave and bench tombs in which bones and burial goods were transferred at intervals to common repository pits. However, in a thirteenth to twelfth century BCE cist at Tell es-Sa‘idiyyeh relatives had “lavishly bejewelled” a young woman with beads...
and other amulets (Bloch-Smith 1992:88). Bloch-Smith does not specify osteological gender analysis for Egyptian-type amuletic pendants. She mentions that beads and scarabs accompanied one male skeleton from Tell er-Ruqeish, a Phoenician and Assyrian international trade center that does not necessarily represent customs of a typical Judean town. In other burials, rings, bangles, and earrings were found with both sexes. In an example from biblical literature, women and men both contributed jewelry for the building of the worship tent in Exod 35:22. So while men possibly wore jewelry as well, ample data affirms that Israelite women owned and wore amuletic jewelry.

In summary, examples of jewelry that biblical texts mention negatively appear as amulets in other Near Eastern texts. Women wore these in Isaiah's account and goddesses wore them in Mesopotamian mythology. Excavations in Egypt, Syria-Palestine, and Mesopotamia provide specimens of these amulets; in many cases they accompany women's graves and women's wares in houses. The following discuss inscribed amulets, Egyptian-influenced magical pendants, and women's eye-motif accessories, including their mythological roots and probable meaning.
Inscribed Amulets

Ancient Near Eastern women wore inscribed gemstones and precious metals to protect and heal themselves and their children. Various colors of stones produced power and virtue; inscribed gems imparted additional protection and blessing. Erikson (1969:148) notes the use of jewelry in healing ceremonies. Certain colors, such as green, combated particular diseases, but the power of healing or protection increased if the stone was inscribed:

Whatever the stone, however, its curative powers were thought to be enhanced by engraving. A combination of the symbol and the word were held in high regard, and an engraved stone thus became a very potent charm capable of fending off illness and, if prevention failed, of curing with dispatch. As to specific procedures, the usual method was to touch the patient with the stones or to prescribe their being worn next to the afflicted body area. Close proximity was important.

According to Lichty (1971:25), the phylactery commonly defended against demons in ancient Mesopotamia. Simple ones consisted of magic stones strung on knotted string or yarn, while more elaborate ones included amulets inscribed with charms. The importance of protective phylacteries continued in Christian, Jewish, and Islamic traditions; they generally consisted of pouches with texts from the Bible, Talmud, or Qur’ân (Koran), or legends about a demon’s origin followed by a conjuration.

Biblical texts that mention God’s deeds or commands inscribed on bands and worn as “frontlets” (Exod 13:9, 16; Deut 6:8, 11:18) and writing tablets worn as jewelry (Exod 35:22; Num 31:50) indicate that the custom of wearing inscribed objects on the body was in fact widespread in Israel. Moreover, the breastplate of Aaron the high priest
was a powerful amulet that contained twelve gemstones, each engraved with the name of one of the tribes of Israel (Exod 28:17-21; Budge 1968:327). Archaeologists found two sheet-silver plaques inscribed in an ancient Hebrew script in the Ketef Hinnom caves in Jerusalem. When deciphered, the inscriptions proved to be a priestly benediction almost identical with the verses in Num 6:24-26. Barkay (1986:30) states that "the nature of the inscriptions and the shape of our plaques clearly show that they served as amulets or charms." They are contemporaneous with the hewing out of the caves in the mid-seventh century BCE, thus constitute the earliest known fragments of biblical text and provide the first example of the inscribed name of the God of Israel, YHWH, from Jerusalem. Figure 46 on the following page shows one of the silver Ketef Hinnom amulets. These examples demonstrate that Israelites wore inscribed jewelry and shared in the common ancient Near Eastern belief about its powerful effects.

According to T. Gaster (1980:10) the widespread use of metals to repel demons stems from the idea that demons belong to the Stone Age and are apprehensive of "newfangled" metal. Scholars have discovered inscribed rolled-up metal amulets from the Roman and Byzantine periods, some containing verses from the Pentateuch, in Samaria and Israel. The custom of writing the divine name in silver or gold has parallels both in inscriptions on gold and silver plaques in other cultures and in the Alexandrian custom of writing in gold the letters of the divine name on law scrolls in the Second Temple period. In midrashic tradition (Num. Rab. 12), the priestly blessing "God bless thee and protect thee" protected against the evil eye. Rabbi Jalkut Reubenin P. Wajehl instructed parents to "take a silver or copper piece of metal and inscribe the Hebrew letter H, and let the
Fig. 46: Inscribed Silver Amulet from Seventh Century BCE Jerusalem,
child wear it” as an amulet protecting against the evil eye (Brav 1981:52). Stager (1985:10), when describing the archaeology of the family in ancient Israel, affirms that jewelry made from shiny metals “has powerful apotropaic properties, particularly for protecting persons against the ‘evil eye’.” It is clear, therefore, that the use of metal in amulets was a long-standing Jewish tradition. The use of inscribed gemstones, phylacteries, and sheet metal plaques to obtain divine blessing and protection was widespread in the ancient Near East and continued into classical and medieval periods. Rabbis especially recommended metal amulets for defeating the evil eye.
Egyptian-Type Amuletic Pendants

Most Egyptian-type pendants were mold-made of faience, generally with a blue-green glaze. Palestinian amulets made about one hundred years after similar Amarna counterparts differ from them only in the variety and intensity of the glazed colors. However, by Iron I, quality had fallen off and standardization had set in, leading towards a repertoire of rigidly defined Iron II types (McGovern 1980:96). Faience, an ancestor of glass made from partially-fused quartz sand with mineral colorants, simulated blue lapis lazuli or turquoise gem stones, both of which people prized for their resemblance to the sky (Dubin 1987). McGovern (1980:190-91) and Bloch-Smith (1992:85) describe mold-made faience amulets found from the thirteenth through the seventh century BCE in many locations in Israel. Egyptian-style pendants produced in Israel are more stylized than those made in Egypt, and thus are more difficult to identify with a particular deity than Egyptian ones. However, Bes and Horus pendants can be identified. They were fairly common in the Late Bronze Age strata at Canaanite sites, and they continued in the Israelite levels.

Excavators found elaborately rendered Iron II Bes pendants with high feather headdresses at Lachish, Samaria, Ta'anach, Tell el-Hesi, Tell el-Far'ah, Tell es-Safi, and Beth-Shean. Bes is the name of a group of Egyptian dwarf gods frequently associated with magic. Although most texts do not name him, Bes appears first pictured on a Middle Kingdom headrest along with the hippopotamus goddesses and on ivory wands which had
magical properties for warding off snakes and scorpions from both the living and the dead. Wilson (1975:78) describes the typical Bes that appears on faience amulets:

“Bes” is frontal and squatting. He is naked apart from the lion-skin whose tail is usually visible between his legs, and he often wears a feather crown. His hands rest on his thighs and his features are normally grotesque, animal rather than human. He is usually bearded and has mane-like hair. This is “Bes” at his most typical. Numerous examples are found from the New Kingdom onwards. In this guise “Bes” is made into faience amulets.

Bes heads also occurred as amulets and as decorations on toilet articles and scarabs. Whatever his form, his function was mainly apotropaic, and he regularly appeared with other gods and demigods (Wilson 1975:83). The talismanic Horus-on-the-Crocodile stelae, dating from Dynasty XIX pictures Bes with Horus and Shed. Egyptians believed these stelae had powers to ward off scorpions and snakes. Later Bes helped women with childbirth, probably because of his connection with Thoeris, who attended the birth of the gods. Beginning in the seventh century BCE, art shows Bes suckling the Horus child. The history of Bes in Egypt suggests that people wore Bes pendants at first for protection against snakes and scorpions, but Bes later provided general protection against harm.

High infant mortality and short female life span plagued Israelite attempts to strengthen their families and economy. Because of the mythological conceptions underlying Bes representations, Israelite women wore Bes pendants and other Egyptian-type faience jewelry as amulets rather than merely as secular status ornaments. Bes pendants protected women and their infants from the threat of death and injury during childbirth and against general hazards such as poisonous animal bites that are usually
fatal to young children. Israelite women also continued to use another protective Egyptian motif—the divine eye—to sustain for them the regular cycles of life regulated by the sun and moon. The next section describes the origin of the legendary “Horus eye” amulet and the schematic divine eye motifs that derive from it.

Fig. 47: Rosette, Bes, and Egyptian-Type Eye Amulets from Samaria, from Crowfoot, Crowfoot, and Kenyon, *Samaria-Sebaste III: The Objects*, fig. 91.
Divine Eye Motifs in Egypt and the Levant

The eye motif in magic reflects some of humanity's most pervasive cosmic and personal fears. Beautiful eye beads and eye motif pendants express fears of the evil eye of gods, demons, living humans, and the dead. The eye's power is usually considered a harmful one; however, the gaze of some goddesses such as Hathor in Egypt and the Eye Goddess of Mesopotamia protects good, and the strong eye of Horus can overpower and destroy evil (Dubin 1978; Borghouts 1973; Crawford 1956). The following will discuss the meaning and historical development of this belief and ritual complex.

The early Egyptian Pyramid Texts already mention the dangerous glance of the demon-snake Apopis that a "great maiden," probably Hathor, must counter (Borghouts 1973:140-41). The demon-snake's attempt to upset the routine movement of the sun's setting by staring at the sun god thus robbing his eye forms the mythological theme of several Middle and New Kingdom texts. Only another god's equally powerful eye could counteract his powerful destructive eye:

From all this, it may be clear that one of the terrible weapons to be feared from the demon of chaos is his malevolent eye. When the sun-boat would be caught by its glance, a cosmic calamity might be the result. The danger is countered by averting the glance in some magical way—or by defying it; but the latter can only be done by someone equal to Apopis, like Seth, or by the sun-god's eye itself. (Borghouts 1973:120)

Besides the evil eye of Apopis which threatens cosmic order, an anonymous evil power to harm persons that they usually term the "evil eye" sometimes resides in the eyes of gods, humans, demons, and the dead. Closely related to cosmic order and the cycle of
birth and death, the evil eye threatens the very existence of the human population by being particularly harmful to pregnant women and children (Budge 1970:354; Dubin 1987:312).

In a worldwide survey of 186 diverse cultures, Roberts (1976) ascertained that 36% had an evil eye belief, and these were mainly in India, the Near East, and Europe. His cross-cultural analysis of various features associated with the evil eye found the highest correlation factor to be milking and dairy production. He argues that the evil eye belief complex developed in the Near East around the time when milk animals became domesticated:

The associations with milking and dairy production are particularly striking, and they suggest that there may be a linkage between the evil eye belief and the fact that milk-producing animals often go dry or stop producing milk for essentially mysterious reasons...The geographical distribution of the cultures possessing the evil eye belief supports the statement that the belief became culturally elaborated in the Near East (broadly defined). Furthermore, the cultural associations indicate that the belief became elaborated no earlier than Neolithic times when the milking of domestic animals became established. (Roberts 1976:241, 261)

Women achieve protection against the evil eye through incantations, magic formulas, and wearing amulets (Borghouts 1973:147-48; Brav 1981:50). An amulet acts either as a repellent or as an attractant of the evil eye away from the intended victim (Brav 1981:52). The eye bead was designed and produced in quantity for everyday use against the evil eye. The earliest clay eye beads date to the Nineteenth Dynasty in Egypt (Erikson 1969:139). Figure 48 shows some stone eye beads from eighth century BCE Samaria in Israel.
Borghouts reports an Egyptian ritual game portrayed in nineteen temple reliefs at Deir el-Bahari, Luxor, Edfu, Dendera, and Philae beginning in the Eighteenth Dynasty, and this is attested much later in similar Ptolemaic period legends. In the ritual the king, sometimes assisted by two “prophets,” stands before a goddess, usually Hathor, and hits a ball with a wooden club. The ball has a small circle in the middle for the pupil or iris, and it represents the destructive Eye of Apopis. Hathor personifies the Eye of the sun god, the source of light, life, and order. The game symbolizes the conflict between chaos and order in the universe and in society. When the king hits and shatters the ball, or expels it from the scene, he defeats the Evil Eye of Apopis that threatens the continuation of life. Hathor and the king thus symbolically win and end the cosmic contest between chaos and order. The earliest example from Deir el-Bahari shows Tuthmosis III (1479-1425 BCE) before Hathor, with the title: “Hitting the ball for Hathor, chief of Thebes” (Borghouts 1973:122). Another at Luxor portrays Amenophis III (ca. 1390-1352 BCE) before a
goddess with a Hathor crown. Its title reads: “Hitting the ball, in order that he may be given life” (Borghouts 1973:123).

Three excerpts of the Ptolemaic captions that accompany the reliefs in the Edfu Temple exemplify the power and position of Hathor:

I give you your eyes while bringing you joy, so that you illuminate that which is hidden in the darkness. Words spoken by Hathor, the Great One, Lady of Dendera, the Eye of Re, who sojourns in Edfu, the Eye-which-bestows-brightness of the Majesty of the King, the Living Eye which is bright and safe in its place. Those who have rebelled against it, are no longer in existence. (Edfu 1.62:5-13)

Words spoken by Hathor, Lady of Dendera, the Eye of Re, who sojourns in Edfu, lady of heaven, mistress of all the gods, lady of writing, the mistress of the library: I grant you your Sound Eyes, being safe on their place. (Edfu 3.348:10-14)

Hitting the ball. Words spoken: take for yourself the iris of [Apopis] which is torn up. Enjoy yourself, O Lady of Dendera; the burn-snake is burnt, his being shall be no more! The slaughter-snake, his gleaming eyes are cut up. He-whose-character-is-evil has been driven away, his pupil has been hit. Rejoice, you, O Eye of Re! (Edfu 4.149:4-150)

In these and other Egyptian texts, Hathor in her capacity as hypostasis of the Living Eye of the sun-god drives away the evil eye of a demon who tries to destroy life and order.

Scholars usually identify Hathor with Asherah because she is similar in function and iconography. This helps to explain the role of Asherah in Israel. Her eyes protect Israelite women and their newborn infants from sickness and death by countering the powerful destructive eyes of gods and people. The prominently-outlined eyes of Israelite pillar-base figurines reflect this protective function of Asherah.

Egyptian texts mention various demons and gods who exhibit piercing eyes or evil glances. The god Seth directs his malevolent eye at other gods, but, except in the incident
of the sun-boat, he never used his eye to oppose dangerous influences. Several Egyptian
gods protected against the evil eye. References to them occur in hymns, proper names,
amuletic decrees and in temple reliefs. One relief on the south wall of the Taharqa
sanctuary at Karnak pictures the four gods Dedwen, Sopdu, Sobk, and Horus, with
glosses for each that say, “he makes his slaughter and brings misery about with the two
eyes” (Borghouts 1973:146). In the *Pyramid Texts* (Sethe, *Die Aegyptischen
Pyramidentexte* 1266-69, quoted in Mallowan 1947:151), even the eye of Horus can
introduce evil:

This hall is purer than the sky...
It is sealed with two evil eyes,
in order that Osiris may not come in his evil coming...;
in order that Horus may not come in his evil coming...;
in order that Seth may not come in his evil coming.

Horus is the god of the heavens, and his eyes symbolize the sun and the moon. His
right eye maintains cosmic order, and his left eye represents the moon cycle of birth,
death, and rebirth. Divine *wdḥ* (uzat) eye pendants combine a human eye with the cheek
feathers of a falcon (Fig. 47, p. 311) and protect the wearer day or night. Borghouts does
not translate *wdḥ* directly, but refers to it as ominous or dangerous. The magical Berlin
wooden tablet 23308 pictures seven *wdḥ*-eyes, and they occur also on some magical
papyri which were rolled up and worn as amulets. On sarcophagi, doors, false doors,
stelae, tomb-walls, and model boats they protect against the evil eyes of dead persons and
against evil eyes of the demons who guard sacred places. The Bes figures and the lyre
player painted in red on the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud decorated pithos were covered by dots (Fig.
Since the pithoi contained other apotropaic symbols and an inscription asking for blessing from Yahweh and his Asherah, the dots might represent protective divine eyes (Hadley 1987b). The travelers staying at Kuntillet Ajrud doubtless sensed an acute need for protection from the wild dangers of the desert.

Eyes painted black, green, or red define the eye-idols and other divine eye symbols in early Mesopotamia. According to Egyptian texts, painting one’s eyes with certain ointments frightens away human or demonic enemies. For example, eyes painted with ladanum (Ar) scare enemies “when they look at you with an evil intention (m² sn twk)” (Edfu 2.43:9-10), and there is “an ointment used in order to annihilate an enemy, in order to dispel an inimical being (hрыy) when coming at a man with a fierce face (m ḥs² ḥr)” (P. Med. Berlin 99.8.8). In the Book of the Dead Papyrus of Ani we read: “O Osiris Unas, the two Eyes of Horus have been laid like paint upon thy face” (Mallowan 1947:207). Egyptians often drew the hieratic eye sign with red ink (Borghouts 1973:148). According to Trachtenberg (1961:133), “red is a color regarded everywhere as anti-demonic and anti-evil eye.” These examples document the widely accepted use in the ancient Near East of eye paint to deflect the destructive evil eyes of gods, demons, and people. They suggest that the red and black paint on the heads and particularly the eyes of female pillar-base figurines served the same purpose.

Judean pillar-base figurines were whitewashed and painted with red and, less frequently, with yellow or black paint. Often the yellow paint represents jewelry. The figurines have prominent eyes, sometimes outlined in black. McCown, Wampler, and Bade (1947:246) describe Tell en-Nasbeh pillar figurines with heads pinched to form
large eye surfaces: “Huge eyes, indicated as filling the whole ‘pinched’ surface, were outlined with a heavy black ring and also showed a black pupil.” The heavy outlining of the eyes with dark paint is also obvious on the drawing of the pillar-base figurine from Beer-sheba Room 25 (Fig. 22, p. 142) and mentioned in the description of female figurine head 3087 that formed the neck of a vessel from Tell el-Far‘ah (Chambon 1985): “The hair, eyebrows and eyelids are accentuated by the application of black paint.” The accentuation of the figurines’ eyes reflects their apotropaic function for the women who used them to protect themselves and their newborn infants.

Beginning in the Middle Bronze Age and continuing through the Late Bronze and Iron Ages in the Levant artisans painted or incised the protecting divine eye motif in the form of various geometric designs that look like eyes on funerary boxes, cultic vessels, and women’s accessories. For example, ring-and-dot designs especially representing the eyes of carved birds, ducks, fowl, and one snake decorated funerary boxes placed near the shoulders of bodies in Middle Bronze II to Late Bronze Megiddo tombs. The ivory pyxis from the Temple of the Rhytons at Ugarit shows an engraved design of a sacred tree with the ends of the branches curled in a ring-and-dot design. As already noted, the stylized sacred tree in Levantine iconography usually represents a goddess and has an apotropaic function. It is likely that people believed that all of these examples of schematic divine eyes protected from demonic forces.

The ring-and-dot design appears on many different objects, especially women’s accessories, from excavations in Iron Age Israel: inlays with rosettes, a scale pan, bone fan handles, flat calendars, crescent ornaments, cosmetic palettes, and ivory pendants.
The ring-and-dots represent supernatural protective eyes. Figure 49 on this page and Figure 54 on page 339 picture Israelite women's accessories with ring-and-dot designs.

Many of the ring-and-dot designs that decorate Israelite women's cosmetic palettes show traces of eye paint. For example, an eighth century cosmetic palette from the second excavations at Samaria had grooves and dots filled with blue and green paint. Women perhaps moistened these with a kohl rod to make the green and gray pastes known as eye make-up in Egypt. In practically every trench at Gezer, Macalister found smooth flat-based cosmetic palettes shaped from quartzite or alabaster, about three inches in diameter, with circle and dot eye designs scratched, punched, or traced with a compass.
around a central depression. A few have the geometric design filled with color, emphasizing and equating the apotropaic function of the eye make-up with the protective divine eye. Albright (1943) mentioned that at Tell Beit Mirsim some of the ring-and-dots on the eighth century palettes contained face paint; the type of limestone used suggested they might have been imported from Phoenicia, another indication of the borrowing and continuity of Near Eastern religious concepts and rituals.

Platt (1978:24) describes cylinder-like ivory pendants with the same eye motif that archaeologists found in twelve Iron Age excavations from the tenth to the seventh or sixth centuries BCE in Palestine. The pendants are oval in cross-section and the narrower end is pierced for suspension. They are plain, banded, or cross-hatched, most with rows of ring-and-dot designs. The greatest number of rods came from Lachish, Megiddo, Gezer, and Beth-Shemesh, but none accompanied the rich Canaanite jewelry deposits at Beth-Shean or in the Megiddo Tombs, implying that common people rather than the elite wore them. Because they lay in rooms with ordinary utensils, Platt believes they belonged to everyday life. The pendants were not earrings or groups of divining rods because “on the mounds the bone pendants were found singly, often in the company of other small pierced objects like beads, scarabs, and amulets” (Platt 1978:27). She concludes that the pendant was strung with these other objects on a cord as a necklace, and that “the ring-and-dot design is connected with the eye motif.” Platt rejects the theory that the shape of the pendants stands for a Hercules club; however the association of the eye motif with a club in Egyptian ritual art suggests an interesting parallel.
Horus eye amulets and schematic divine eye motifs in Egypt, Ugarit, and Israel provided protection in general against cosmic chaos and sustained the cycles of life and death. Ring-and-dot designs occur on Israelite women's everyday accessories. In Egypt from the Late Bronze Age until the Ptolemaic era the goddess Hathor, equated iconographically with Canaanite and Israelite Asherah, served as the personification of the defending divine eye of the sun god. The red and black painted heads and eyes of Israelite figurines emphasize the goddess's apotropaic function. In addition to the need for protection from the destructive eyes of malevolent gods and demons that attempt to disrupt the cycles of life, women and their infants need particular protection against the impersonal "evil eye" force which emanates from jealous people. This is a pervasive belief and ritual complex whose beginnings stretch back to early times in the ancient Near East and whose threat continues in modern Middle Eastern cultures. The next section explores the history of eye symbols and their connection with a protective goddess in Mesopotamia.
Eye Motifs in Mesopotamia

The earliest written references to the evil eye occur on third millennium BCE Sumerian tablets. Archaeologists found specimens of banded agates cut to produce an eye effect and stone beads with incised eye designs at Mesopotamian sites of the same period (Dubin 1987:308). Others come from the Akkadian period and the first half of the second millennium, but most pieces of agate or onyx amulets that look like an eye or a pair of eyes come from the Kassite and late Assyrian periods (Van Buren 1945:18). In addition to eye beads, a sky blue bead or stone pendant safeguarded the wearer from evil, and a green stone averted the evil eye.

Deity figurines at several Mesopotamian sites had extra-large eyes. Statuettes at Khafajah portrayed the divinities anthropomorphically, but with double-size eyes. Thousands of beads, animal-shaped amulets, and large-eyed figurines covered the floor and platform of the Tel Brak temple (Mallowan 1947, 1956, 1965). The large-eyed figurines fell into three basic categories. The "eye-idols" consisted of thin biscuit-like bodies in black or white alabaster surmounted by engraved naturalistic eyes painted with black or dark green malachite or red paint. "Spectacle-idols," also found at Susa in Iran, Ur and Lagash in Babylonia, and at Mari in Syria, are sometimes larger and have open hoops for eyes. A black steatite one mounted on a pedestal appears to be a cult image. An intermediate form has encrusted and inland eyes. Figure 50 shows the first two varieties.
Several scholars have suggested that the Mesopotamian eye figurines represent a "mother goddess." Erikson (1969:170) philosophizes that the prominent eyes and bead necklaces of the Brak temple figurines symbolize a magical connection to a nurturing, protective deity in the same way that a mother's eyes and necklace provide focal points for a nursing child. Although this sounds romantic, it is not too far removed from the Egyptian idea that Hathor, the Eye of Re, protected against the demon of cosmic chaos. Some of the large-eyed figurines in the Tell Brak temple "hold" a child and seem to be conventionalized images of a mother goddess (Van Buren 1945b:58). In a later article Van Buren (1950:142) compares the Brak figures to a relief of a cult-statue of Ishtar (British Museum 118996) that stood against the rear wall of the H-sanctuary at Assur, and which exhibits the same "rigid frontality," the same color-lined staring eyes, and dots to
represent a string of beads. The spectacle-idols also parallel the figure incised on a votive bronze mirror from Luristan, a female in frontal position with outstretched arms holding palm branches, guarded by two lions. As in the spectacle-idols, her head or face are represented by two perforated rings. Rosettes that usually symbolize the goddess Ishtar surround the field (Van Buren 1945b:84; Van Buren 1955:175). However, worshipers engraved one of the Brak eye-idols with a stag surmounted by a bird, imagery associated with the Sumerian childbirth goddess Ninhursag (Mallowan 1956, 1965).

Although Ishtar’s character resembles a primitive earth or mother goddess in that she symbolizes both life and death, she is not a nurturer, and the use of the name Ishtar for the mother goddess in the Epic of Gilgamesh is an example of the name being superimposed on a separate goddess (Abusch 1995). By the second millennium the role of mother goddess or childbirth goddess in the sense of creator or mother of the gods and of people is ascribed to a goddess who goes under the interchangeable names Ninhursag(a), Ninmah, Nammu, or Damgalnuna (Black and Green 1992). As we have just noted, worshipers engraved one of the eye-idols with a stag surmounted by a bird, imagery which symbolized this goddess. In the Neo-Assyrian period, the lion symbolized her, and incantations against the child-stealing goddess Lamashtu claimed her as protector. Women who used the Lamashtu incantations at Ugarit also named Damgalnuna as one of their protective deities.

In both Mesopotamian and Canaanite iconography the rosette occurs in conjunction with protective mother goddesses who stand on lions. The Qudshu plaques from Minet el-Beida near Ugarit combine the Canaanite mother goddess Asherah with the
warlike star goddess Astarte standing on a lion. In one example a rosette appears over her head, and in another example a rosette is carved on the lion’s shoulder. Rose eye designs sometimes decorate household and cultic vessels at Ugarit. A goblet and a bowl incised before firing on their rims and bases with a series of two small concentric circles framed by two pairs of horizontal lines came from Stratum IIIA3 at Ugarit south of the acropolis (Ugaritica VI: 55-56). One of the Mycenaean rhytons from the house with the Lamashtu tablets features a rosette-type eye design consisting of a small circle surrounded by dots, and another rhyton from the same house has an overall design of the opposite motif—small circles of dots surrounded by solid oval lines (Ugaritica VI: 115, 118). These examples of rosette eye designs from Ugarit reflect devotion to and dependence on a goddess for protection.

Eye symbols and rosettes occur together on various examples in Mesopotamian art. Mallowan (1947:159) found numerous large faience rosette beads in the gray-brick stratum (ca. 3200 BCE) of the Eye Temple platform. Copper paneling impressed with representations of a repoussé eye lined the walls of the Brak sanctuary, and rosettes of white marble, black shale, and red limestone decorated the inner face of the north wall. A cylinder seal of the Jemdat Nasr period found at Tell Agrab depicts the goddess—over a temple entrance with gate-posts it shows an immense face indicated mainly by a pair of gigantic eyes on a band studded with rosettes (Figure 51; Van Buren 1945b:46, 54). All of these examples of protective goddess imagery build on the idea of her watchful protecting eyes.
The opposition of the rosette to the rhomb mirrored in Mesopotamia the cosmic contest between order and chaos mythologized in Egypt in the stand-off between the eyes of Hathor and Apopis. Rosettes, perhaps in this case symbolizing good fortune, alternate with rhombic eye symbols, maybe picturing fate, on gaming-boards and on a basket-weave handled gray plaque from Ur. The “rhomb,” an eye-like geometric design with a magically protective function appears in Mesopotamian glyptic art from the Jemdat Nasr period until the fall of Assyria (Fig. 52; Van Buren 1945b; Black and Green 1992). It occurs with scenes of a god shooting arrows at or otherwise attacking monsters and sphinxes. One late-Assyrian style seal found in Crete shows two horizontal rhombs on either side of the dagger of Assur as the eyes and nose of a face, indicating apotropaic potency (Van Buren 1945b:119). Some interpreters explain the rhomb as a symbol of earth; others say it represents a woman’s vulva, since it appears with Ishtar in Mesopotamian art and looks like the models of vulvae found in her temple at Assur (Black and Green 1992). The rhomb may have amplified or modified its meaning at times.
because on clay tablets dealing with agriculture it represents a grain of corn, symbolic of Sarpanitu, consort of Marduk, "Creatrix of seed." Mesopotamians worshiped Sarpanitu as a goddess of childbirth under the name Erúa, from the Akkadian erȗ, "to be pregnant."

The rhomb also appears on various seals with a sacred tree. The dual use of the rhomb to symbolize protection in some cases and to portray fertility in others is not unusual in Near Eastern iconography, since the powers of fertility and protection often combined in the same personage or were expressed by the same symbol. For example, Ishtar is goddess of love and procreation, but also goddess of war. In Egypt Bes plays an apotropaic function and also assists at childbirth. Whereas the sacred tree represents fertility, in a secondary way it symbolizes the protection of gods or central government (Barnett 1975:88-89; Keel and Uehlinger 1992:234). The goddess Asherah presents another example. Scholars traditionally regard her as a fertility goddess, but the Khirbet el-Kom and Kuntillet Ajrud inscriptions expect her to “bless and keep” and “save from enemies” along with Yahweh.

Fig. 52: Rhomb and Eyes, from Van Buren, Symbols of the Gods in Mesopotamian Art.
A perpendicularly and horizontally pierced onyx breast ornament carved to represent two eyes was first dedicated in a Sumerian inscription to the king’s “Lady” Ningal, wife of the moon-god. Ten centuries later when the Assyrians conquered Babylon they added a Semitic text to the jewelry piece: “To Ningal, the shining light, the Assyrian (Ningal), O hear!” Sargon II dedicated a rose and white agate eye mounted on blue paste to Ningal at her temple at Khorsabad. Shalmaneser and Nebuchadnezzar inscribed and dedicated several beautiful stone eyes to Marduk. Apparently, as in Egypt some gods’ eyes provided protection while at times they themselves needed this same protection, as the image of Ishtar who wore the breast ornament that “caused men to go” illustrates. Significantly, ancient peoples wore eye beads and carved eye jewelry on necklaces or as breast ornaments to protect the most vulnerable parts of their bodies. For a man in battle this was his chest. For a woman, her breasts constituted her source of nurture for her children. According to Van Buren (1945b:55) who has traced symbols of the gods from early to late periods in Mesopotamia, divine eye symbols represent first the divine all-seeing hortatory presence, but more so the protective function of averting the evil eye and other occult forces. They do not represent a specific Magic Eye or Eye-God, or even the eyes of Ningal, but more likely the powers of several deities, especially the “mother goddess.” According to Brak excavator Mallowan (1947:152), the eye figurines represented the “mother goddess” without picturing prominent breasts, belly, or genitals because during the Uruk and Jemdat Nasr periods such symbols disappeared from representations of the divinity on monuments and reappeared gradually in the Early Dynastic Period, but only fully after 2000 BCE with the propagation of Semitic fertility
ideology throughout Western Asia. While Israelite female pillar figurines feature the
goddess's breasts, they omit showing her belly or genitals. This may be due merely to a
change in iconography similar to the one Mallowan documents for early Mesopotamia,
but it more likely reflects an emphasis on the protective function of the mother goddess
rather than a focus on her sexual, procreative function. Her powerful eyes averted the evil
eye and other occult forces.
The Evil Eye in the Bible and in Rabbinic and Early Christian Thought

Although the biblical term *ayin ra* "evil eye" means a jealous or stingy eye, it probably relates to the more general evil eye belief complex (Dundes 1981:41, 46).

Several proverbs dealing with the evil eye occur in the biblical wisdom writings:

*Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, 
neither desire thou his dainty meats; 
For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he; 
Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee. 
The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, 
and lose thy sweet words.* (Prov 23:6-9)

*He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, 
and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him.* (Prov 28:22)

*The covetous eye is not satisfied with its share; 
greedy injustice shrivels the soul.* (Sir 14:9)

*Remember, it is a bad thing to have a greedy eye. 
There is no greater evil in creation than the eye; 
for that reason it must shed tears at every turn.* (Sir 31:13)

1 Sam 18:9 reports that after the Israelites acclaimed David for killing ten thousands to King Saul's thousands, Saul "was eyeing" David from that day on. The following day an "evil" or "injurious" spirit entered Saul and he tried to spear David. This account of Saul's jealousy of David pairs an injurious spirit with his jealous eye. Semitic cultures of the ancient Near East as well as modern Middle Easterners envision the resentful glance that harms an envied person as a personified evil spirit that causes illness or death to the victim. Just as the covetous eye of Sir 14:9 "shrivels the soul," covetous
evil eyes in modern Lebanon “shrivel” the breasts of mothers so that they cannot nourish their newborn infants.

In a first to third century CE study of demonology, *The Testament of Solomon*, the decans of the zodiac must confess their names, their powers, and the means of guarding against them. One says, “I am called Rhyx Phtheneoth. I cast the evil eye on every man. But the much-suffering eye, when inscribed, thwarts me” (*T. Sol.* 18:39; Duling 1983:981). According to Goodenough (1953:2.238-40) the “much-suffering eye” is a variation of the Egyptian amuletic “Eye-of-Horus” that shows the divine eye torn, pierced, or wounded by weapons or animals. It is more common in the Greco-Roman Jewish world than the “sound” eye, although it derives from the same Egyptian legends. The torn eye in a mystical way releases power through representing good being destroyed by evil and then being restored again, a symbolism similar in significance to the Christian crucifix (Goodenough 1953:240). Both sound and much-suffering eyes occur on ceiling tiles from the Dura synagogue and on Jewish amulets, some with the inscription *lao* (Goodenough 1953:3.1049, 3.1064, and 3.1065), a shortened form of the divine name Yahweh. On one silver-plated copper medallion, a Christianized example only slightly adapted from a Jewish design pictures a cavalier holding a lance to the throat of a prone female and the motto: “Get out, hated one (feminine), Solomon is after you…” (Goodenough 1953:2.238; Goodenough 3.1063). Another Christianized version, a 36 mm. diameter bronze amulet (Goodenough 3.1067), has Egyptian sound eyes on both sides. These eye amulets exhibit Greco-Roman era Jewish and early Christian concerns
with the harmful effects of evil eye. Figure 53 pictures the Jewish amulets and ceiling tiles as well as the Christianized metal amulets.

Fig. 53: Greco-Roman Period Amulets against the Evil Eye, from Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, figs. 1049, 1064-1066, 1063, and 1067.
A Syriac charm obtained by the Harvard Semitic Museum from Urmia, Persia, and translated by W. Hazard (1890-91) protects Gauza the daughter of Shima from "an evil spirit in the form of a hateful woman" who is called among other names Lilitha and "the suffocatress of children and women." Giwargis, the writer of the two inch wide six foot long scroll, copies ten holy god names and says, "I bind and I expel and I objurgate the evil and bewitching eye, and the eye green and heavy, and the eye of men and the eye of women, and the eye of every kind of man and beast" (1989-91:291). Headlines and some of the words of the text are written in red ink, and the parchment has three pictures of saints confronting demons, one of whose face is characterized by one feature—a large eye in the center. This early Christian example indicates the perceived susceptibility of ancient Near Eastern women and their infants to injury from evil eyes and their personifications as child-stealing demons.

According to the rabbinic writings, women are particularly susceptible to the evil eye. For example, the evil eye explains the cause of miscarriage: Sarah threw an evil eye on Hagar and caused her to abort her first child (Midr. Gen. Rab. 53). The Lithuanian rabbi Hayyim ben Yitsḥaq Volozhiner, spokesman of the Kabbalistic Mitnaggedim and author of Nefesh ha-Ḥayyim (1824), blamed female susceptibility to evil eye on the mystical numerical equivalence between the phrase ayin rač "evil eye" and the word nashim "woman."

---

17 Hazard does not suggest a date for this charm written in Syriac script.
In ancient Israel, as in Egypt and Mesopotamia, women feared the effects of the evil eye and child-stealing demons. Because of the dangers confronting them and their newborn children, Hebrew women wore protective stones while pregnant to prevent miscarriage, and newborns wore cords or knotted bands to preserve them from evil (Budge 1968:212f; van der Toorn 1994:26, 83). Jewelry and figurines archaeologists found at Lachish exemplify just such amulets that ancient Israelite women wore to protect themselves and their newborn children from the effects of the evil eye and child-stealing demons.
Lachish III and Women’s Magic

Houses along the street from the city gate and south of the palace of Iron Age Lachish probably housed soldiers and shopkeepers and show Israelite domestic life at the end of the eighth century BCE (Tufnell 1953). The pillar-base female figurines and horse figurines, model furniture, rattles, and zoomorphic vessels concentrated primarily in Tombs 1002 and 106. The most interesting finds from houses consisted of female figurines and jewelry. Many of these relate to apotropaic function through Egyptian mythology. Tufnell did not find any altars or incense stands in pre-exilic contexts at Lachish, although archaeologists later discovered the tenth century bench-lined cult room I described in Chapter Three. Several of the houses south of the palace followed the typical three or four-room Israelite house form. Most of them had the customary three parallel longroom spaces separated by pillars, and the outer two spaces were generally cobbled. A fourth space, a back broadroom was sometimes present. Loci 1031 and 1033 are “rooms south of the palace,” but do not appear to be complete houses. Each dwelling contained at least one piece of jewelry. Some examples of jewelry and figurines with notes of accompanying women’s household items from the residence district south of the palace follow.

The contents of House 1008 included a female figurine with a draped headdress and an imitation cowrie amulet, along with clay spindlewhorls, burnt fibers, a cooking pot, bowls, jugs, and storage jars. Modern Middle Eastern cultures use cowrie shells as amulets to deflect the evil eye from infants because the shells look like eyes (Donaldson
1981:73; Watson 1979:233). House 1002 held another eye amulet—a bone sacred eye scaraboid—as well as women's weaving and cooking implements—a mass of clay loom weights, a bone spatula, two saddle querns, nine cooking pots, three lamps, as well as bowls, jugs, storage jars, and strainer spouts. In addition to sixty-nine clay loom weights, an upright beam from a loom, and a stone dying vat for clothing manufacture, House 1003 had a roof roller, a lamp, a chalice, eight cooking pots, and bowls, jugs, and jars, together with a blue faience bead. As we noted earlier, women wore blue and green stones to avert evil, especially the evil eye.

Besides a cooking pot, jars, and jugs, House 1032 produced six beads, one of them gold, a faience Nefertum amulet, a carnelian spacer, and a shell fragment. The carnelian spacer and gold bead are also apotropaic devices. As already mentioned, people regularly choose red as a color for apotropaic motifs because they believe it deflects demons and evil eyes. In addition, they think demons fear jewelry made of gold or other shiny metals. Locus 1031 showed two more eye amulets Israelite women wore to protect themselves and their newborn infants—a blue faience imitation cowrie amulet and a bone pendant with ring-and-dot designs. In Locus 1033 lay a hand-modeled goddess head from a vessel and two Egyptian Twenty-sixth to Twenty-second Dynasty scarabs. These rooms in eighth century BCE Lachish houses south of the palace confirm the importance of magic jewelry and female figurines in the everyday lifestyle of ancient Israelite women.

Many of the houses or shops along Road 1087 (Fig. 54, p. 337) leading into the town from the gate are only partially excavated, however what is reported for them is similar to what we know about the houses south of the palace. Each group of rooms had
Fig. 54: Lachish Road 1087 Houses, from Tufnell, *Lachish III*. 
at least one figurine or amulet. Along with conventional household goods like loom weights, a lamp, a cooking pot, bowls, jars, jugs, a ploughshare, and an oxgoad, House 1089 contained two bone fan-handles pierced for suspension, one with circle and dot designs, and a steatite scarab. In House 1078 lay a figurine with a curled wig and pointed cap, a lamp, a cooking pot, and storage jars, and in House 1080 a pendant, a cooking pot, and kitchen bowls and jars. In addition to a saddle quern and grinders, two lamps, a cooking pot, bowls, juglets, and jars, House 1040 presented a green faience quadruple uzat (divine Horus eye) amulet and a bone disk pierced for suspension. Similarly, House 1043 had a bone disk with circle designs, pierced for suspension, accompanied by burnt olive stones, two cooking pots, bowls, jars, and jugs as evidence of women’s cooking activity. Figure 55 on the next page shows the bone pendant with ring-and-dot designs and similarly decorated bone fan handles and a disk pierced for suspension from a necklace, all excavated from Iron Age Lachish Israeli houses.

The bone disks pierced for suspension from a necklace or possibly from the house doorway, as well as the bone pendants and fan handles with ring-and-dot designs, the green faience quadruple eye, and the sacred eye scaraboid, all manifest Israeliite women’s concern for protecting themselves and their children from evil eye and the child-stealing demons. The red, blue and green beads, miniature faience deity amulets, and deity figurines from eighth century BCE Lachish come from clearly feminine weaving and cooking contexts. They illustrate the magic jewelry Israeliite women wore and the images they placed in their homes to protect themselves and their children from the evil eye and child-stealing demons. As I will recount in the following, modern Middle Eastern women
combat the same fears about the evil eye and child-stealing demons with similar evil eye amulets—blue beads, cowrie shells, and shiny metal objects.

Fig 55: Bone Fan Handles and Pendants from Lachish, from O. Tufnell, *Lachish III: The Iron Age*, plate 63.
Modern Middle Eastern Evil Eye Beliefs and Amulets

According to Dundes (1981:66), modern Iranian women base their beliefs about the evil eye and effective countermeasures against it both on the Koran and on ancient Iranian Zoroastrian literature. Donaldson (1981:72) in a study reprinted from her 1938 publication on Iranian magic and folklore reports the persistence of the belief that blames a childless wife or the mother of a frail child who looks with longing at the child of a rival wife or at a healthy child for any illness that the child may contract. To protect themselves and their children, Iranian mothers choose talismans that resemble eyes. They frequently wear cowrie shells, animal eyes, and agates cut so that the layers of color form circles or agates cut into long bars with holes drilled in them. Donaldson (1981:73) says that "the dried eye of a sacrificed sheep is of all things the most highly esteemed, for almost invariably one dangles from the cap or shoulder of the Iranian baby." For examples of modern Iranian amulets against the evil eye see Figure 56 on the next page.

In Iranian Hasanabad mothers dress children with amulets to protect them from the evil eye, a force present in the gaze of some persons, and machinations of the jin and peri demons. Charms and amulets typically protect children, animals, and the churned buttermilk the women make. The evil eye may sicken and precipitate the death of an admired child, so children wear charms attached to their clothing or hair to protect them and to bring good fortune. Patty Watson (1979:233) reports:

One of Rustam Aga's younger sons displayed the following: on his back a brass bell, two white cowry shells (excellent protection against the Evil Eye), a blue glazed paste disc with multiple perforations, and a cloth case (probably containing
Fig. 56: Modern Iranian Charms against the Evil Eye, from Donaldson, *The Wild Rue*, plate facing p. 20.
Qur’anic inscriptions); on his left shoulder three buttons—one orange, one yellow, one white; on his right shoulder a red button, another blue glazed perforated disc, an old coin, two blue beads, and one large pink bead...Sheik Ali, at the age of one month, was bedecked with blue beads, as well as other beads of various colors, an embroidered cloth (the size of a lady’s handkerchief), inscribed medallions, tiny cloth packets enclosing Qur’anic excerpts, blue glazed discs, and a number of whole cloves. The cloves were perforated and strung horizontally, alternating with beads; two or three of these ornaments were pinned on the shoulders of the baby’s wrappings. On the band which tied these wrappings in place were two large blue glazed discs centering a small glass animal figurine. Finally, in the center front of his tiny cloth skull cap were two small blue glazed discs flanking one old coin.

Watson (1979:270) also describes the clothing and jewelry of the one year old daughter whom Guljamine is still breast-feeding:

Cap and jacket are decorated as follows: On either side of the cap are a string of shells, beads, and a blue-glazed perforated disc, with a third string in the center front; fastened to the back of her jacket are two wild goat beards, two coins (one old Iranian one, one George V English copper), a claw from the leopard Rustam killed several years ago, one blue bead, and two glass beads on a string with a small brass bell; attached elsewhere to the jacket were a naféperét [protection against a supernatural being], one or two blue-glazed perforated discs, a few cowries, a 5-riyal piece, some links from a little chain, and four small cloth-wrapped packets (probably containing inscriptions from the Qur’an).

In the Near East, in countries as widely-separated as Morocco, Greece, Lebanon, and Iran, the color blue seems particularly effective in counteracting the evil eye (Westermarck 1926; Lawson 1910; Harfouche 1981; Watson 1979; Dundes 1981).

Historically and cross-culturally, women prefer blue beads, especially eye beads with a blue matrix and white, yellow, or blue centers, to avert evil spirits (Dubín 1987:312).

Blue resembles an eye, so has the power to repel it, and the color has an affinity with the
moon or sky (Harfouche 1981:95-96; Erikson 1969:138; Dubin 1987:5). Harfouche (1981) writes that in Lebanon where almost all babies have a set of charms pinned over their shoulder or hanging on a gold chain around the neck or wrist, the most widely used amulet is the blue bead whose blue roundness symbolizes the full moon, giver of life, growth, and fertility, and the sky where the moon rises. In ancient mythology the full moon and associated goddesses had a special effect on mothers and children. For example, Anahita purified women’s wombs and breast milk for their infants, and the moon protected against Hecate the mistress of black magic and her horde of ghosts. Greek folklore portrays Hecate as a ghostly wolf or jackal, a common hypostasis of Lilith in Aramaic and Syriac texts (T. Gaster 1942:51).

Harfouche, a professor of maternal and child health in the school of public health at the American University in Beirut, researched infant care and maternal attitudes towards that care and published a book on customs and taboos related to infant health in modern Lebanon. He asked several hundred Armenian, Maronite Christian, and Sunni Muslim women, “Does the evil eye affect your milk supply?” and “Does the evil eye affect your baby’s health?” and concluded that the evil eye was an undeniable influence in the maternal nursing situation. Almost no one answered “no” to the questions. Half of the women believe that the evil eye “snatches the milk from the lactating mother” by drying or suppressing it, and the other half “have no opinion.” Besides this quantitative effect,

---

18 Since most Middle Easterners have brown eyes, the preference for blue may reflect a particular fear of strangers, especially Europeans.
the evil eye affects the milk qualitatively by diluting or poisoning it, an indirect result of
the evil force hitting the breast, inflaming it, and abscessing it. As to the harmful effect of
the evil eye in causing sudden illness, instant death, or other malady to an infant, 81%
answered in the affirmative. An overwhelming majority of Lebanese women fear that an
evil eye will destroy their children.

_invoking a victim’s deity provides an important antidote to the poisoning and
shriveling effect of the evil eye. Thus, someone present can overcome the “empty” eye of
a female acquaintance who is either childless or has a poor milk supply if they pronounce
the name of Deity:

The affected mother is usually reputed to have large breasts, and a milk supply
that arouses jealousy or envy in others. She can be spared the ill-effect if the evil-
eyed observer, the mother, or any person present, mentions the Deity, while the
envious comment is being made. (Harfouche 1981:88)

Ancient Near Eastern prayers and incantations necessarily named the patient’s protective
deity as well. Personal gods and goddesses cared for and protected the family as their
primary function. They often were addressed as intermediaries with the more powerful
high gods. Clients invoked their presence through burning incense or oil. The flames and
fragrant smoke pleased the deities and purified the surrounding area from illness caused
by supernatural evil influences. Because of this association, incense burners and lamps
accompany prayers and incantations in ritual texts, and they surface frequently in
excavated household shrines in the ancient Near East.

To treat a supposed victim of the evil eye, modern Iranians repeat an incantation
at sunset while they burn incense made from seeds of the wild rue mixed with leaves of
myrtle and frankincense (Donaldson 1981:74). In nearby Afghanistan, mothers of newborn infants throw spherical seeds on the coals of their fires to protect their babies from evil eyes. When the seeds crack and release their incense, women say that “the eyes are cracking.” If an evil eye quenches or poisons the body fluids of a Lebanese child or nursing mother, the Rakwi (Al Rukyat) and fumigation by incense provide the most common curative devices. Rakwi consists of a prayer or incantation said over a liquid medium like water or olive oil held in a small bowl over the child or near the affected breasts of the mother. The Lebanese women give four reasons for burning incense (Harfouche 1981:102):

a. The incense is used in sacred places, hence it pleases the Gods and is capable of repelling evil.
b. Fire burns evil and has a purifying effect.
c. The fumes obscure the path of evil and thus deter it.
d. Evil is incompatible with the pleasant odor of burning incense.

This ethnographic parallel from modern Lebanon reiterates the religious implications of burning incense. It “pleases the gods” and repels, burns, or deters evil. Ancient Akkadian incantations stored in the Neo-Assyrian library at Ninevah reveal the same concept that incense powerfully deters spiritual evil:

Incantation. Incense, dwelling in the mountains, created in the mountains, you are pure, coming from the mountains! (Fragrance of) juniper, fragrance of cedar, incense dwelling in the mountains; the powerful incense has been granted to us, the high mountains provide it for purification in the pure censer, filled with awe-inspiring splendor, the sweet oil, the choice oil, worthy of the table, and the pure [...], the materials of the purifying craft, make the incense-fumes, their

---

19 Personal communication from R. Adamec, granddaughter of the former king of Afghanistan.
product, issue forth: may he be clean like heaven, may he be pure like the core of heaven, may the evil tongue stand aside! (Šurpu 9:96-106; Reiner 1970:48)

These examples contradict Fowler's claim that ancient as well as modern people burn incense for purely aesthetic reasons.

According to Fowler (1985b:26), although incense is burned on religious occasions, incense has no religious significance for Iraqi villagers, Bedouin, or residents of the Sudan, and "in common houses the purpose is purely to give a pleasing odour to the room." Fowler explains incense burned as part of Israelite and other ancient Near Eastern religious rituals as a deodorant to cover putrefying smells in temples and funerals. However, the chimney-like niches for burning incense that archaeologists found in ancient Mesopotamian houses and neighborhood shrines corroborate the textual references to incense offered to accompany prayers and incantations to personal family gods. These household and neighborhood shrines were scenes of libations and grain offerings, but not of animal sacrifices that needed perfume covering.

The modern ethnographic parallels from Iran, Afghanistan, and Lebanon demonstrate that Middle Eastern women fear the effect of the evil eye of jealous women and child-stealing demons on their breast milk and on their young children. They pin amuletic jewelry on their children and on themselves to deflect these evil forces that could sicken them. If they perceive an evil effect caused by an adverse power, they burn incense and recite a prayer or incantation in the name of their deity in hopes of reversing it. I suggest that ancient Israelite women similarly protected themselves and their newborn infants with jewelry, personal deities and incense. They wore amuletic jewelry,
especially eye-motif jewelry, to deflect evil eyes and child-stealing demons. As modern
Middle Eastern women name their protective deity in situations of crisis for themselves
and their newborn infants, Israelite women invoked the goddess Asherah through her
name and her image. Believing that the fragrance of burning oil or incense brought
blessing and prosperity, they burned incense or oil on special incense altars or lamps in
their living rooms in order to invite the protecting presence of their personal goddess and
to frighten away unwanted supernatural beings.
Demonic Personifications of the Evil Eye—Lamashtu and Lilith

Charm texts against the evil eye often personify the evil eye as a female demon, usually as a child-stealing Lilith figure (Dundes 1981). The Syriac charm that binds evil eyes and “an evil spirit in the form of a hateful woman” who was “the suffocatress of children and women” (Hazard 1890-91) illustrates this personification. The scroll includes three pictures of saints battling demons, one of whose face is dominated by one large eye. According to Trachtenberg (1971:45), people trace the activity of the evil eye ultimately to demons, the effective agents in poorly-chosen words and malevolent sorcery. Just as modern Near Eastern incantations, incense, and amulets guard newborns from illness and death and prevent the power of the evil eye to poison and dry up a mother’s milk, ancient Babylonian incantations, incense, and amulets protected infants from being sickened by Lamashtu and Lilith (Lilitu or Ardat-lilu), the preying female spirits who represent the fear of pre- and neonatal mortality. Early Mesopotamian incantations and rituals show how the evil goddess poses the same threats to the mother and infant as the evil eye:

19.
... not a midwife, she wipes off the babe.
She keeps counting the months of women with child,
she is continually blocking the door of the woman in labor,
She seizes... the babe from the arm of the nurse.
The twin gods who saw her
and made her go through the window,
made her slip away past the cap of the door pivot (?)
bound her with...[ ] (van Dijk, Goetze, and Hussey 1985:26)
she is fierce, she is terrible,
she is a goddess, she is an Amorite
She strangles
the babes, the weak (?) ones
she gives water of...to drink. (van Dijk, Goetze, and Hussey 1985:26)

who carried fat, she slew the fat;
who carried milk, she slew the milk;
the nurses who opened widely,
who spread a little their strong elbows,
she has bitten;
...away with your breast from here! (van Dijk, Goetze, and Hussey 1985:49)

In these texts, the evil goddess causes infant death at the time of childbirth or kills
newborns by strangling them. She also kills them indirectly by biting the nurse’s breast to
“slay” its fat and milk, then substitutes her own poison breast. Incantation #19 reveals
that these actions and their effects can be stopped by other gods who “bind” her.

According to M. Gaster (1971b:1011) the magical formula of a child-protecting
charm and the symbolic character of the ceremony that accompanies it remain basically
the same through the centuries, although the religious environment and the protective
divine names change as it adapts to different cultures:

The religious background will shift from time to time whenever the nation
changes its religious principles, or when the magical formula has been carried
from a nation professing one form of religion to another professing a different
one. The gods will thus either be eliminated entirely or others will be substituted
for them, but the charm itself will survive that change...The efficacy of the
magical formula rests, as is well known, partly on the ceremony which
accompanies it, and is often of a symbolical character, but mostly on the divine
names which the charm contains...For wherever we may look, the whole range of
ancient religious mysteries stands under the ban of the mysterious ineffable Name
of the Divinities worshipped in those countries.
One legend, with examples that originate in various countries in the ancient Near East and in the modern Middle East and cover a period of more than two thousand years, involves a female demon confronted by an archangel or saint figure who forces her to tell all of her names and return the infants she has stolen (M. Gaster 1971). Gaster cites this story in its ancient Syriac form and in its modern form as told still by Syrian immigrants to the United States. The she-demon appears in ancient Greek as Gogol and in medieval versions as Gello or Gylo. A Jewish form of the legend recounted in the seventh century CE Alphabet of Sirach tells how Lilith becomes a child-strangling demon as a result of quarreling with her husband Adam and refusing to obey God. Three angels who possess power to drive her away from the infants she tries to kill confront this demoness:

But she begged of them, and said, ‘Leave me, for I have been created for the purpose of weakening [destroying] little babes, if it be a boy, eight days from the day of his birth, and if it be a girl, that I should have power over her up to twenty days.’ When they heard her words, they urged more strongly upon her to obey, and she then said, ‘I swear unto you by the name of the living and great God, that whenever I shall see either you or your names or your images on an amulet I will not hurt that child.’ And she took upon herself to lose every day a hundred of her children by death, therefore every day 100 Shiddim die. If we now write those names on an amulet for little children, and she sees those names, she remembers her oath and the child gets cured. (M. Gaster 1971b:1032-33)

An earlier form of the legend occurs in The Testament of Solomon, the pseudepigraphic folktale from the first centuries CE that fuses astrological and mystical beliefs adopted by Gnostics from Jewish, Egyptian, Assyrian, and Greek teachings. In chapter thirteen, a demon presents herself before Solomon:

When I had done this and had sat on my throne, I Solomon, asked her and said, “Who are you?” She replied, “Obyzouth. I do not rest at night, but travel around all the world visiting women, and divining the hour (when they give birth), I
search (for them) and strangle their newborn infants. I do not go through a single night without success. You are not able to give me orders. I even make the rounds (and go) into the remotest areas. Otherwise my work is limited to killing newborn infants, injuring eyes, condemning mouths, destroying minds, and making bodies feel pain."

When I, Solomon, heard these things, I was amazed. I did not look at her shape, for her body was darkness and her hair savage. I, Solomon, said to her, "Tell me, evil spirit, by what angel are you thwarted?" She said to me, "By the angel Raphael; and when women give birth, write my name on a piece of papyrus and I shall flee from them to the other world." When I heard these things I ordered her to be bound by the hair and to be hung up in front of the Temple in order that all those sons of Israel who pass through and see might glorify the God of Israel who has given me this authority. (Duling 1983; T. Sol. 13:3-7)

These ancient Roman-period and Byzantine Jewish legends and incantations against the child-stealing demon Lilith reflect their parallel ancient Mesopotamian Lamashtu texts. They approach ancient Israel in time and space in the thirteenth century BCE Ugaritic Lamashtu texts from Ras Shamra, which resemble late versions like the examples from the library of Sargon at Ninevah and show that women carried on the tradition in much the same form during the intervening centuries. The cuneiform Lamashtu amulet in a Greco-Roman period infant’s grave at Ras Shamra demonstrates West Semitic women’s tenacious custom of using amulets to combat the female child-stealing demon. Two limestone plaques from seventh century BCE Arslan Tash, discussed in the following, parallel ancient Israelite women’s use of symbolism in their homes of the same time period.
The Arslan Tash Inscriptions

Archaeologists found two limestone plaques in the vicinity of the Arslan Tash excavation in Upper Syria in 1933. Robert du Mesnil du Buisson published the first in 1939 and André Caquot and du Mesnil du Buisson finally published the second in 1971. The larger limestone plaque, about 3½ by 2¾ inches in size, has a suspension hole near the top, with traces of its hanging cord still visible. Three grotesque magical figures—a winged sphinx, a character armed with dirk and ax, and a scorpion-tailed female wolf gobbling up a small human victim whose legs protrude from the monster's mouth—were carved on it before the inscriptions were written on and around them. The shape, proportions and lack of clothing of the small human figure replicate depictions of very young children being carried or led by their mothers that Albenda (1983) photographed from Neo-Assyrian reliefs of captives from the time of Sennacherib (704-681 BCE).

Epigraphers describe the dialect of the Arslan Tash incantation to fend off the child-stealing demons as Hebrew (Albright 1939; Torczyner 1947, 1954), Canaanite (Albright 1939; T. Gaster 1942; Cross and Saley 1970), or Phoenician (Albright 1939; Cross and Saley 1970; Zevit 1977; Sperling 1982). The script typifies early seventh century BCE Aramaic modified to follow Phoenician rather than Aramaic orthographic practice, seeming to side with the language of the inscription rather than with its script (Cross and Saley 1970:42). This incantation against Lilith derives from Assyrian Lamashtu texts and presages the medieval Jewish Kimpertzettel. Figure 57 shows drawings of both sides of the plaque and their accompanying inscriptions.
Fig. 57: Arslan Tash Plaque against the Child-Stealing Demons, from R. du Mesnil du Boisson, "Une tablette magique de la région du moyen Euphrate," p. 423.
Scholars who have written on the goddess Asherah like Reed (1949) and Patai (1967) cite Albright's 1939 translation and interpretation of the Arslan Tash text as a prayer to Asherah for help in childbirth. Although other scholars like T. Gaster (1942) proposed reading the first god-name as Ašur rather than Asherah, Cross and Saley (1970:46) support the "Asherah" reading, stating that "the god (ʿEl) ʿOlam is set in chiastic parallelism with his consort ʿAsherah in a bicolon which is metrically impeccable (8 + 8 syllables)." Here is Cross's translation:

Incantations: O Fliers, goddesses,  
[O] Sasam son of Pidrišša, god,  
and O Stranglers of Lamb(s):  
The house I enter, ye shall not enter  
And the court I tread, ye shall not tread.  
The Eternal One has made a covenant with us,  
Asherah has made (a pact) with us  
And all of the sons of El,  
And the great of the council of the Holy Ones,  
With the oaths of Heaven and Ancient Earth,  
With the oaths of Baʾl, lord of earth,  
With oaths of Hawrān whose word is true,  
And his seven concubines,  
And the eight wives of Baʾl Qudš.  

Legends or inscriptions on the three figures augment the main inscription:  

The Legend on the Winged Sphinx:  

O fliers, from the dark room pass away!  
Now! Now! night demons.  

The Inscription on the Human-eating She-wolf:  

From (my) house, O crushers, go forth!  

The Legend on the Ax-wielding God:
As for Sasam, let it not be opened to him,
And let him not come down to (my) door posts.
The sun rises, O Sasam:
Disappear, and fly away home.

This inscribed plaque dates to the time of the Judean monarchy when Assyria controlled Syria-Palestine. Its West Semitic dialect approximates Hebrew. The plaque illustrates a woman’s naming her personal protective deities in order to prevent the entrance into her house of night-flying thieves. The figures on the plaque and the descriptions of the demonic flying goddess employ motifs widespread in ancient Near Eastern cultures as well as in medieval Jewish literature.

_Flying Night Demons_

The visualization of the child-stealing demon as a flying creature or preying night bird has parallels in Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Arabian, Greek, and Jewish literature and iconography. The painted terracotta “Burney relief” from the early Larsa period in Mesopotamia shows a winged nude female figure with bird’s feet flanked by owls (Lloyd 1984:170), and Lamashtu texts warn her to fly away “with the birds of heaven” (T. Gaster 1942:47). The Arslan Tash plaque’s epithet “flier in the dark room” also parallels the sixteenth century BCE Berlin Papyrus 3027 which consists of Egyptian incantations for mothers and children against child-stealing spirits (Zauber sprüche für Mutter und Kind, Erman 1901; printed in Pritchard 1950:328):

Another (charm). Mayest thou flow away, he who comes in the darkness and enters in furtively, with his nose behind him, and his face reversed, failing in that for which he came!
Mayest thou flow away, she who comes in the darkness and enters in furtively,
with her nose behind her, and her face turned backwards, failing in that for which she came!
Hast thou come to kiss this child? I will not let thee kiss him! Hast thou come to silence (him)? I will not let thee set silence over him! Hast thou come to injure him? I will not let thee injure him! Hast thou come to take him away? I will not let thee take him away from me!

The same papyrus describes the child-stealer as a “breaker of bones” (T. Gaster 1942:49), which the legend on the human-eating she-wolf echoes with its epithet “crushers.”

Arabian and Greek contexts call her a screech-owl (T. Gaster 1942:45). Jewish literature associates Lilith with kites and jackals (Isa 34:14-15). She possesses wings (Nid. 24b; Rashi ad Sanh. 109a) and she is called Broxa “noxious bird” or “bird which flies by night” (Semah David, 1587) in medieval Jewish parlance. Targum Onqelos translates one of the unclean birds in Lev 11:16 and Deut 14:15 as htypt² “snatcher,” the same term Aramaic charms use for the name of a demon (Montgomery 1913:157; T. Gaster 1942:46). These examples show that a popular belief in a birdlike demon who snatched victims circulated throughout the ancient Near East.

The root ⅃⅃ in the caption on the winged sphinx occurs in Akkadian in both masculine (lîlî) and feminine (lîlîtru). Cross (1970:46) reads a nun at the end of the word so transcribes ⅃⅃n “night demons” in the sense of “Liliths.” ⅃⅃n is the normal West Semitic plural form of the name lîlit, and it is the form rabbinic texts use as well. Butterweck (Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments 2(3):437), cited by Hutter (1995:973), reads the letters as ⅃⅃n, which he translates “night and day.” Gaster (1947:50) prefers the feminine transcription “Lilith” for the caption on the winged sphinx although only the masculine form ⅃⅃ which he interprets as ⅃⅃ is visible, since the
feminine terms “goddess” and “strangleress” in the main inscription require the feminine meaning. In addition to the biblical allusion to feminine night flying spirits in Isa 34:14-15, it is quite possible that the masculine form occurs in the Hebrew Bible in Isa 2:18 which together with the following verse should read according to Gaster “and the idols shall be as a lītū that flits by. And they shall enter the caverns of the rock and the holes in the ground before the Terror of YHWH.” Gaster supports this with five points: (1) ḫlp is used to express a spirit’s movement in Job 4:15, and lītū, from Sumerian LIL, really means “wind;” (2) Babylonian and Greek incantations frequently banish demons to clefts in rocks; (3) in magical incantations the same “Terror” causes the flight of demons; (4) the new reading introduces a typical Isaiahic paronomasia between līlīm and līlī (and the idols shall be like idle wraiths which flit away); and (5) the final yodh could easily have dropped out before the initial yodh of yḥlp. Gaster is trying to prove a similar point to mine: people in the biblical world believed they could banish flying spirits by speaking the name of or exhibiting the image of a powerful protective deity.

Excavators of second to fifth century CE Jewish tombs at Irbid (Arbela) east of the southern end of Lake Galilee found several tiny metal foil amulets inscribed in Aramaic with Hebraisms and folded inside gold or bone capsules. These amulets continue a long tradition since bone and metal amulets that protected against the threats of evil eye and child-stealing demons were popular among women who followed Yahwism in earlier centuries during the Israelite monarchy. One of the Irbid amulets, a bronze foil talisman probably intended to be worn by the child it protected, addresses the evil eye, calamities,
and demons. Figure 58 pictures one of the earliest examples from the tombs, a $3\frac{1}{2}$ by $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch silver amulet that dates to the second or third century CE. Part of its inscription reads:

In the name of the great God. Amen,
Halleluia, Forever, Amen, Selah.
Peace to this Marian daughter of Š.
and to the unborn-child which is in her bowels from the lilith of her canopy.
Shemariah angel of Yahû protect her for ages. Hallelu le-Yah... (Montgomery 1910-11:275, lines 20-26)

This inscription calls on the great God to send his angel to protect a young woman and her unborn child from the “lilith” that hides in the canopy of her bed. Note that the inscription expects Yahû to use the service of an intermediary protective spirit. Ancient Mesopotamians often depended on their personal gods and goddesses as intermediaries between them and the more powerful high gods. The Kuntillet ʿAjrud and Khirbet el-Kom inscriptions name Yahweh and his Asherah as if Asherah were the intermediary agent of protection. As I will show in the following, a client claimed protection on the basis of a covenant with her family’s personal protective deity. In Israel that protective intermediary was Asherah.
Fig. 58: Second century CE Aramaic Amulet against Lilith, from Montgomery, “Some Early Amulets from Palestine,” fig. A.
Deity Bonds, Bans, and Protective Covenants

The Arslan Tash incantation names first a “bond” with Asherah or Ašur, then with Baal and the Consort of Hades, along with his other seven wives. This amulet demonstrates that seventh century Syrian women feared child-stealing gods and goddesses, and they called on beneficent gods and goddesses to protect them from these beings. Sperling (1982:9) underlines the connection of this inscription with ancient Israel:

First, it must be noted that though the inscription was found in Syria, the fact that it was written in Phoenician, brings it into close connection with ancient Israel. That Phoenician mythology and cultic terminology greatly influenced the religious conceptions of ancient Israel scarcely requires demonstration. Secondly, though the present inscription dates from the seventh century B.C.E. there are several indications that its origins are older. It will be recalled that it is common for incantations to reflect commonly accepted and popular beliefs rather than the rarefied speculations of theologians. If so, then it was not novel to speak of a covenant between divinities and human beings well before the incantation was composed. In fact the second incantation bears a colophon indicating that its source was an older scroll.

Line 9, krt ln. ʔlt ʔlm ʕr. krt, which Gaster translates “there hath been made with us a bond everlasting! Ašur hath made (it)” and Cross reads “The Eternal One has made a covenant with us, Asherah has made (a pact),” uses the word ʔlt “bond, ban,” which occurs again three times in lines 13-15. The idea of a votive agreement between one or more personal deities and an individual or family is central to ancient Near Eastern religion. The individual or family agrees to “serve” the deity with regular or special offerings if the deity will protect and prosper them. The Hebrew Bible portrays the Israelite religion as first a covenant relationship between Yahweh and Abraham, then as a pact with the descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel at Sinai. The Hebrew Bible uses
the same vocabulary as the Arslan Tash inscription. The cognate Hebrew יָרָה “bond, covenant, curse, ban,” occurs in the same verbal expression קְרַת יָרָה “made (cut) a covenantal oath” in Deut 29:11, 13 (Eng 29:12, 14) when describing the covenant that Yahweh made with the men, women and children of Israel. This context presents Yahweh as the deity of choice rather than the other nations’ “gods made of wood and stone, silver and gold.” The Arslan Tash inscription’s expression “make an everlasting covenant” is also familiar from the Hebrew Bible. The synonymous term ברת “covenant” that occurs with קְרַת יָרָה “made (cut) a covenantal oath” in Deut 29:11 is modified by לִמּוּ “everlasting” and used with the same verb קְרַת “make (cut):” ברת לִמּוּ קְרַת “make an everlasting covenant” in Isa 61:8 and Jer 32:40.

According to Gaster (1947:66), the term יֵרָה in the incantation “combines the two notions of (a) a pact of protection covenanted by superior powers and (b) a ban imposed upon the demons.” The same formula occurs in Akkadian incantations and on Lamashtu plaques and in general is parallel to its lineal descendant in the Jewish קימפטצטטל (Kindbettzettel) (Montgomery 1913) which says, “By a ban from God, thou shalt be restrained.” Jewish קימפטצטטל plaques are hung in the room where a woman is giving birth to protect her and her newborn infant from the child-stealing demoness Lilith. The Kimpetzettel plaques often have “Get out, Lilith” written in large Hebrew letters in their center. Fig. 59 shows an example of the Kimpetzettel apotropaic inscription published in Sefer Raziel, a work compiled in the thirteenth century, but containing much Gaonic (Islamic period) mystical and magical information.
Fig. 59: Jewish Kimpetzettel against Lilith,
from T. Gaster, “A Canaanite Magical Text,” plate II.
The Divine Name and House Amulets

The invocation of celestial beings for individual protection through pronouncing their powerful names was an essential ingredient of ancient Near Eastern religion. Israelite rituals derived from a conviction of the reality of the spirit world and they built on Egyptian and Mesopotamian lore. These Israelite rituals later developed into elaborate Talmudic traditions of demons and angels and gave rise to medieval Kabbalistic conceptions of a cosmic struggle between opposing good and evil powers. The names of God and his angels became very important in Jewish magic and mysticism. The Jewish Kabbalistic work Zohar (Wa-ethanan 263.2) says that, “When a demon takes up position at a man’s door, and is free to work mischief, if the man but stand on the left and fix his gaze upon the mysterious Name of God and repeat it to him, he will render him unable to accomplish his evil design.” T. Gaster (1942:71) wrote that the Samaritan priest Abisha, when asked in 1940 whether modern residents of Nablus (Shechem) believed in a child-stealing Lilith, answered that the priests wrote out the Benediction from Num 6:22-27 for the people and instructed them to hang it on the mothers and children because in the context of the Benediction God told Aaron, “Set my name upon the children of Israel” (Num 6:27). Mesopotamian texts and material archaeology underline the importance in the ancient Near East of naming the protective deity in order to deflect malevolent forces.

In Mesopotamia once an individual or family had made a pact with their personal deity to provide them protection, it was usual to draw their picture on a limestone plaque
or to make a figurine of them, and to pronounce their names to actualize their protective force:

The two things go together, for the name possesses precisely the same potency as the image. These two things constitute the essential "virtue" of a spell, the actual formula being secondary. If for instance, as in the present case, a god or protective spirit has compacted with a votary to guard him from demons, the outward sign of such compact, which alone renders it effective, is the exhibition to the demon of the divine or angelic name and/or image. The "ban" pronounced on evil spirits has, for this reason, always to be pronounced in the name of the god or protective genius. (T. Gaster 1942:69)

Seventh century Assyrians buried magically protective clay or wood figurines of minor gods or beneficent spirits near the door of their house or placed them in rooms:

In a different type of building ritual of the Neo-Assyrian Period, magically protective figurines of clay and wood represented various minor gods and beneficent demons and monsters. These were buried or placed in the rooms. In many of these cases, the efficacy of the figurines depended upon the supposed localisation of the power of a supernatural being within the figurines itself (a parallel to the procedure concerning the preparation of cult statues.) Certain figurines and plaques had very specific functions in particular rituals. Among these were those used to exorcise Lamaštu. (Black and Green 1992:82)

Among the illustrations Black and Green (1992) provide is a plaque-figurine of the protective god Lahmu from the foundation of a seventh century building at Assur with "Get out, evil demon!" and "Come in, good demon!" inscribed on his arms, shown in Figure 60 with a cylinder seal impression picturing Lahmu holding aloft a fierce lion.

These magically protective Mesopotamian figurines and plaques represented deities or their emissary spirits who protected the inhabitants of the house, especially from child-stealing demons, the same function as the Arslan Tash plaques. Israelite pillar-base goddess figurines fulfilled this protective function in ancient Israelite homes. Women
believed Asherah's power localized within the figurine, so they placed it in the house to protect it from malevolent supernatural beings, probably near the doorway to its courtyard or living room or on its roof.

Fig. 60: The Protective God Lahmu Defeating a Lion, and with “Get out, evil demon! and “Come in, good demon!” inscribed on his arms, from Black and Green, Gods, Demons, and Symbols in Ancient Mesopotamia, figs. 91 and 9.
The Arslan Tash plaque was pierced at the top for suspension, but it was too large to be worn as an amulet. T. Gaster (1942:42) thinks that, like the Jewish Kindbettzettel, people hung it in the room where a woman was giving birth. Cross and Saley (1970) guess that the plaque because of its shape and drilled hole hung near the entrance doorway of a house and was not used solely for childbirth. They posit parallels with biblical traditions:

We believe it not farfetched to point out a parallel between the plaque and its function, and the marks made with the blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts of Israelites in Yawhistic tradition, designed to protect Israelite firstborn in the night of the last plague on Egypt (Exodus 12:22 f.). No less a parallel is the practice required by the Deuteronomist, also writing in the seventh century, instructing the children of Israel to inscribe their doorposts with words from the law (Deut. 6:4-9). These practices in Israel evidently had a pagan background. In other words, we suggest that the Arslan Tash plaque was a pagan prototype of the mēṣūzāḥ, the Israeliite portal inscription. (Cross and Saley 1970:48)

The seventh century BCE Arslan Tash plaques date from the same time period as the Israeliite female pillar-figurines. They have parallels in Mesopotamian protective spirits and in Jewish doorway-protection inscriptions. In Semitic cultures the evil eye of gods, demons, or people presented a dangerous force that only a more powerful divine name or image could resist. The goddess Asherah invoked through her image in the large-breasted pillar-base figurines served as the protective spirit of ancient Israeliite houses. Demon-protective red or black paint often emphasized her conspicuous guarding eyes that warned away the evil eye and the child-stealing demons during childbirth and the delicate neonatal period. The second Arslan Tash inscribed plaque underlines the significance of strong protective eyes that defy evil eyes.
Eye to Eye in the Second Arslan Tash Tablet

The second amuletic limestone plaque from Arslan Tash (Fig. 61) measures 53 by 33 mm. and contains an inscription written in the same language and script as the first.

Fig. 61: Arslan Tash Plaque Against the Evil-Eyed Demon, from Caquot and du Mesnil du Boisson, "La second tablette," fig. 1.
T. Gaster (1973:18) describes the tablet:

The obverse contains six lines of writing; the reverse shows an ogre, with goggle eye and with scorpions at (or attached to) his heels standing and gobbling up his victim. The legs of the latter protrude from the monster's mouth, just as do those of the hapless wretch who is depicted on the companion piece in the process of being devoured by a demonic she-wolf. Above the figure and on either side of it are further lines of writing, and the text is continued on the edge of the tablet.

The plaque features an evil-eyed demon named *MZH* who consumes human victims by drying their body fluids with his evil eye. A "big," "open," or "unblemished" eye defends the sleeping victim by opposing the evil-eyed demon. The following translation is compiled from T. Gaster's (1973) and Cross's (1974) transcriptions:

**Obverse:**
Charm against the demon who drains his victims [or Blood-Spatterer].
Baal [or the lord] has harnessed his chariot.
"Big-Eye" has gone forth and "Open-Eye" from the steppe.
Woe, O divine 'Spoiler,' O holy one!

**Reverse:**
I have shot the bolt.
Flee, O 'Eyer' (with the evil eye), from (my) house.
From (my) head. O 'Consumer of Eyes,'
From the head of the dreamer when he dreams;
By virtue of the Unblemished Eye your
casting of the evil eye will be stopped!
This charm is from the Scroll of the Enchanter.

Cross suggests that the name *MZH* means "one who sprinkles or spatters" from the *hipqîl* form of *nzy* "sprinkle or spatter, especially blood." Gaster prefers "one who drains his victims" from Hebrew *mzh* "suck out" (Deut 32:24). Both variations include the concept that the demon deprives the victim of vital body fluids. Montgomery (1913:258) translated a parallel early Jewish charm against the child-stealing demon who
threatens, "I am going to take her newborn child, to drain (li-mššš) its blood and to drain the marrow of its bones." The second Arslan Tash incantation confirms the ancient Near Eastern concept that demons or demigods drained their victims' body fluids by casting an evil eye on them while they were sleeping.

The idea that women in childbirth and their newborn infants are attacked by demons who consume healthy liquids and substitute them with poison persists in modern Middle Eastern Islamic societies. Many Lebanese women believe that the evil eye "snatches the milk from the lactating mother" by drying or suppressing it. The evil eye can affect the milk qualitatively by diluting or poisoning it, an indirect result of the evil force hitting the breast, inflaming it, and abscessing it. 81% of the women questioned believed the evil eye caused sudden illness, instant death, or other malady to an infant. Invoking a victim's deity usually proves an adequate antidote to the poisoning and shriveling effect of the evil eye on body liquids.
Child-Stealing Demons in Modern Islamic Society

Demons similar to Lamashtu and Lilith continually appear in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic mythologies. One Islamic female jin named Ummu's-subyan victimizes newborn children:

In Islamic society a female djinn named Ummu's-subyan will enter the house of a newborn child and if she finds it alone she will suckle the child and then slip away. As a result of this visitation the child will refuse its mother's milk and slowly starve to death. A Persian picture of this djinn portrays her with wings, horns, and talons, flying in to suckle a child in its crib. (Lichty 1971:24)

Twentieth century Iranian women's fear of the evil jin and peri provides a modern ethnographic parallel to Lilith and Lamashtu beliefs. In rural Hasanabad, jin are the most important supernatural beings. Etymologically, jin means something like "creature of darkness," a similar idea to the biblical "pestilence that stalks in darkness" (Ps 91:6) and the Babylonian Maqlu bowl's "Lilith who cometh in darkness" (T. Gaster 1942:48).

Yol (or Al), a hideous-looking female witch-like creature is "very likely to enter or seize the liver of a woman in childbirth. When this happens, the woman dies. Yol often inhabits water so all water must be removed from a room occupied by a woman in labor" (Watson 1979:234). Watson is aware of an incident in which a woman who had just been delivered of a baby girl in Hasanabad began hemorrhaging and fainted. Three of the villagers tried to expel the jin by beating the woman and pushing needles into her scalp, since jin are afraid of metal; unfortunately, she died. An another occasion, a baby seemed to have undergone serious damage to its central nervous system and was having
convulsions before it died. A woman named Fatma, the only person in Hasanabad who had a Koran, had prayed over the child, but when it died she “explained that a peri had wanted the child, and so had touched it on the back of the head; as a result it died” (Watson 1979:235). Twentieth century Islamic women’s fear of the evil jin and peri parallels ancient Near Eastern beliefs and rituals against Lilith and Lamashtu child-stealing demons. In addition, their preventive measures against evil eye damage to their breast milk reflect long-standing traditions of dealing with poor milk supply and high infant mortality.
Breast Amulets

Anthropologists and textual scholars who have studied ancient principles of magic discern ideas such as "like produces like, and contact implies contagion" (Frazer 1959) and "effective reduplication with empowered images" (Ritner 1987), often referred to as "sympathetic magic." In ancient Mesopotamia young mothers wore semiopaque cream-colored stones called "milk-stones" to ensure a copious supply of milk (Van Buren 1945a:18). Ancient Near Eastern women sometimes protected their milk supply from evil influences with breast amulets. A 10,000-8,000 BCE Natufian necklace of breast-shaped bone beads found at el-Wad in the Jordan Valley furnishes the earliest example of breast-shaped amulets. In the First Intermediate Period (2181-2130 BCE) Egyptians wore amulets in the forms of breasts and other human anatomical parts to protect those body parts (Dubin 1987:37). Models of various body parts surfaced in Mesopotamian excavations. Some such as feet possibly represent offerings for specific ailments. Texts and archaeology demonstrate that people used models of human sexual organs associated with the cult of Ishtar (Inana) to restore potency. Babylonian incantations to help overcome impotence stipulate that: "You make a figurine" and place it at the head of the bed during intercourse (Black and Green 1992:82, 152). These amulets that people employed to preserve or promote the body part function they represent exemplify Ritner's (1987:249) definition of Heka "magic" as effective duplication with empowered images. The Near Eastern concept of effective duplication suggests that Israelite women made
female figurines with large breasts to protect their own milk supply from malevolent forces that attempted to drain them and substitute poison for healthy milk.

The two most visible aspects Judean pillar-figurines portray are their eyes and breasts. Eyes relate to breasts in that they both represent two essential functions of motherhood. Mothers nourish their infants and protect them by watching for danger. Evil eyes damage nursing breasts, but strong divine eyes deflect disastrous evil eyes. In the same way, breast amulets as empowered images magically protect an abundant milk supply, and ultimately full breasts represent female deities who provide and protect women's milk supply. The prevalent interrelation between eyes and breasts in apotropaic imagery shows in Mesopotamian art, in which artisans sometimes draw eyes the same as breasts. See, for example, the plaque and pot handles in Figure 62, on which circles represent both eyes and breasts. Possibly the rosettes that occur with eyes in early Mesopotamian representations of the "mother goddess" symbolize her breast nipples. In mother goddess iconography in the wider Mediterranean area, an eye often equals a breast. Examples from Spain and Yugoslavia in old Europe (Fig. 63) feature concentric

Fig. 62: Plaque and Pot Handles from Early Mesopotamia, from Contenau, Manuel d'archéologie orientale, figs. 107, 263, 264.
Fig. 63: Mediterranean Area Representations of Eyes and Breasts from ancient Syria (a), Crete (b), Yugoslavia (c), and Spain (d-j), from Crawford, *The Eye Goddess*, figs. 18 and 19.
circles or circles with short lines radiating from the circumference to symbolize both eyes and breasts (Crawford 1957:41, 48, 96, 98; Dundes 1981:277). These eye and breast-goddess motifs come from the same geographic areas where child-stealing Lilith legends persist. The same circle with short lines radiating from its circumference appears with the goddess on the Canaanite Lion Lady plaques.

Thurston (1907:254), an ethnographer from the early twentieth century, recorded precautions Malabar residents of southern India take to ward off the evil eye from new houses and fertile fields. They suspend from the ceiling of the house an upside-down pot with black and white dots, a wooden monkey with large testes, or “the figure of a Malayali woman, with protuberant breasts.” Malayalis place a straw figure with dotted costume on top of a bamboo pole in a flourishing field. If female, the figure has “well-developed breasts.” This custom further illustrates the relationship between breasts and the evil eye. The black and white dots imitate eyes, so represent powerful divine eyes that repel malevolent ones. The large testes and “protuberant breasts” likewise symbolize resistance to the evil eye, because they portray the opposite of its evil effect of stifling life by drying up essential body fluids.

Although most Bronze Age figurines from the Levant represent the face, breasts, and pubic triangle of goddesses, some omit showing the breasts. On the other hand, many Israelite period figurines lack depictions of female genitalia, and instead the breasts and eyes feature prominently. Various archaeological specialists describe pillar-base figurine breasts as “prominent,” “large,” “distended,” or “offered.” Considering the prevalent fear of a mother’s milk being dried or drained by demonic forces who then substitute their
own poison breast milk, it is likely that the figurines pictured the goddess Asherah as a benevolent *dea nutrix* who protected the mother and her newborn infant from the evil eye and its personification as a child-stealing demoness. Along with amuletic jewelry, the large-breasted female figurines presented powerful deterrents to the evil eye and the child-stealing demons that attempted to damage infants directly or indirectly through depleting or poisoning their mothers’ breast milk. Fig. 64 presents four drawings of female pillar-base figurines from Iron Age Judah, two from seventh/sixth century Lachish and the third and fourth from eighth century Beer-sheba and Jerusalem.

Fig. 64: Judean Pillar-Base Figurines from Eighth and Seventh Century BCE Lachish, Beer-sheba, and Jerusalem, from Winter, *Frau und Göttin*, Abb. 31-33.
Pillar-Base Figurines as Votives in Household Cult

The clay pillar-base figurines consist of heads, heavy breasts emphasized by the arms encircling and supporting them, and solid or hollow conical bodies. Since the excavators found a mold for mass-producing female figurines in the tenth century "cultic structure" at Ta'anach, the figurines may have been used as votives or amulets at shrines. However, since the vast majority of them came from domestic contexts, it is more likely that they served as votives in household shrines. Women used them in family religion as miniatures of life-sized images of Asherah "to bring the reality of the goddess and her power closer in order to ensure successful child-rearing" (Dever 1994:150-51).

Votive figurines represent a contract between a worshiper and her personal deity. They stand in a public or private shrine as tokens of the agreement. The votive may represent the praying worshiper as a reminder to the goddess that she must comply with the wish. In other cases women may leave the votive at the shrine as a gratitude gift after the deity granted the request. The pact or covenant generally consists in the worshiper vowing to serve the personal deity with daily or crisis offerings if the deity protects the individual or family or answers a certain request.

Women in the ancient Levant habitually made vows, often in connection with progeny issues. For example, King Lemuel's mother refers to him as "the son of my vow" (Prov 31:2). She apparently had contracted with her personal deity that she would present certain offerings if she obtained a son. The Ugaritic legend of King Keret (KTU 1.14-16) describes a man who has lost seven childless wives and is without progeny. El promises
him a new wife who will bear his heir Yassib. In response Keret vows to give Asherah (Athirat in the Ugaritic dialect) two or three times his bride’s weight in silver if the mission is successful:

Athirat of Surra and Goddess of Sidian: If I take Hurraya into my house, bring the maid into my court; I will give her double in silver, her triple in gold. 
(KTU 1.14, Story of Keret)

The vow was a convenient medium of religious expression for women, since it could be practiced outside the sphere of religious and political authority structures (Berlinerblau 1966). Israelite women frequently made vows (Numbers 30). For example, Hannah vowed to dedicate her son to Yahweh if he provided her one (1 Sam 1:11):

Hannah made this vow: ‘LORD of Hosts, if you will only take notice of my trouble and remember me, if you will not forget me but grant me offspring, then I shall give the child to the LORD for the whole of his life, and no razor shall ever touch his head.

Van der Toom (1989) posits a type of “sacred” prostitution enacted by people, especially women, who had made a vow to a deity, but when the time arrived for payment they did not have sufficient resources to do so. They hired themselves as secular prostitutes and then used the proceeds to pay their debts at the sanctuary (Deut 23:17-18; Proverbs 7).

Keel and Uehlinger (1998:108) view votive figurines as dual representations—they identify the goddess as an ideal woman and they also identify the female worshiper with the goddess. Mallowan (1933:209) likewise, when debating the identity of the “eye-idol” he found by the thousands in the Tell Brak Eye Temple, suggested that the dedicators were projecting themselves through the image of the deity—that is to say, that there was a dual concept of god and person, the person being expressed in the image and
likeness of the god. Margaret Morden gives a list of the possible range of meanings for “votive” in her paper “Cult from Clay: The Evidence of the Terracottas from the Lower Sanctuary on the East Acropolis of Idalion” (1997). Votive can cover a scale of votary/deity interaction stretching from votive equals deity to votive equals votary, with intermediate possibilities as well:

**Scale of Votary/Deity Interaction**
- Votive = Deity
- Votive = representation of Deity
- Votive = symbol of Deity
- Votive = aspect of Deity
- Votive = aspect of Deity and Votary
- Votive = relationship between Deity and Votary = Prayer
- Votive = aspect of Votary and Deity
- Votive = aspect of Votary
- Votive = symbol of Votary
- Votive = representation of Votary
- Votive = Votary

If we were to take either end of Morden’s scale, the pillar figurine would represent a female. If the pillar figurine votive represents the deity exclusively, then the deity is a goddess, almost certainly Asherah. If the figurine represents the votary exclusively, then the votary is obviously a woman and not a man. A further look at Morden’s explanation of the range of meanings for “votive” clarifies this even more:

**Possible range of meanings for Votive**
- This is me (A).
- This is how I want you to think of me (praying/kneeling/being brave/being beautiful, etc.) (A).
- This is how you think of me (A).

- This is what I want from you (B).
- This is what you have already given me—thanks (B).
- This is what I have and want to keep (B).
This is what I think you want (B).
This is what I want to give you (B).

This is you (C).
This is what I want you to be (C).
This is what I think you are like (C).
This is what I admire/like/dislike/abhor/fear about you (C).

Taking these in order, we can attach a particularized meaning for the female pillar-base figurines to each possibility. An Israelite woman might mean:

This is me: I am a woman with watchful eyes guarding my infant. My breasts are large, full, and distended, offering pure milk to my newborn child.

This is how I want you to think of me: I want to establish a covenant with you to give me a child, then to guard my breasts and my newborn infant.

This is how you think of me: You want me to be a successful nursing mother with a healthy child.

This is what I want from you: I want to have a newborn child whom I am offering breasts distended with lots of pure, healthy milk.

This is what you have already given me—thanks: You are keeping your end of the pact we have made. You have given me a healthy child, and (s)he is nursing well so that my breasts are continually filling with lots of pure milk.

This is what I have and want to keep: My child is healthy and my breasts are full; please guard my child and my breasts from being sickened by the evil eye and the child-stealing demons.

This is what I think you want: This figurine is an invitation for you to continually guard the doorway of this house.

This is what I want to give you: This figurine is a reminder that your presence is needed here to guard this house and your name is invoked over this newborn child.
This is you: You are a source of motherly protection for me. Your eyes frighten away the night demons who fly into the house to steal my child while I am sleeping.

This is what I want you to be: I want you to stand as my substitute to guard my child from demons while I am sleeping.

This is what I think you are like: Your eyes and name are powerful enough to counter the evil eye of any jealous woman or demon who tries to damage my milk or my newborn child. (Note the watchful, threatening eyes on the Tell Beit Mirsim heads in Figure 65.)

This is what I admire/like about you: Your presence is powerful enough to protect me and you can intercede with Yahweh if I need a more powerful divine eye. You are a woman, so you are more approachable and understand a woman’s concerns.

---

Fig. 65: Pillar-Base Figurines from Houses at Tell Beit Mirsim, from Albright, *Tell Beit Mirsim III. The Iron Age*, plate 31.
Morden's analysis leads us to believe that Israelite women used the female figurines for protection for themselves and their children. If we were to imagine, on the contrary, that the image represented a male votary, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to invent a statement that would mean "This is me," "This is how I want you to think of me," or "This is how you think of me." We can think of a father with watchful eyes, but we cannot think of one who would portray himself with distended breasts! The same holds true for the (C) meanings. There are traditions of protective male gods with piercing eyes in Egypt, even images of dogs who protect the houses in Mesopotamia. But would male gods ever be represented as offering large breasts full of milk?!

Only the (B) meanings could be said by a man to a male or female deity. For example, a father could be thanking a deity for giving him a healthy wife, making a statement that he wants to keep it that way, or giving her to Yahweh or Asherah for protection. A man might pray these prayers at the public Yahweh temple or bamah with its asherah pole; however, we do not find many female figurines at public sanctuaries in Israel. Even if a father were making the image to represent his wife, it would be in the light of the evil eye, child-stealing complex and his wife's need to have enough breast milk to feed the newborn child. The image would need to stand in the house in order to invite the powerful protective presence that would guard the child while the mother was sleeping.
Evil Eye and Child-Stealing Demons—Summary and Conclusions

The medieval view of magic as opposed to (Church) religion, held also by late 1800's and early 1900's apologetic interests that deemed magic as foreign to or opposed to an Israelite religion distinct from its Near Eastern neighbors, has given way to seeing magic and religion as complementary or operating on a continuum. This chapter has stressed the commonalities in ancient Near Eastern apotropaic rituals, especially those related to mother and child protection, and the continuity between religion and magic. In Egypt and Mesopotamia magic and religion interacted as the situation dictated and both depended on each other. Incantation rituals derived power from the deity they named, and prayers to deities caught their attention through flames, incense, images or some other ritual instrumentality.

Women base their protective rituals on legends about the magical powers, both for evil and for good, of certain gods and goddesses or their agents whose names change, but whose functions remain remarkably similar throughout four millennia of Near Eastern history. Forms and rituals that deflected evil eyes and child-stealing demigods passed between cultures and assimilated to each indigenous theological system. Egyptian legends about the evil eye of Apopis who attempted to disrupt the cycles of life and death inspired the symbolism of apotropaic jewelry. Israelite women wore eye beads, divine Horus-eye pendants, and Bes pendants in their homes at Lachish, Jerusalem and elsewhere while cooking, weaving, and feeding their children. Egyptian "sound eye" and "much-suffering
eye” symbolism continued to protect Yahwistic women and their infants in Jewish Second Temple and rabbinc and early Christian times.

Red, blue, and gold beads, pendants, rosettes, and eye designs symbolized divine nurture and protection in Mesopotamia also. Historically and cross-culturally women prefer blue beads, especially eye beads, to avert evil spirits. Blue resembles an eye so has the power to repel it, and the color has an affinity with the moon whose blue roundness symbolizes the full moon, giver of life, growth, and fertility, and the sky where the moon rises. In ancient mythology the full moon and associated goddesses had a special effect on mothers and children. For example, Anahita purified women’s wombs and breast milk for their infants, and the moon protected against Hecate the mistress of black magic and her horde of ghosts. Several blue faience amulets rested with women’s implements at Lachish.

Biblical references indicate that ancient Israelites routinely wore inscribed objects. Archaeology confirms this practice through two sheet-silver amulets inscribed in an ancient Hebrew script that came from the seventh century BCE Ketef Hinnom caves in Jerusalem. Similar foil amulets that protected women and infants came from the Roman and Byzantine periods in Palestine. For example, excavators of second to fifth century CE Jewish tombs at Irbid (Arbela) east of the southern end of Lake Galilee found several tiny metal foil amulets folded inside gold or bone capsules. One of the Irbid amulets, a bronze foil talisman probably intended to be worn by the child it protected, addresses the evil eye, calamities, and demons. A second century CE silver amulet with an inscription that calls on Yahu to send his angel to protect a young woman and her unborn child from the
“lilith” that hides in the canopy of her bed brings to remembrance the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud and Khirbet el-Kom inscriptions that name Yahweh and his Asherah, as if Asherah were the intermediary agent of protection. These examples indicate that Israelite women and their children wore inscribed jewelry and shared in the common ancient Near Eastern belief about its powerful effects.

Egyptian texts and paintings portray Hathor in her capacity as hypostasis of the Living Eye of the sun-god driving away the evil eye of a demon who tries to destroy life and order. The goddess Asherah, Hathor’s equivalent in function and iconography, protected Israelite women and their newborn infants from sickness and death by countering the destructive eyes of gods and people with her own powerful eyes, shown outlined in red or black on the pillar-base figurines that invoked her guarding presence in Israelite houses. Examples from Egypt and Mesopotamia document the widely accepted use in the ancient Near East of eye paint to deflect the destructive evil eyes of hostile gods, demons, and people. They suggest that the red and black paint on the heads and particularly the eyes of female pillar figurines served the same purpose. Israelite women, along with their ancient Near Eastern neighbors, practiced apotropaic and empowerment rituals with images. Israelite female pillar-base figurines with full breasts and guarding eyes duplicated their full breasts in the breast-feeding mother and deflected demonic evil eyes. The effect was triggered by prayers and incantations accompanied by fire and incense, all of which invoked the power of Asherah, the personal family goddess.

Amuletic jewelry magnified the apotropaic effect.
Ethnographic parallels from Iran, Afghanistan, and Lebanon demonstrate that twentieth century Middle Eastern women employ religious and magical practices to prevent the effect of envious eyes of people and jin or peri demonesses on their breast milk and on their young children. They pin metallic amulets, jewelry that resembles eyes, or jewelry that symbolizes protective goddesses on themselves and their infants' clothing to nullify these evil forces that could sicken them. If they perceive an evil effect caused by an adverse power, they burn incense and recite a prayer or incantation in the name of their deity in hopes of reversing it. In modern as well as in ancient Near Eastern cultures women invoke the presence of protective deities through burning incense or oil. The flames and fragrant smoke pleases the deities and purifies the surrounding area from illness caused by supernatural evil influences. Because of this association, incense burners and lamps accompany prayers and incantations in ritual texts, and they are present frequently in excavated household shrines in the ancient Near East. Biblical texts refer to incense burners and oil lamps in connection with religious ritual as well as in the list of duties of a good woman in her home. Incense burners and lamps accompany female figurines in many Israelite houses.

Names and images were important vehicles of power in ancient Near Eastern cultures. Benevolent eyes and names protected against evil eyes and names. Evil powers were repulsed by seeing their own or equally powerful images, or by hearing their own names or names of more powerful deities. Because of this, naming the patient's protective deity was an important ingredient in ancient Near Eastern prayers and incantations. In
biblical Deuteronomistic religion and in iconoclastic Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions, the power of the divine name survives the reliance on divine images.

The Arslan Tash plaques date to the time of the divided Israelite monarchy. They are inscribed in a West Semitic dialect similar to Hebrew and illustrate a woman's naming her personal protective deities in order to prevent the entrance into her house of a child-stealing goddess. The figures on the plaque and the descriptions of the demonic flying night goddess employ motifs known from Assyrian Lamashtu incantations and Egyptian magical texts as well as from Talmudic and medieval Jewish literature. Israelite pillar-base goddess figurines fulfilled the same function in ancient Israelite homes as the magically protective Mesopotamian figurines and plaques that represented deities or their emissary spirits who protected the inhabitants of the house, especially from child-stealing demons. Playing the same role as the Arslan Tash inscribed plaques, they were placed in the house, probably on its roof or near the doorway to its courtyard or living room, like the mēṣūzāh, the Israelite portal inscription, and the Jewish Kindbettzettel that hung in the room where a woman was giving birth to protect it from malevolent supernatural beings.

The primary function of personal gods and goddesses was to care for and protect the family. They often were addressed as intermediaries with the more powerful high gods. The goddess Asherah invoked through her image in the large-breasted pillar-base figurines served as the protective spirit of ancient Israelite houses. Her conspicuous guarding eyes, often emphasized or outlined with demon-protective red or black paint, warned away the evil eye and the child-stealing demons during childbirth and the delicate
neonatal period. Parallel to their ancient and modern neighbors, Israelite women protected themselves and their newborn infants with personal deities, incense, and amuletic jewelry, especially eye-motif jewelry, to deflect evil eyes and child-stealing demons. As modern Middle Eastern women name their protective deity in situations of crisis for themselves and their newborn infants, Israelite women invoked the goddess Asherah through her name and her image. Believing that the fragrance of burning oil or incense brought blessing and prosperity, they burned incense or oil on special incense altars or lamps in their living rooms in order to invite the protecting presence of their personal goddess and to frighten away unwanted supernatural beings.

Israelite women needed, made, and revered the household figurines. Men and women divided household labor and responsibility such that women managed food storage and preparation as well as the household economy. Chapter Six will show that Israelite household roles verify that men respected women's wisdom, educational skills, and agency in initiating and supervising household cult as well.
CHAPTER SIX: WOMEN AS RELIGIOUS AGENTS IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

Women as Israelite Household Administrators

The central highlands of Palestine where the early Israelite population concentrated was a difficult and unpredictable environment for agriculture. Harsh conditions resulted in high mortality rates. Clearing forests, terracing, cutting cisterns, sowing and reaping, as well as preserving and preparing foods required intense labor. The practically self-sufficient household formed the basic societal unit. As full participants in the division of labor, women assumed responsibility for field work during peak times and for preserving and preparing food year-round. In addition their families expected them to bear and educate children to increase the labor force and to perpetuate claim to the family land inheritance. The woman described in Proverbs 31 managed the household commercial enterprises including buying and selling property, directing servants, overseeing weaving and clothing manufacture, as well as keeping the lamp burning at night. A strict division of labor tends to place a high value on women’s work. Because of the division of labor and a woman’s presence and position in the household, it is likely that she also supervised religious duties there.
Women in “Patriarchal” Israelite Religion

Phyllis Bird (1989:296) suggests that “the patriarchal family at worship replicates the patterns of the patriarchal society at worship, or vice versa.” But Carol Meyers (1988:39, 40) argues that the Israelite culture, although patrilineal, was not patriarchal in the sense of men having control over females, male family heads having control over their wives and other family members, or of women being subservient, despite some biblical texts or features of biblical languages that seem to imply this. Males inherited their ancestral lands and women generally moved to live with their husbands because of the imperatives of the Israelite economy in the Iron Age. However, social reality confirms that authority does not necessarily coincide with power:

With households managed by women, the decisions made by them will have great social impact. In short, female power will be as significant as male power, and perhaps even greater. To put it another way, in a peasant society in which the household is the fundamental institution and the primary locus of power, females may even have a predominant role, at least within the broad parameters of household life. (Meyers 1988:176)

Nabal’s wife Abigail (1 Samuel 25) exemplifies the independence and power sagacious women had as household managers. While Saul was still king and David was surviving in the desert with his men, he sent messengers to Nabal hoping for a food gift during the sheep-shearing festival, since his band had protected Nabal’s shepherds. Nabal rebuffed them, and David, angered, set out to kill him and his family. When the servants informed Abigail, she collected a rich store of bread, wine, mutton, roasted grain, raisins and figs, and without a word to her husband sent it ahead on donkeys with the servants to forestall David before starting to meet him herself. She succeeded in dissuading David
from blood revenge through eloquent argumentation, blessing him and taking blame for
the incident herself. As Brenner (1985:40) puts it, “She hints that as the real responsibility
for the household is hers—which is borne out by her authoritative behaviour—her actions
should suffice to cancel out her husband’s foolishness.” Her economic and personal
independence is confirmed as she waits to tell her husband, who has not missed her or the
food supplies, at an appropriate juncture, then after his timely death accepts David’s
marriage proposal without intermediary and joins him with her entourage of household
servants.

Although the Hebrew Bible highlights public male leaders, it also speaks of
women who figured occasionally in public religious roles: judge (Judges 4–5), prophet
(Judg 4:4; Exod 15:20-21; Neh 6:14), wise woman (2 Sam 14:1-20; 2 Sam 20:16-22),
singer/dancer (Exod 15:20-21; Judg 11:34; Jer 31:4; Ezra 2:65; Neh 7:67; 1 Chr 25:5-6),
keener (Jer 9:17 [HB 9:16]; 2 Chr 35:25), door attendant at the meeting tent (Exod 38:8;
1 Sam 2:22), necromancer (Ex 22:18; 1 Sam 28:7), consecrated woman (qedešā) (Deut
23:18; Hos 4:14), weaver of clothing for divine images (2 Kgs 23:7), and Queen Mother
who made a covering for the “asherah” (1 Kgs 15:13). Judg 5:7 calls Deborah who
counseled and pronounced juridical decisions for the Israelites “mother in Israel,”
signifying someone who bore a particular kind of religious authority parallel to the young
man appointed “father and priest,” first of Micah’s household shrine and then of the
Danite tribe (Judg 17:10; Judg 18:19). Women such as these were important and
respected in their public religious roles in Israelite society.
Biblical texts give various examples of women, viewed both positively and negatively, performing religious or magical activities in their homes, and sometimes they mention that their families supported them. The woman of Endor consulted the dead Samuel, then cooked and served King Saul a meal (1 Sam 28:7-25). Huldah prophesied to the high priest and the king's cabinet while in her home (2 Kgs 22:14-20). Some women baked cakes, burned sacrifices, and poured out wine offerings to the "Queen of Heaven" goddess in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem (Jer 7:18; Jer 44:19). Israelites also paid women divining prophets to tie magic bands on them (Ezek 13:18-23). The Israelite woman's household was the center of her religious as well as her economic activity.

The forty-two Roman-era Aramaic incantation texts from Nippur that Montgomery cataloged affirm women's leadership in protective household rituals. These incantations were designed to protect aspects of the domestic welfare of a married couple and their children, house, property, and cattle, and they included various incantations against child-stealing demons. Frequently women procured the incantations without reference to their husbands, and the texts always required the name of the mother of the household (Montgomery 1913:49). Jews as well as Mandaeans and Greeks required the mother's name in protective household rituals. The Talmud reflects this role of women when it stipulates in b. Shab. 66b that "all repetitive incantations are in name of the mother." According to Montgomery (1913:50), the matriarchal condition of society rather than an elder principle of *pater incertus, mater certa* forced the requirement that protective incantations include the mother's name.
Women were sometimes involved in public religious leadership, but they usually performed religious offices in the context of their normal domain—the household. Although the biblical texts portray Israelite society as largely patriarchal, legislated authority does not necessarily coincide with power, especially in cultures with designated interdependent gender roles. Her sociological position as household manager gave the Israelite woman a measure of independence which allowed her to choose to direct her energies in several directions. She had power to work for the benefit of her family and household within the accepted cultural norms and conversely the freedom to assert her independence to the detriment of her husband and children. The biblical book of Proverbs delineates these options.
Two Images of Women in the Book of Proverbs

Proverbs presents two contrasting images of women. The first is positive—a metaphorical wise teacher, and the second is negative—a sexually provocative stranger. Both are symbolic personifications based in Israelite sociological history, and both are illustrated in the lives of real biblical women. Proverbs is a collection of Israelite poetry that probably spans the nation's entire ancient history. It contains images that reflect the household struggle for survival in the difficult hill country environment of the pre- and early monarchic period (Meyers 1988). Proverbs also manifests concerns with Jewish identity issues that climaxed in post-exilic times (Brenner 1985:117).

Beginning in the time of the Judges and continuing to a large extent under the monarchy, Israelite households were independent cultural and economic centers which formed the basis of a tribally-organized society (Meyers 1988:149; Stager 1994:24). While men were public clan leaders, women managed the household economy and socialization of the children. Prov 31:10-31 paints a picture in the form of an acrostic poem of the successful matriarch. Her value is not judged in terms of her sexuality, but on the basis of her business acumen and industrious work for the benefit of her household (Bird 1974:58).

Proverbs 8 couches Woman Wisdom's cosmic role in the metaphor of the house she builds and the table she sets. Whereas the Hebrew Bible usually refers to the basic Israelite living unit of buildings, property and equipment, animals, and multigenerational family that allowed for the functions of residency, economic production, social activity,
and cultic practice as "father's house," in a wisdom association with teaching and procreation it sometimes calls it "mother's house" (Meyers 1991). In these cases, which include Song of Songs 3:4, Song of Songs 8:2, and Ruth 1:8, women act as agents in their own destiny, and their agency affects others. The setting is domestic. Prov 9:1, Prov 14:1, and Prov 24:3 connect wisdom with a woman building a household. For example, Prov 9:1-2 in the context of the Woman Wisdom metaphor states that,

Wisdom has built her house:
she has hewn her seven pillars.
She has slaughtered a beast, spiced her wine, and spread her table.

Wisdom literature is mainly concerned with successful practical living for young, elite, unmarried men (Brenner 1985:43; Bird 1974:59). Mothers and fathers shared responsibility in the education of their children:

Hear, my son, your father's instruction,
and reject not your mother's teaching. (Prov 1:8)

My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching. (Prov 6:20)

The advice Lemuel's mother gave to her royal son in Prov 31:1-10 illustrates the woman's primary role in this education. Israelite women probably also taught their children to read (Meyers 1988:152-54).^20

---

^20 We cannot assume that ancient women were illiterate. A few Babylonian women like Enheduanna were scribe-poets. And the 1962 excavation at Ugarit found two letters in good condition that women had authored. Lady Arušebat wrote one of them to her priest brother, and the other one came to the queen from a woman who worked for her (Nougayrol 1964:133).
Proverbs 8 personifies wisdom as a woman linked with God as a source of truth, righteousness, instruction, and knowledge. She was present with him at the time of creation (Prov 8:22-31):

The Lord created me the first of his works long ago, before all else that he made. I was formed in earliest times, at the beginning, before earth itself. I was born when there was yet no ocean, when there were no springs brimming with water. Before the mountains were settled in their place, before the hills I was born, when as yet he had made neither land nor streams nor the mass of the earth's soil. When he set the heavens in place I was there, when he girdled the ocean with the horizon, when he fixed the canopy of clouds overhead, and confined the springs of the deep, when he prescribed limits for the sea so that the waters do not transgress his command, when he made earth's foundations firm.

Then I was at his side each day, his darling and delight, playing in his presence continually, playing over his whole world, while my delight was in mankind.

Although the Hebrew Bible frequently employs female metaphors, Woman Wisdom is unique to Proverbs 1-9. The grammatically feminine gender of the Hebrew word הָוֹקָד "wisdom" may have inspired the metaphor, but it does not explain its development. Some scholars see in Woman Wisdom the reflection of a Near Eastern goddess prototype or antitype. Near Eastern mythology frequently associates a god or goddess of wisdom with creation. For instance, Babylonian Ishtar was "creatress of wisdom," Siduri Sabitu of the Gilgamesh epic was a genius of life and wisdom, and Egyptian Maat was a hypostatization of truth and order. According to Coogan (1987:119-20), the figure of Wisdom in Proverbs 8 and later texts (Wisdom 8-9, Sirach 24, Philo) provides subtle evidence for Asherah as the consort of Yahweh in Israel:

I would argue that the author is not drawing directly on old mythological material but on actual Israelite belief in the consort of the deity. To be sure, this belief is
continuous in Canaanite tradition, and important evidence for it is found in second-millennium sources. But I think it unlikely that the author of Proverbs 8, whenever the passage is to be dated, had our Ugaritic corpus as part of his or her personal library. Rather, this passage emerges from a living Canaanite tradition in Israel, specifically the belief in the consort of the deity.

Conversely, the mythologized Woman Wisdom figure may protest an inimical Semitic goddess of love who represents women who fail to submit to normal societal duties. While both of these mythological threads may be motivating factors in the creation of Woman Wisdom, it is likely that sociologically the literary convention arose as a contrast to the Foreign Woman, an actual type of woman who threatened the social structures of Near Eastern cultures (Brenner 1985:42). “The Instruction of Ani” papyrus from the Twenty-first or Twenty-second Dynasty in Egypt (eleventh to eighth century BCE) gives a similar warning against “the woman from abroad:"

Be on thy guard against a woman from abroad, who is not known in her (own) town. Do not stare at her when she passes by. Do not know her carnally; a deep water, whose windings one knows not, a woman who is far away from her husband. “I am sleek,” she says to thee every day. She has no witnesses when she waits to ensnare thee. It is a great crime (worthy) of death, when one hears of it... (Pritchard 1950:420)

Woman Wisdom has many characteristics in common with her alter ego the Foreign/Strange Woman, and together they outline the boundaries of acceptable and non-acceptable social connections for Israelite young men. The valued sociological function of women as family educators and wise household-builders as contrasted with foreign or strange women is the best explanation for the use of the Woman Wisdom metaphor in Proverbs.
Although the patriarchal stories portray a foreign wife as inferior to a woman of the ethnic-national group (Gen 24:3-8; Gen 37-41; Gen 27:46; Num 12:1; Deut 7:1-4), Israelites used the "benefits of intermarriage as a device for their cultural and political acceptance into their new environment" (Brenner 1985:116). Intermarriage was also occasioned by the problem of short female life span due to disease and mortality in childbirth (Myers 1988). Even the first kings practiced intermarriage with an attitude of indifference rather than anxiety. Men expected foreign wives to adapt to their husband's social and religious customs. Whereas wisdom writings like Proverbs 1-9 and prophetic indictments grew louder in protest, kings and common people continued to intermarry, considering it natural and politically expedient. In the Persian period Ezra and Nehemiah expelled foreign wives (Ezra 9-10; Neh 13:23-30). The objection to foreign women apparently stemmed from associations with fertility cults, sexual promiscuity, and disloyalty, as well as concern for cultural separateness. The Deuteronomistic history portrays Solomon (1 Kings 11:1-8), Ahab (1 Kings 16:31-32) and others as distracted from Yahwism by non-Israelite wives who imported their foreign cults. Hosea 2-3, Ezek 8:14 and Jer 44:9, 19 envision women as fanatically involved in fertility cults. Moabite and Midianite women seduced Israelites and involved them in sacrifices to the gods of Moab and ultimately in plague and slaughter (Numbers 25). Samson betrayed his spiritual strength and countrymen to a Philistine woman (Judges 16). Ezra's proscription against foreign marriages likewise cited religious syncretism as a motivating factor, although doubtless assimilation and disappearance of the nationality and the language (Neh 13:24) had become crucial threats during the exile.
Even if a woman was not actually foreign, if she belonged to another man, she was “other,” and off-limits. Proverbs 1-9 repeatedly warns the young man that involvement with another man’s wife leads to financial ruin, social shame, physical punishment and death (Prov 2:16-19; Prov 5:1-23; Prov 6:23-35; Prov 7:1-27; Prov 9:13-18). Although ancient Israelite women were not chattel or property that could be bought and sold by fathers and husbands, these men owned the rights to their reproductive roles. A man who violated or stole another man’s property rights could be prosecuted. As a basic tenet of the Israelite patrilineal society, a father owned his virgin daughter’s reproductive function and a husband his wife’s (Exod 22:16-17; Deut 22:13-30). Biblical genealogies, terminologies for the household unit, and inheritance laws (Lev 25:23-28; Num 27:1-11; Numbers 36) confirm that the Israelite agricultural economy revolved on patrilocality and patrilineality. In this system if a woman had a son by a man other than her husband, the illegitimate son might mistakenly inherit land and responsibilities that did not rightfully belong to him. Adultery was a serious crime against the social order. This is discernible both in law codes which prescribe the death penalty for marital infidelity (Ex 20:14; Lev. 20:10; Deut 5:18; Deut 22:22) and in the many prophetic uses of the adultery metaphor for apostasy.

Israelite tradition did not always condemn adulteresses and foreign seductresses. If they accepted the mores of Israelite culture and their actions benefited the community, it excused them for their unconventional morality and accepted them as part of it. Tamar, who committed incest to continue her husband’s lineage (Genesis 38); Ruth a Moabiteess who declared that Naomi’s God would be her God, then married Boaz (Ruth 1-4); and
Rahab the Jericho prostitute (Joshua 2), all came into the Israelite Davidic matriarchy because they valued the welfare of their chosen community (Ruth 4:12, 17; Matt 1:3-5). The Deuteronomists admired Midianite Jael because she seduced and killed a political and military enemy of the Israelite community (Judg 4:9, 17-24; Judg 5:24-27). However, Potiphar's wife epitomizes the Proverbs "other" woman. She acted only from sexual passion and did not contribute to the preservation of the ancestral family of the Israelites or to the existing social order (Gen 39:6-20). On the contrary, her action endangered it.

Although two distinctly opposite figures in Proverbs, Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman both embrace or are embraced (Prov 4:8; Prov 5:20), and grasp or are grasped (Prov 3:18; Prov 4:13; Prov 7:13) by the young men they consort with in the street or market (Prov 1:20-21; Prov 7:12). Both women invite listeners to their respective houses (Prov 7:15-20; Prov 9:1-6; Prov 9:14-16; Prov 8:34) and offer them bread (Prov 9:5, 17). The imagery of water applies to a young man's attraction to his own wife (Prov 5:15) as well as to Folly (Prov 9:17). With either his wife or with Folly he can fill himself with love or breasts (Prov 5:19; Prov 7:18). Thus, the distinction between personified Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman derives more from their representations of order and disorder than from their actions. Although physical death threatened an adulteress through capital punishment (Deut 22:22), a husband's vengeance (Prov 6:33, 34), and extra-cultural sexually-transmitted diseases (Num 25:1, 8-9), according to Camp (1988:21), the death of loving a strange woman (Prov 5:5, 23) consisted primarily in the separation from Yahweh and the community that it forced.
Both women speak with persuasive rhetoric (Prov 1:5; Prov 5:3; Prov 7:21; Prov 8:4–8). This shows the crucial importance of language in society, and especially in the wisdom tradition, and the dangers of its abuse. The Strange Woman threatens because her words are so close to the truth of human experience in which husbands go away on business and strange beds offer delights. Her words reflect the moral ambiguity that people feel when they try to understand the anomaly of a God whose hand gives both good and evil (Job 2:10; Camp 1988:24).

The Proverbs portrait of the Israelite woman as a powerful source of wisdom contrasts with the traditional impression of patriarchal social and theological order in the Bible. In Proverbs she is the source of life for the community, not as childbearer, but in a socio-cultural and religious sense of life. This proved especially important in the post-exilic community when the monarchical center of male power had disappeared:

At a time when the center of male power, the monarchy, had been eradicated, the kind of power born of the love and nurture of the woman-centered family household recalls Israel to its fundamental values and serves as the life-and-identity-source for the community (Camp 1988:32).

Apparently the Israelite woman was free to walk to the city gate in public view and persuade men to listen to her. She could dedicate her sexual power to a family-centered society or use it to seduce men away from the accepted social order. Her intellectual prowess could foment heresy and self-worship or nurture and educate the youth within her circle of influence. The wise and strange characterizations of Proverbs reflect society's value of women's spirituality and leadership in family religion.
The Wise Woman and Anat in the Poem of Aqht

The characters of Pughat and Anat in the Ugaritic legendary poem Aqht presage the wise and strange woman dichotomy of Proverbs. According to Baruch Margalit's (1989:479) characterization, Pughat is the tale’s heroine, the poet’s ideal model, and the polar opposite of Anat:

Pughat epitomizes the poet’s belief in the intrinsic worth of women qua women, in their superior intelligence as well as courage, both of which go unrecognized in Raphaite society... Pughat’s epithets describe her as she really is: industrious, ingenious, and humble. Pughat is a ‘wise-woman’ type. But her sagacity is not the ‘book learning’ of her more privileged ‘kid brother’. Pughat ‘knows’ the stars because she rises early and retires late. She ‘knows’ the fauna and the flora well because she works in the fields. It is this ‘knowledge’ which enables her to discern the ominous signs of trouble before her educated father. Pughat’s sagacity is equaled only by her strength and courage...an inner strength at once impressive and inspiring.

Anat, however, personifies all that is contemptible, corrupt and uncontrolled in the society and culture:

A ruthless misogynist and a creature of passion, Anat is a goddess who never ‘grew up’... Capricious and amoral, cunning and shrewd, Anat is the power of Evil in Aqht. Lustful and deceitful, she is the antithesis of her ‘brother’ Baal, the life-giving power of Good, as well as of the wise, hard-working, and self-controlled Pughat. Anat is driven by a ferocious will unbridled by moral sanction or conscience...the symbolic equation with SML, the withered mother of killer-hawks...she herself is a barren woman, a perpetual ‘virgin’, who feeds on the children of real, flesh-and-blood mothers. (Margalit 1989:477)

Several Ugaritic texts portray Anat as an antagonistic birdlike figure similar to Lamashtu daughter of Anu in Mesopotamia. Anat shows disrespect and threatens El in the Baal Cycle. In order to plot against El(kunirša) and Asherah, Anat eavesdrops in the form of a bird in the Hittite translation of a Canaanite mythological text from the second half of the second millennium BCE (Zevit 1977:113; Hoffner 1965:9; Hoffner 1975:142).21

Asherah replied to Elkunirs: ‘If you..., then I will hearken to my ..., and I will sleep with you.’ Elkunirs heard this word and said to his wife: ‘Come, I will hand over Baal to you. As it pleases you, punish him!’ Anat-Astarte heard those words. She turned herself into an owl on Elkunirs’s arm, yea she became a screech-owl and perched on his shoulder. There she overhears the words which the husband and wife speak to each other. But Anat-Astarte like a bird flew off across the desert places. In the desert places she found Baal, and [she said] to him...

(KUB 12.61:3 and KUB 31.118 + KUB 36.37 = CTH 342; Hoffner 1965:10)

In UT 76.2:10-12 Anat takes flight as a winged goddess. In the Aqhat legend, after El’s promised heir Aqhat has been born to Daniel, Anat covets Aqhat’s bow, hovers in the air with a flock of eagles, then kills him for it (KTU 1.18.4:32-37; Gibson 1977:113):

As Aqhat sat down to meat,  
the son of Daniel to a meal,  
above him eagles hovered,  
a flock of hawks looked down.  
[Among] the eagles Anat hovered;  
over [Aqhat] she released [her warrior];  
he did strike him twice [(on) the crown],  
three times on the ear;  
he [did spill] his blood [like] a …..

21 These translators interpret the ideogram dÌSTAR-ìš “goddess” as Canaanite Anat-Astarte. According to Hoffner, Goetze’s translation in Ancient Near Eastern Texts Supplement (Pritchard 1953:519) “is far too cautious and obscures many of the gains in interpreting the myth since 1953.”
like a 'killer,' [on to his knees].
[His breath did go forth like a wind,
his life [like spittle],
like a vapour [from his nose].

In this text Anat resembles Lamashitu in that she is a malevolent birdlike goddess who kills offspring that the aid and blessing of other more beneficent deities provided.

Fig. 66: Birdlike Lamashstu, from Thureau-Dangin, "Rituel et amulettes," AO 8184.

Zevit (1977:111-13) argues that Anat is the child-stealing demon reprimanded in the first Arslan Tash inscription. He translates the initial line: "An incantation for 'Atta, the goddess." "Flying one," then, on the figure of the winged sphinx is an epithet of 'Atta. Zevit, along with Albright (The Evolution of 'An—'Atta, American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature, 1925), considers 'Atta to be an Aramaic form of Anat.

Albright also derives from 'Atta the name of Atargatis, a Hellenistic period north Syrian goddess. As Anat was a flying creature in both the Ugaritic and Hittite versions of Canaanite mythology, so Atargatis identifies with a sphinx at Heliopolis (Baalbek). Zevit (1977:113) speculates that during the 500 years between the Ugaritic Anat and the Arslan
Tash inscription, Anat’s association with Pazuzu and Lamashtu had transformed her into an enemy of women at childbirth:

If the ‘Anat—‘Atta identification is accepted as a working hypothesis, there is a gap of at least 500 years between the picture of ‘Anat which emerges from the Ugaritic texts and her appearance at Arslan Tash under the name of ‘Atta. It is not impossible that the element of capricious violence in ‘Anat, who intimidated Ashera and El with threats of violence (UT 51.2:21-25; ‘nt 5:32-37) and who arranged the murder of Aqhat (UT 128:26-28), contributed to her transformation into an enemy of women at childbirth. Association of ‘Anat with the winged Pazuzu demon, which attacks mothers and children, and with the Lamashtu demon, which generally kills the infant by suckling it, may also have influenced her transformation.

Pughat and Anat, the two females set in opposition in the Aqhat story, reflect two roles goddesses and women play in ancient Syro-Palestinian society—nurturer and destroyer. To repeat Margalit (1989:477), Anat represents “a barren woman, a perpetual ‘virgin’, who feeds on the children of real, flesh-and-blood mothers,” in contrast to the wise, hard-working, and self-controlled Pughat. Ugaritic mythology also contrasts Anat with Asherah. In the Baal Cycle Anat threatens El, whereas Asherah intercedes with him. This motif echoes the Egyptian idea that the eyes of gods oppose each other. Apopis tries to introduce chaos by staring at the sun god with his evil eye. Hathor, the Eye of Re, withstands the demonic eye of Apopis, who would like to destroy the order of the universe. In Ugaritic mythology Asherah likewise supports the pantheon’s high god by resolving the conflict between him and the demonic Anat who threatens the order of the pantheon. Asherah presents a wise mother figure, whereas Anat destroys household order by violence and by feeding on other women’s children. The cosmic stand-off reflects a societal stand-off and vice versa.
Israelite women occasionally appeared in public religious roles; however, their primary leadership was in household religion. The culture esteemed them as wise speakers, educators, mothers and administrators. Outside influences—foreign women who disrupted family commitments to fidelity, patrimony and worship; jealous barren neighbors who could not or would not bear children to increase the labor force; and night flying demons who sickened, poisoned, and dried up their breast milk and the body fluids of their newborn children—threatened Israelite women’s practical and spiritual leadership. As part of their religious duty to the household, Israelite women set up household gods to protect themselves and their families.
Women as Religious Agents in Ancient Israel—Summary

The central highlands of Palestine where the early Israelite population concentrated was a difficult and unpredictable environment for agriculture. Harsh conditions resulted in high mortality rates. Clearing forests, terracing, cutting cisterns, sowing and reaping, as well as preserving and preparing foods required intense labor. The practically self-sufficient household formed the basic societal unit. As full participants in the division of labor, women assumed responsibility for field work during peak times and for preserving and preparing food year-round. In addition, their families expected them to bear and educate children to increase the labor force and to perpetuate claim to the family land inheritance. The woman described in Proverbs 31 managed the household commercial enterprises including weaving and clothing manufacture, as well as keeping the lamp burning at night. A strict division of labor tends to place a high value on women's work. Because of the division of labor and a woman's presence and position in the household, it is likely that she also supervised religious duties there.

Israelite culture, although patrilineal, was not patriarchal in the sense of men having control over females, male family heads having control over their wives and other family members, or of women being subservient, despite some biblical texts or features of biblical languages that seem to imply this. Social reality confirms that authority does not necessarily coincide with power. Nabal's wife Abigail exemplifies the independence and power sagacious women had as household managers.
Although the Hebrew Bible highlights public male leaders, it also speaks of women who figured occasionally in public religious roles: judge, prophet, wise woman, singer/dancer, keener, door attendant at the meeting tent, necromancer, consecrated woman, weaver of clothing for divine images, and Queen Mother who made a covering for the "asherah." Judg 5:7 calls Deborah who counseled and pronounced juridical decisions for the Israelites "mother in Israel," signifying someone who bore a particular kind of religious authority. Women such as these were important and respected in their public religious roles in Israelite society.

Biblical texts give various examples of women, viewed both positively and negatively, performing religious or magical activities in their homes, and sometimes they mention that their families supported them. The woman of Endor consulted the dead Samuel, then cooked and served King Saul a meal. Huldah prophesied to the high priest and the king's cabinet while in her home. Some women baked cakes, burned sacrifices, and poured out wine offerings to the "Queen of Heaven" goddess in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. Israelites also paid women divining prophets to tie magic bands on them. The Israelite woman's household was the center of her religious as well as her economic activity.

The forty-two Roman-era Aramaic incantation texts from Nippur that Montgomery cataloged affirm women's leadership in protective household rituals. These incantations were designed to protect aspects of the domestic welfare of a married couple and their children, house, property, and cattle, and they included various incantations against child-stealing demons. Frequently women procured the incantations without
reference to their husbands, and the texts always required the name of the mother of the household. Jews as well as Mandaeans and Greeks required the mother's name in protective household rituals. The Talmud reflects this role of women when it stipulates in \textit{b. Shab. 66b} that "all repetitive incantations are in name of the mother." According to Montgomery, the matriarchal condition of society rather than an elder principle of \textit{pater incertus, mater certa} forced the requirement that protective incantations include the mother's name.

Women were sometimes involved in public religious leadership, but they usually performed religious offices in the context of their normal domain—the household. Although the biblical texts portray Israelite society as largely patriarchal, legislated authority does not necessarily coincide with power, especially in cultures with designated interdependent gender roles. Her sociological position as household manager gave the Israelite woman a measure of independence which allowed her to choose to direct her energies in several directions. She had power to work for the benefit of her family and household within the accepted cultural norms and conversely the freedom to assert her independence to the detriment of her husband and children. The biblical book of Proverbs delineates these options.

Proverbs presents two contrasting images of women. The first is positive—a metaphorical wise teacher, and the second is negative—a sexually provocative stranger. Both are symbolic personifications based in Israelite sociological history, and both are illustrated in the lives of real biblical women. The Proverbs collection of Israelite poetry spans the nation's entire ancient history. It contains images that reflect the household
struggle for survival in the difficult hill country environment of the pre- and early
monarchic period. Proverbs also manifests concerns with Jewish identity issues that
climaxed in post-exilic times.

Beginning in the time of the Judges and continuing to a large extent into the
monarchical period, Israelite households were independent cultural and economic centers
which formed the basis for a tribally-organized society. While men were public clan
leaders, women managed the household economy and socialization of the children. The
Prov 31:10-31 acrostic poem paints a picture of the successful matriarch. Her value is not
judged in terms of her sexuality, but on the basis of her business acumen and industrious
work for the benefit of her household.

Proverbs personifies wisdom as a woman linked with God as a source of truth,
righteousness, instruction, and knowledge. Woman Wisdom's cosmic role is expressed
with domestic metaphors—the house she builds and the table she sets. In a wisdom
association with teaching and procreation in which women act as agents in their own
destiny and their agency affects others, the Hebrew Bible refers to the basic Israelite
living unit as "mother's house." Mothers and fathers shared responsibility in the
education of their children. The advice Lemuel's mother gave to her royal son in Prov
31:1-10 illustrates the woman's primary role in this education.

Some scholars see in Woman Wisdom the reflection of a Near Eastern goddess
prototype or antitype. Woman Wisdom has many characteristics in common with her alter
tego the Foreign/Strange Woman, and together they outline the boundaries of acceptable
and non-acceptable social connections for Israelite young men. The valued sociological
function of women as family educators and wise household-builders as contrasted with foreign or strange women is the best explanation for the use of the Woman Wisdom metaphor in Proverbs.

Even if a woman was not actually foreign, if she belonged to another man, she was “other,” and off-limits. As a basic tenet of the Israelite patrilineal society a father owned his virgin daughter’s reproductive function and a husband his wife’s. Biblical genealogies, terminologies for the household unit, and inheritance laws confirm that the Israelite agricultural economy was based on patrilocality and patrilineality. In this system if a woman had a son by a man other than her husband, the illegitimate son might mistakenly inherit land and responsibilities that did not rightfully belong to him. However, Israelite tradition did not always condemn adulteresses and foreign seductresses. If they accepted the mores of Israelite culture and their actions benefited the community, it excused them for their unconventional morality and accepted them as part of it. Tamar, Ruth, and Rahab all came into the Davidic matriarchy because they valued the welfare of their chosen community. The distinction between personified Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman derives more from their representations of order and disorder than from their actions. Both women speak with persuasive rhetoric; this shows the crucial importance of language in society, and especially in the wisdom tradition, and the dangers of its abuse. The Proverbs portrait of the Israelite woman as a powerful source of wisdom contrasts with the traditional impression of patriarchal social and theological order in the Bible. In Proverbs she is the source of life for the community, not as childbearer, but in a socio-cultural and religious sense of life. The wise and strange
characterizations of Proverbs reflect society’s value of women’s spirituality and leadership in family religion.

The characters of Pughat and Anat in the Ugaritic legendary Aqhat poem presage the wise and strange woman dichotomy of Proverbs. Pughat and Anat, the two females set in opposition in the Aqhat story, reflect two roles goddesses and women play in ancient Syro-Palestinian society—nurturer and destroyer. Barren and perpetually virginal Anat who feeds on the children of real flesh-and-blood mothers contrasts with wise, hard-working, and self-controlled Pughat. Ugaritic mythology also contrasts Anat with Asherah. In the Baal Cycle Anat threatens El, whereas Asherah intercedes with him. This motif echoes the Egyptian idea that the eyes of gods oppose each other. Apopis tries to introduce chaos by staring at the sun god with his evil eye. Hathor, the Eye of Re, withstands the demonic eye of Apopis, who would like to destroy the order of the universe. In Ugaritic mythology Asherah likewise supports the pantheon’s high god by resolving the conflict between him and the demonic Anat who threatens the order of the pantheon. Asherah presents a wise mother figure, whereas Anat destroys household order by violence and by feeding on other women’s children. The cosmic stand-off reflects a societal stand-off and vice versa.

Israelite women occasionally appeared in public religious roles; however, their primary leadership was in household religion. The culture esteemed them as wise speakers, educators, mothers and administrators. Outside influences—foreign women who disrupted family commitments to fidelity, patrimony and worship; jealous barren neighbors who could not or would not bear children to increase the labor force; and night
flying demons who sickened, poisoned, and dried up their breast milk and the body fluids of their newborn children—threatened Israelite women's practical and spiritual leadership. As part of their religious duty to the household, Israelite women set up household gods to protect themselves and their families.
CONCLUSION

The study of Israelite religion has taken form in various approaches or "schools of thought" since the late nineteenth century. Scholars have studied Israelite religion in the context of its literary portrayal in the biblical text, in relation to its Near Eastern neighbors, from a background of anthropological and sociological theory, as well as through archaeology. These approaches have differed in their application of extra-biblical data to the research and in their presuppositions about the uniqueness of Israelite religion in comparison to the religions of its ancient Near Eastern neighbors Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Syria.

Wellhausen combined Vatke's Hegelian model of interpreting Israelite religion with Graf's reconstruction of the development of the sources of the Pentateuch in his "Documentary Hypothesis," which characterized the clergy, sacrifices, sanctuaries, and festivals of each stage, and concluded that the Yahwistic and Elohistic sources documented the fertility stage of Israelite religion, Deuteronomy belonged to the ethical stage, and the Priestly source came from the legalistic stage. Although this critique forced scholars to identify a biblical writer's interests, it interpreted the biblical text exclusively from within from a strictly textual-philological approach without applying knowledge of the religion's historical Near Eastern milieu. Additionally, its anti-Semitic evolutionary bias failed to recognize its early complexity.
The anthropological school represented by Robertson Smith, Frazer, and Durkheim studied the psycho-sociological basis of Israelite religion through comparing its community ritual institutions to worldwide animistic beliefs and practices that involved physical means of manipulating supernatural powers. Although this approach opened the field to human conceptions of magic and religion rather than concentrating on theological debate, its theory derived from observations of external data instead of considering the text's point of view. It also admitted no contemporary levels of practice. Scandinavian and British scholars of the myth and ritual school postulated calendrical ritual festivals that ancient Near Eastern communities celebrated by reciting cult-myths and acting them out ritually. This school renewed interest in comparative Near Eastern religions, but overemphasized public and royal ritual as the heart of Israelite religion to the neglect of private family customs that divergent texts and archaeological discoveries suggested.

The History of Religions school attempted to avoid apologetic bias and reference to supernatural factors by applying what they regarded as the scientific method to trace Israelite religious phenomena through historical phases by reference to Egyptian, Phoenician, and Babylonian texts. Although the pan-Babylonian model lost credibility through artificial systematization and lack of attention to the critical evolutionary interpretation of religious history, its revelation of Israel's involvement in the interrelationships of ancient Near Eastern cultures provided the impetus for further comparative research. Religion-historical scholars who developed form criticism analyzed biblical literary forms and tried to identify the Sitz en Leben that gave rise to
Israelite oral traditions and religious festivals. While religion historians recognized the socioeconomic and cultural influences of Israel's predecessors and neighbors—a problem to theologians who insisted on Israelite religion's unique and final revelation—and studied how the religion adapted outside influences to its own ideology, and form critics brought attention to the socioeconomic and religious interests of common population groups as contrasted to divine king advocates in ancient Israel, almost complete reliance on textual rather than material archaeological data limited their effectiveness.

The Biblical Archaeology movement in American Protestantism challenged the European literary critical presumption that the biblical account was historically unreliable. Although Albright was unable to substantiate the actual historicity of historical personalities and events of the Genesis, Exodus, and Joshua narratives, he developed both textual and material archaeology into a science that recognized the value of the Bible in its historical and literary background. As a result of its fundamental purpose, Biblical Archaeology focused heavily on political history related to the conquest of Canaan with its public buildings, fortifications, and destruction layers, all dated by pottery sequences, rather than on Israelite religion and its socioeconomic environment. The Israelite village house and what women did there were not interesting to these male clergymen who represented male-dominated aniconic religious and political institutions. Their acceptance of the monotheism of the biblical text and the uniqueness of Israelite religion in contrast to its Canaanite influences biased their investigations. The biblical theology movement as well as several histories written in the 1960's and 1970's reacted similarly to religion historians' relativism by reemphasizing the uniqueness of and
ignoring the socioeconomic influences on Israelite religion, and they continued to focus on theological issues from the perspective of public male-oriented religious institutions.

A resurgence of the earlier sociological approach began to use artifactual as well as textual evidence for the reconstruction of Israelite religion. Although these scholars showed little interest in family religion or women’s activities, they highlighted the socioeconomic background of Israel’s settlement. They labeled Israelites as former Canaanites who developed their own new form of Canaanite religion. Gottwald’s statement, “Only as the full materiality of ancient Israel is more securely grasped will we be able to make proper sense of its spirituality” gave the new archaeology its invitation to locate and describe ordinary citizens’ houses, village shrines, and daily activities.

Ugaritic textual scholars who focus on the relation of Canaanite to Israelite religion rarely refer to the archaeological remains of the Canaanite religion that the texts suggest. Cross, building on Alt’s analysis of patriarchal clan religion and Albright’s work on Near Eastern parallels, reconstructed the origin of Israel’s delivering god Yahweh from strands of the Near Eastern world that combined to form Israel’s epic tradition. Cross avoided both the extremes of biblical scholars who assert the uniqueness of Israelite religion and the mistakes of those who assume that it continued the Canaanite mythology and rituals unchanged. Dever substantiated studies of Canaanite and Israelite linguistic and textual parallels with archaeological evidence for Late Bronze Age fertility religion traditions that continued in popular Iron Age Israelite religious practice.

Holladay identified and quantified religious attributes of Iron Age religious sites and classified them into establishment, nonconformist, and distributed cults on the basis
of their locations and furnishings. Ackerman shifted attention from the idealistic male-dominated institutional focus of most biblical studies with her work on women’s leadership in goddess worship and her interpretations of prophetic denunciations of idolatry through ancient Near Eastern texts. Berlinerblau highlighted the need to recognize diverse social groupings in ancient Israelite religion. Albertz developed the theme of personal or family religion first introduced by Jacobsen, extracting from texts the concepts ancient Babylonians and Israelites had of the abilities and responsibilities of their personal gods, and what prayer and offering rituals they practiced in local or household shrines. Albertz touched on the central role women played in theophanic birth promises.

Bird pioneered the analysis of women’s roles in biblical Israelite religion and considered Israelite women to be marginalized. Although Bird employed ethnographic parallels, she minimized the potential contribution of archaeology, saying it was mute with respect to women’s practice and point of view. Meyers uses both biblical texts and archaeological knowledge to stress the centrality of the family household unit in the highland village setting and women’s pivotal role in the household’s economic and educative functions. However, she does not attempt to define the function of female figurines in women’s household religion. Van der Toom provides little archaeological verification for the religious activities he describes for the various stages of an ancient Near Eastern woman’s life. Neither does his recent Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel address the figurines, models, and jewelry found in Israelite four-room houses from the biblical period.
These scholars have studied Israelite religion in the context of its literary portrayal in the text, in relation to its Near Eastern neighbors, from a background of anthropological and sociological theory, as well as through archaeology. But until now no one has studied what texts and archaeology show about women's ritual in the Israelite household. Most text-based studies assume a monotheistic patriarchal religion led by priests and kings. They minimize or scarcely notice women's roles. Scholars who attempt a reconstruction of women's role in family religion depend heavily on texts, without examining the archaeological evidence for women's activities. On the other hand, archaeologists who catalog cultic artifacts hesitate to link them specifically with women and to interpret them in the light of the ancient Near Eastern religious milieu. This dissertation has attempted the lacking systematic review of the archaeology of household religion, the analysis of women in the archaeological record, and the relation of figurines and other cultic artifacts from Israelite houses to their mythological history.

Various epigraphers and archaeologists identify the biblical Asherah with the Canaanite goddess through textual and iconographic correspondences. Others because of Hebrew language usage and theological developments argue that attributes of the Canaanite goddess became feminine aspects of the personality of the Israelite god Yahweh, and a stylistic tree placed in Yahwistic sanctuaries symbolized this feminine aspect. In the first book about Asherah, Reed decided that biblical references to “asherah” speak of a wooden image of the goddess whose name was Asherah. Lipiński, on the other hand, argued that “asherah” in the Bible and Hebrew inscriptions refers to a Yahwistic
shrine and not to a goddess by that name, since "asherah" means shrine in cognate languages. Although Lipiński used a comparative approach to Semitic linguistics to suggest that "asherah" meant "shrine," he did not accept the use of general Semitic iconographic evidence that suggested otherwise. McCarter analyzed the wooden "asherah" as the trace of the male deity Yahweh’s presence in his sanctuary—one of his abstract aspects personified as a goddess. McCarter finds it difficult to support his assertion that this innovation is not the same person as the Canaanite goddess with the same name. Tigay argues that Asherah was not a popular goddess Israelites regarded as a source of blessing and protection because her epithet does not occur in Hebrew personal names. He minimizes the significance of "asherah" in Hebrew inscriptions, which he claims represent peripheral royal or foreign influences. The archaeological contexts of the Hebrew inscriptions label them as popular rather than royal and Judean rather than Syro-Phoenician and reveal the weakness of Tigay’s exclusive use of onomastic evidence as a barometer of popular piety.

Lemaire illustrated his suggestion that an "asherah" was a living tree with biblical references to trees planted in Yahwistic cult places. Keel and Uehlinger assert that the "asherah" in Hebrew texts refers to a stylized sacred tree that Israelites depersonalized and integrated into the service of the royal God, who assimilated the formerly female functions of nurture and transmission of life. The tree thus symbolized Yahweh’s power and sustenance. According to Smith, Israelites related Asherah to the cult of Yahweh and did not worship her separately, as is implied by biblical historiography. By the tenth
century they combined, conflated, and attributed Northwest Semitic imagery for El, Baal and Asherah to Yahweh. Miller cites examples from Mesopotamia to argue the absorption of feminine deities by all-powerful male deities. Miller’s theory encounters a problem in that goddesses did not in fact disappear from ancient Israel because biblical texts mention goddesses, and the female figurines prove that Israelites remained loyal to a goddess whom the inscriptive evidence named Asherah.

Ackerman, Winter, and Olyan employ the close relationship between the symbol and the deity in Near Eastern religion to emphasize the historic-traditional principle that goddess and cult object cannot be separated. To associate Yahweh with Asherah’s cult object or with some hypostatized female aspect of Yahweh is to associate Yahweh with Asherah. Olyan finds no evidence that anyone in Israel before the reforming kings opposed the “asherah,” and although Deuteronomistic polemic linked Asherah with the cult of Baal, the goddess Asherah never functioned intimately with Baal in Canaanite or Israelite religion.

I have argued that biblical usages in parallel with other deities, mentions of Asherah with Yahweh in ancient Hebrew inscriptions, and the ubiquitous Israelite female figurines demonstrate that the Canaanite goddess Asherah persisted in Israelite religion as a goddess who mediated Yahweh’s powers of fertility, blessing, and protection. Not always immediately apparent in texts, the Canaanite goddesses’ powers of reproduction, sustenance, and protection are reflected in the iconography of drawings, stelae, plaques, and amulets. Although the three aspects of Canaanite fertility pendants—the head, breasts, and pubic triangle—continue in the head, breasts, and “tree trunk” of the Judean
pillar figurines, the deemphasis on the sexual aspect of the figurines as well as protective blessing inscriptions imply that Asherah's function in Israelite religion was connected more with nurture and protection than with fertility.

In the current status of scholarship on figurine classification and interpretation, several detailed descriptions of ancient Israelite female figurines extend their scope of reference to the entire West Semitic ancient Near East, while others limit their study to eighth and seventh century Judah. Some scholars resist calling the figurines deities, and even those who equate the figurines with a goddess from the Near Eastern tradition hesitate to identify the name or function of such a goddess. Archaeologists who locate the figurines in domestic contexts minimize their religious significance by negating the sacred character of household shrines and activities. The few who recognize Israelite figurines as women's ritual objects provide little suggestion as to how they functioned.

In the 1940's archaeologists called the numerous examples of female plaque and pillar figurines discovered in Israelite excavations "Astarte" figurines. Pillar-base figurines conventionalized a nurturing goddess into a more abstract symbol. The excavators found figurines in houses and suggested that women made them for magic or religious rituals. In such a ritual the pillar-base figurine stood against the wall since the base was flared at the bottom to stand alone, and the heads and backs of the figurines were roughly finished, indicating that the back was not meant to be seen.

Pritchard's 1943 monograph recognized the pillar figurines as continuations of the earlier plaque figurines; they were symbolic representations of womankind, of a domestic milk-fertility cult, or of a mother goddess, although he did not think they could be
specifically identified with any goddess mentioned in the Bible. Tufnell and Kenyon, two women archaeologists, suggested that the female pillar figurines were foreign to the Yahweh cult. Patai argued that Asherah and Astarte were Hebrew goddesses, not foreign or magical entities. Although he believed that the Bronze Age plaque figures represented Astarte, the pillar-base figurines were small clay counterparts of the larger wooden Asherah poles. Holladay explained the time sequence between the two as follows: the plaque-type figurines went into eclipse both in Israel and Judah during the ninth century, while the pillar-base ones came into vogue sometime in the eighth century in the north and in the late eighth or mid-seventh century in the south. According to Hestrin, the stylized elements of the pillar figurines parallel the Canaanite pendants: the head and breasts are the same, but the tree trunk replaces the tree-surmounted pubic triangle that depicted the female genitalia. Both symbolize Asherah.

Meyers treats the figurines as votive figures of worshiping women because Late Bronze Age Canaanite goddess statues were made of precious metals or stone and came from public shrines instead of or as well as houses. These objections are answered with the following observations: in the Levant the quality of artifacts reflects the varied economic positions of the royal or peasant patrons of a particular shrine, and both deity and worshiper figurines are found in temples as well as in house shrines. McCown and Kletter both argued that the idealized uniformity of the Iron Age pillar figurines suggests that they are abstract symbols of a goddess rather than of individual worshiping women. It is short-sighted to deny that female figurines from houses represent a goddess. Votive
figurines incorporate images of both the praying woman and her personal goddess; in fact, they represent the relationship between the two.

Although Fowler used examples of figurines of women playing tambourines or performing daily activities as evidence for a non-cultic interpretation, the activities he dismissed as non-cultic frequently occurred in Israelite religious ritual. Another of Fowler's suggestions—that figurines might be children's toys—is belied by the heads beautifully-modeled beyond the skill of the ordinary potter and by Bloch-Smith's observation that Judean tomb assemblies never included toys. On the other hand Fowler is correct in his claim that clay figurines do not define a locale as a public sacred area.

Holland, Engle, and Kletter cataloged Israelite figurines and suggested that they had a religious function, but they did not attach distinct meanings to the various styles. Using Syro-Palestinian parallels, Winter compiled a detailed description of female imagery found in the ancient Near East and determined that nude Near Eastern goddess figurines portray a defending and intermediating Syrian goddess who originated and functioned in the private religion of women. Keel and Uehlinger relate female pillar figurines to doves which are attributes of or substitutes for goddesses; however, they do not explain how the figurines as attributes or aspects of Asherah substituted for the goddess in ritual. Kletter believes that Judah was an isolated entity in the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, and the figurines found there should not be interpreted in light of Syrian or Bronze Age antecedents. Kletter discounts the significance of his own conclusion that most figurines belonged to domestic contexts, and he doubts that figurines were objects of cult practices such as incense burning. His narrow view that cult
is practiced only in sacred buildings does not accord with archaeological discoveries of altars and incense stands in secular living rooms in Mesopotamia and the mixture of religious objects with cooking pots, dishes, and weaving implements in Israelite houses.

Although the style of the figurines, incense burners, and altars change with the era and ethnic group, and the names of the gods and goddesses vary, the concepts that motivate votive relationships with personal protective deities remain continuous throughout the ancient Near East, from Bronze Age Mesopotamia and Ugarit to Iron Age Phoenicia and Israel. Cultic artifacts and structural elements universal to ancient Near Eastern family shrines include deity images and the apparatus necessary for burning incense and oil, pouring libations, and offering grain and luxury items to them. These are usually placed on some type of elevated structure—altar, podium, platform, or bench.

In the Iron Age southern Levant, figurines and models, lamps, zoomorphic libation kernoii, offering benches, incense altars and stands, and special plaster or paint characterize Phoenician and Philistine shrines. The use of these in obvious shrines affirms the cultic function of these same classes of furnishings and artifacts found in Israelite houses. The Philistine and Phoenician shrines explain that the female figurines and models so common in Israelite houses were visual images of a votive relationship between a woman and her protective goddess. The chalices, models, and incense stands from Israelite houses continue the Near Eastern tradition of offering incense and gifts to personal deities to invoke their protective presence in the family household. Beginning in the earliest Israelite settlements and continuing under the united and then the divided monarchy, semi-public cult rooms associated with other buildings in ancient Israel
display the same religious structures and artifacts, often mixed with conventional household pottery.

The usual Israelite house form consisted of three long rooms separated by pillars and a rear broadroom. The side rooms were often cobbled or paved, and the central room served as a courtyard. The massiveness of the pillars and remains of stairways indicate that some Israelite houses included second stories or work-worthy roofs. Stager and Holladay suggest that families lived on the second story because of the small size of the ground floor, the massive load-bearing courtyard pillars, and ethnographic parallels. The present knowledge of the architectural plan of Israelite houses provides an appropriate context for a discussion of women's social, economic, and religious activities within its ambience.

Ethnographic and historical studies on the division of labor by gender demonstrate that men's activities characteristically center on food production and community leadership, while women tend to manage the household economy, including food storage and preparation. Because the household is woman's domain, she manages directly or indirectly all of its contents. However, items connected with processes of food preparation and storage—grinding stones, ovens, cooking pots, storage jars, and food particles—remain particularly visible in the archaeological record. Ancient Near Eastern stone reliefs, paintings, and texts, including the Bible, attest that women spun thread and wove textiles both for their family households in subsistence agricultural economies like early Israel, when there was little craft specialization, as well as in industrial contexts. Needles, loom weights, food storage vessels, cooking pots, dishes, and food remains
define women’s work areas in Israelite houses. These feminine implements frequently
occur together with incense altars and female figurines in house rooms and courtyards. In
addition, jewelry and accessories that Israelite women used to deflect evil forces often
accompany their household weaving and cooking tools. The Israelite period houses at
Tell Masos, Tell el-Farʿah, Beer-sheba, and Tell Halif provide examples of cultic artifacts
and furniture Israelite women employed in household rituals.

The structures and artifacts in several dwellings at Tell Masos, possibly biblical
Hormah, suggest that early Israelites maintained household shrines. The presence in
Room 307 of the four figurines typical of votives deposited in the Hathor temple at
Timna demonstrates that the residents of House 314 depended on an established
relationship with a personal protective goddess whom they worshiped in their home in
addition to or instead of in a public sanctuary. Residents probably used the hearth and
mudbrick structure with ash residue as well as the courtyard bench for metalworking and
associated religious rituals invoking the protection of their personal family goddess.
Room 331 which residents entered near the courtyard bench held three incense burners,
three lamps, a bead, a large number of shells from the Red Sea, and a Canaanite-
Phoenician style ivory lion head. The lion symbolized and accompanied the powerful
protector goddesses of the Egypto-Canaanite pantheon, so its presence with the incense
burners and lamps in Room 331 implies that a woman with a newborn child slept there
and protected herself and her newborn with shells and beads and by burning oil and
incense to welcome the protective household goddess and to deflect the presence of
jealous evil spirits.
The conspicuous benches, careful plastering, and body sherd paneling suggest that House 167’s Room 169 functioned as a shrine because plastered and decorated walls with benches around them as architectural features define domestic cult rooms in the southern Levant. Several artifacts discovered in the room itself and in and around House 167 hint at luxury votive offerings, and a bone scaraboid carved with animals as well as a limestone lion head reflect the goddess Asherah. At the center of House 42’s outer court next to an ash pit stands a .5 m. high structure with an attached bench. No accompanying artifacts indicate that residents employed the structure in technological activities, and it resembles offering podiums that furnish cult areas in the Levant. A cooking pit, a cookpot, jugs, and bowls indicate that a woman prepared food in the area near the elevated structure. The bone amulet with ring-and-dot designs, the chalice fragment, and the decorated stand suggest women’s household religious ritual to deflect demonic forces.

Throughout the late seventh to early sixth century BCE Area G rooms at Tell Masos excavators found female and animal figurines, lamps, and a furniture model among women’s textile production implements such as spindlewhorls, needles, and pins, as well as food storage and preparation vessels like cooking pots, bowls, storage jars, and kraters. The presence of ritual artifacts in the environs of women’s implements illustrates the importance of household religion to Israelite women’s daily life.

Most of the Israelite dwellings from the tenth century Level 7b at Tell el-Farāh, biblical Tirzah, included either a female or an animal figurine in their household commodities. Horse figurines, often accompanied by arrowheads, came from several buildings in the southern section of the residential district as well as from the defense
fosse and the open space facing the city gate. While the war goddess symbolism of horse figurines labels those from public findspots as amulets for military men, those from houses must have fulfilled a purpose similar to the protective figurines that guarded Mesopotamian houses. The ivory pendant, flute-player amulet, female figurine fragment, model sanctuary, and probably the beads and pierced disk from Houses 187, 149B and 161 from the western edge of the settlement show that Israelites did not confine their religious thoughts and activities to public temples. The bovine heads, the cow nursing calf motif, the beads and blue jewelry plaque, the woman with tambourine figurine, and even the lamp from Houses 176, 427, and 436 represent women’s religious beliefs and rituals their wider ancient Near Eastern heritage associated with fertility and a mother’s protection. No specifically male accoutrements accompany these votive artifacts; on the other hand, several items like household pottery and the spindlewhorl confirm Israelite women’s interest in them.

The northeastern section of the tell is particularly rich in cultic finds. In addition to House 427 where the excavators discovered bovine and female figurines, House 436 included several luxury votive objects, House 442 contained an incense burner and Cypriot bowls, and their neighboring House 440 produced a nursing female figurine, a harnessed horse head from a zoomorphic vessel, an alabaster pendant, six beads, and another female with tambourine figurine from the beaten earth floor of its courtyard near a 3 m. long stone bench, as well as a model sanctuary. Several of the houses in Level 7 at Tell el-Far‘ah have courtyard alcoves that connote niches where women repeated prayers and incantations, poured libations, and burned oil and incense to the goddess who
protected the household. Women's cooking installations predominate in these courtyard areas where excavators also found fragments of female figurines, zoomorphic libation vessels, and women's textile-producing tools. The Israelite houses from tenth century BCE Tell el-Far'ah demonstrate women's religious agency in their households.

The eighth century BCE Israelite houses in Tell Beer-sheba Stratum 2 provide several examples of cultic artifacts in women's food preparation, cooking, storage, and weaving areas. Front Room 94, the site of a woman's oven and cooking pots, held a lamp and a fragment of a zoomorphic figurine. Near Eastern women habitually stationed a figurine to guard the entrance and lighted a lamp to attract the beneficent deity and deflect evil ones. Courtyard 36, itself a kitchen, borders both Room 94 on the north and Room 25 on the south, where excavators found a female figurine, miniature lamp, and model couch. Architectural structures that resemble votive offering shelves line the sides of Courtyard 36 where it adjoins these two findspots of votive figurines and lamps.

Domestic kitchens in front rooms near the street, because they give entrance to the living and work space on the roof and to the rear bedrooms and food storage, afford natural places for household shrines that honor and invoke the protective deity who guards against potentially damaging evil eyes and evil spirits that attempt access to the house.

A krater with horizontal loop handles labeled qdš "consecrated" belongs to a front room household shrine of House 76. A cosmetic stick, stone pendant, mother-of-pearl, loom weights, as well as food remains and containers mark this area as the domain the mistress of House 76 traversed on her way from her cooking and weaving area to the food storage in casemate Room 66. The room combination 44-145 contained an oven, 30 clay
loom weights, cooking pots, a jar inscribed with ḫwmt, and a figurine fragment. The long central Room 48 of Building 25 contained another figurine fragment, beads, a bracelet, loom weights, a decorated amphora, a button, a few cooking pots, and a large number of bowls and storage jars. The women’s jewelry, textile production tools, and cooking equipment that surround the figurines in these Israelite houses affirm that women owned them and incorporated them in their household religious rituals.

Model chairs that represent the lap of the child-protecting goddess appeared with figurines and incense burners in Houses 25, 808, and 430. Additional figurines occurred with lamps. These cultic artifacts from women’s work areas at Tell Beer-sheba indicate that women positioned images of the family protective goddess near vulnerable entrances to their dwellings, provided her with votive offerings, and burned incense and oil to invoke her aid.

At Tell Halif (Lahav), the Field 4 team exposed the remains of a household shrine in Stratum 6B. Elements of the household shrine mixed with ordinary household pottery in the ground floor rear broadroom of a late eighth century four-room house. On floor G8005 of the room the molded head of a female pillar-base figurine accompanied a ceramic fenestrated incense stand. The household shrine room architecture revealed two phases. Residents modified its initial purely domestic nature by blocking doorways and constructing insulating walls or offering benches to create a more sacred space in its second phase. These apparently cultic structures and artifacts occupied women’s work space in the private Israelite house. Many household clay vessels and stone and bone implements dominated the room. An oven outside the room, fish bones, and carbonized
remains of grapes, cereals, and legumes indicate that this was a woman’s household food
preparation and storage area. This Israelite house shrine at Lahav affords another
excellent example of an incense-burning altar and a female figurine associated with a
woman’s work area.

Israelite women presided over ovens and kitchens in courtyards or ground-floor
rooms that opened onto the street. As in other ancient Near Eastern cultures, women
protected their living areas from evil forces that attempted to attack them and their
children. They placed figurines that represented and invoked protective household deities
in the front rooms or courtyards of their houses near doorways that provided access to the
house and roof living and work areas. For example, figurines and clearly votive vessels
came from front Rooms 93, 94, and 443 and the remaining front half of House 25
including Rooms 25, 48, and 145 at Beer-sheba. Entrance Courtyards 36 at Beer-sheba,
314 and 42 at Tell Masos, and 440, 355, 327, and 436 at Tell el-Far‘ah include elevated
structures that may have served as niches, podiums, and offering tables for protective
house divinities. Figurines came from near most of these elevated structures, especially at
Beer-sheba and Tell el-Far‘ah. For example, excavators found figurines in the same loci
as alcoves or benches in Courtyards 440, 355, and 327 at Tell el-Far‘ah and in loci
adjoining Courtyards 436 at Tell el-Far‘ah, 36 at Beer-sheba, and 314 and 42 at Tell
Masos.

In many cases incense burners or lamps accompany figurines in Israelite houses to
purify the house rooms from evil and to invoke the presence of protective deities. The
lamps and incense burners take various forms. They include chalices, fenestrated clay
offering stands, miniature votive lamps, normal lamps, clay models that represent the child-protecting goddess's lap, as well as small limestone incense altars. Depending on the time period, any and all of these examples occurred in Israelite living spaces with deity figurines and women's implements.

Overall, women managed Israelite household economies, but they were specifically responsible for food storage and preparation as well as clothing production. Women's other major contribution consisted in childbearing and education. Figurines and incense burners in rear broadrooms protected sleeping mothers and their newborn infants from flying night demons. While Stager and Holladay place family living space on a second story due to massive weight-bearing pillars and cramped ground-floor rooms, others like Herzog present evidence that families lived in rear broadrooms at sites like Beer-sheba. Rear storage and sleeping rooms at Tell Masos (307, 331, and 169), Tell el-Far'ah (442) and Tell Halif (G8005) contained evidences of household cult including incense burners or elevated offering structures that invoked deities who protected women and their infants while they worked and slept. Apotropaic amulets and accessories, especially in sleeping rooms, also testify to women's concerns with protecting their infants from child-stealing demons. For example, apotropaic jewelry accompanied incense burners and chalices in rear broadrooms of Tell Masos Houses 314 (Room 331) and 42 and Tell el-Far'ah House 442 and joined women's food storage and preparation artifacts in several other rooms including Tell Beer-sheba casemate Rooms 63 and 66 and Courtyard 48 and Tell el-Far'ah Houses 440, 161, and 436.
These Israelite period houses at Tell Masos, Tell el-Far'ah, Beer-sheba, and Tell Halif reveal the cultic artifacts and furniture Israelite women employed in protective household rituals. Private house shrines for protective family deities and semi-public neighborhood cult rooms in the ancient Near East provide parallels that help to interpret the cultic structures, artifacts, and jewelry these Israelite houses exhibit. The most obvious architectural structure of cult rooms in Israel and Judah is the offering bench that scales one or two walls and sometimes the entire room. Occasionally a section of bench stands higher as a podium for the deity. Cult rooms contained figurines, models, incense burners, lamps, libation vessels, and luxury votives. The combination of structures and artifacts defines these areas as locations where Israelites observed sacred rituals. These small neighborhood cult rooms and semi-private household shrines of wealthy individuals provide the pattern which clarifies the religious nature of similar artifacts and furnishings wherever they exist. Because of these small sanctuaries we can be certain that the figurines and incense burners archaeologists found in Israelite houses were religious objects.

Texts as well as archaeology indicate that second millennium Mesopotamian shrines located in the streets of residential neighborhoods or in the courts or living rooms of private houses consisted of incense altars and offering platforms, and they honored personal gods that belonged to extended families and their residential neighborhoods. Personal gods in Mesopotamia received daily prayers as well as crisis laments and petitions addressed to "my god," "my goddess," or similar titles that indicate a familial relationship, and their clients honored them with libations, food, and incense offerings in
domestic shrines rather than in the large state temples. While kings chose personal gods from the higher echelons of the pantheon, ordinary citizens tended to approach city and national deities through intermediaries, and for this reason personal gods customarily fulfilled the role of intercessor.

Ancient Near Eastern personal family gods and protective spirits, as distinguished from deceased ancestors, together served the purpose of protecting the members and interests of the household. Their guarding presence in houses was invoked through figurines that represented either the family god or goddess or their emissaries, male šedu and female lamassu protective spirits who kept household residents from harm. Archaeological excavations and texts reveal that people placed these figurines on guard in the courtyards or bedrooms of their houses, hung them in plaque form or buried them near doorways, or stood them on pedestals on the roofs. Residents burned incense or oil on special incense altars or lamps in their living rooms in order to invite the protecting presence of their personal god and goddess and to frighten away unwanted supernatural beings such as Lamashtu and Lilith, rapacious demon-like goddesses who threatened women and their newborn infants.

Houses and small neighborhood shrines at Ugarit exemplify the continuity of Babylonian religious customs in the Levant and the practical application of local Ugaritic sacred texts to family piety. The small “Temple of the Rhytons” had low stone benches and an offering podium, but no sacrificial area. Its furnishings included mediocre representations of deities, a terracotta stand for incense offerings, libation rhytons, and small imported and luxury objects dedicated to the deity. Sacred texts and divinity
figurines found throughout the housing and workshop districts indicate that private citizens at Ugarit, like those of Assyria and Babylonia, participated in religious rituals in their homes and workshops instead of limiting their religious expression to the elaborate state and royal temples located in the political center of the city. Worshipers replicated cultic structures and furnishings that belonged to major state sanctuaries and royal temples in their household shrines in less elaborate form with less expensive materials. This allowed people to serve and invoke in a consistent and personal manner the deities they depended on for daily family care and household protection. Logically, family interests differ from or supplement national interests. Personal religion in the ancient Near East reflects concerns with the everyday physical welfare of individual family members. The wisdom tablets from the “House of the Literary Tablets,” the fragment of a medical ritual for a pregnant woman and conjurations against various evils including demons from the “House of the Man of Letters,” Rapšānu’s incantation against evil eyes, and the incantations against the child-stealing Lamashu from the Hurrian house all indicate that practitioners at the household level assisted their family members or neighbors to deal with normal human life situations and perceived dangers.

Texts and artifacts indicate a definite concern for human procreation and agricultural fertility in the ancient Near East. The difficult subsistence environment of the Israelite hill country, with its total dependence on large labor force and rainfall—often unreliable because of famine cycles—for successful agriculture, forms the background of the fertility aspects of the Canaanite and Israelite religions. One of the most crucial problems that confronted early Israelites was small household size in the face of increased
labor needs. There were strong pressures on women to reproduce. Due to plagues and military conquests, the Iron Age began with as much as a four-fifths reduction in population in the eastern Mediterranean region. Adult female longevity, along with infant mortality, presented a major obstruction to fertility. The average woman died at age thirty. Study results show very high infant mortality; of the average 4.1 births for each female, only 1.9 survived. Data from the excavation of Roman Age Meiron indicate that 50% of individuals died before age 18, and 70% of those occurred within the first five years of life; that 35 percent of the population died before age 5 confirms to general osteological statistics from Palestinian burials. This skeletal analysis of human remains from archaeological excavations confirms biblical clues to Israelites' preoccupation with fertility, infant mortality, and short female life span.

Biblical scholars and archaeologists like Cross and Dever have shown that Israelite Yahwistic religion developed out of its specifically Canaanite ancient Near Eastern context. If we take as a given the principle that group survival depends on its members' involvement in the three areas of reproduction, production of subsistence goods, and defense, it follows that a group's religious system requires the participation of their deities in these same three areas. Egypto-Canaanite texts and iconography show both gods and goddesses as sources of fertility as well as participants in the defense of societies and individuals through their politico-military and protective powers. Although the Ugaritic mythical texts depict El as the giver of children and Baal as the source of rain for agricultural fertility, they articulate less clearly the role of the Canaanite goddesses; but amuletic pendants, paintings, stelae, and plaques delineate pictorially their
reproductive, nurturing, and protective powers for animals and humans. Due to male authorship both Canaanite and Israelite texts emphasize male deities as sources of defense and fertility, whereas the female powers of reproduction, sustenance, and protection are reflected mainly in the iconography. Two of their most significant representations involve trees and lions.

Ugaritic and Israelite evidence demonstrates that Levantine people oriented religious rituals involving prayers and sacrifices to their deities, sometimes through empowered images. Both myth and ritual texts portray El as a patriarchal figure, father of gods and human beings. As a god of fertility he gives children and as a god of child-sacrifice he demands their return. The Keret and Aqhat mythological texts associate Lady Asherah of the Sea with El as procreatress of the gods and of humans and as sustainer of animals. In the Baal Cycle Asherah mediates between suppliants and the high god El, and in the Keret Epic she receives offerings for doing so in a fertility function. One of the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscriptions and various biblical texts indicate that Asherah received offerings as a deity from Israelites. The Ugaritic texts call Baal “the victor” and “rider in the clouds.” He is a war god as well as god of the rainstorm, and he receives prayers and offerings for these functions. Ancient Near Eastern gods and goddesses defended the royal dynasty of the state as well as the individual. In biblical texts Yahweh assumes this responsibility, although royal patronage of Baal and Asherah in passages such as 1 Kgs 18:19 and 2 Kgs 21:3, 7 hints that these deities functioned in this role as well.

Anat partners with Baal in the Baal Cycle, a fertility myth. Anat and Astarte accompany Baal in Ugaritic mythology and both function as war goddesses in Egyptian
texts. Canaanite and Egyptian art and iconography express these mythological goddess roles through anthropomorphic and symbolic images. The controversy over the role of the goddess Anat epitomizes the debate on fertility. Whereas some interpreters understand Anat in the Ugaritic texts as a fertility goddess sexually involved with Baal or El, others claim there is no clear unambiguous support for her sexuality and procreative power. Male scholars’ tendency to assign one-word epithets like “storm” god to Baal and “high” god to El, but to reserve “fertility” for the goddesses reflects an unconscious effort to downplay their more visible feminine powers by generalizing all women into less threatening fertility or motherhood roles. The main Canaanite gods El and Baal and their consorts Asherah, Anat, and Astarte combine and interchange fertility and warrior-protector roles.

Due to some Deuteronomistic mentions of Astarte and Asherah with Baal, biblical scholars traditionally link Asherah with Baal, who as Baal Haddu in the Ugaritic myths acts more often as Anat’s mate. Recent scholarship analyzes the purported alliance of Asherah with Baal in Deuteronomistic writing as fabricated because the “asherah” almost always stood in a Yahwistic shrine in Israelite religion. Scholars who study references to Asherah in the Bible agree that all come from the Deuteronomistic editor or later. For these reasons, it appears likely that Asherah was paired with Baal as a tactic of Deuteronomistic polemic.

Some of the Ugaritic texts as well as biblical texts confuse Astarte and Asherah. The variable pairings of the gods and goddesses in the Ras Shamra texts and certain conflate terms suggest an early mingling of the Canaanite goddesses. Parallel phrases that
identify the gods as “sons of Athirat” and “sons of Qudshu” seem to confirm that Qudshu was one of Asherah’s names on the Ugaritic tablets. The Egyptian relief labeled “Qudshu-Astarte-Anat” which shows a nude goddess standing on a lion makes the equivalence of Asherah and Qudshu significant. The label indicates a fusion of the major Canaanite goddesses and provides a key to a series of iconographic identifications. Commerce between Egypt and Canaan effected the merger of the functionally similar deities Asherah and Hathor during Egyptian rule.

Southern Palestine exhibits Egyptian motifs and style due to more or less direct influence by Egypt during the Late Bronze Age, and Phoenicia had close ties with Egypt since the time of the Old Kingdom, so that Palestinian art can be termed Egyptianized, either directly from Egypt or indirectly from Phoenicia. Egyptian plaques and stelae from the New Kingdom, especially the Ramesside era, show Qudshu holding snakes and lotus flowers. The goddess Qudshu wears the Hathor wig, an almost heart-shaped headdress with a prominent curl at the bottom of each side, and sometimes the Hathor crown. Archaeologists consistently identify Hathor with the Canaanite goddess shown on the plaques because of their similar attributes. Egyptian paintings portray her variously as a tree or the living soul of trees, as a cow or lioness, and as a nurse of the king of Egypt. Negbi shows that victorious fertility goddess iconography began in the coastal areas and was transmitted inland, an indication that coastal Canaanite traditions influenced the early Israelite figurines.

One of the principal epithets of the Late Bronze Age war and fertility goddesses was “Lion Lady.” The lion, symbolizing the merged Egypto-Canaanite goddess, occurs in
both textual and representational evidence. The larger terracotta cultic stand from Iron Age Ta‘anach exhibits the Lion Lady together with her lions and tree and ibex motifs. A goddess standing on the back of a lion expresses the concept of a transcendent deity who can subdue the lion, a symbol of ferocity. Mesopotamian amulets frequently portrayed the child-stealing goddess Lamashtu with a lion’s head. Only an equally fierce or more powerful deity could defeat her machinations. The goddess who stood on a lion symbolized a war goddess or mother goddess transcendent and ferocious enough to subdue her. Lion goddess iconography leads us to the conclusion that Israelite women employed the lion figurines in their houses for protective house rituals.

In Egypt the tree often represented the source of life and food. Several Egyptian paintings portray the goddess as a woman forming the trunk of a tree, offering food to people. The iconography of the Late Bronze Age Lachish ewer and goblet equates the tree with a pubic triangle fertility symbol. In addition, Mattan presented the ewer that pictured the tree bordered by rampant caprids as an offering to the goddess Elat, an epithet for Asherah in the Ugaritic texts. A relief from Ras Shamra shows a goddess in the same position feeding rampant caprids beside her. These examples from archaeology demonstrate that a living or stylized sacred tree represented Asherah, and Canaanites worshiped her in this form. The burned tree at Iron Age Lachish continued this tradition in Israelite times. Whereas the Lachish ewer dates to the late thirteenth century BCE when the Israelites were emerging as a people in Canaan, and the Ta‘anach cult stands belong to the tenth century united Israelite monarchy, archaeological evidence for the cult
of Asherah during the divided monarchy comes from ninth or eighth century Kuntillet ʿAjrud and eighth century Khirbet el-Kom.

The Kuntillet ʿAjrud semi-public cult room is significant for the study of household shrines because it provides an additional example of elements indicative of local Levantine shrines—offering benches, walls decorated with paint and white plaster, red-painted apotropaic and fertility iconography, and votive vessels; it exemplifies Israelites' use of protective images and inscriptions on or near entrance doorways; and it connects Asherah with Yahweh in a protective function. One inscription from the wall of a typical Judean chambered bench tomb at Khirbet el-Kom and three on large pithoi at Kuntillet ʿAjrud appeal to "Yahweh and his Asherah" for blessing and protection. Their authors wrote them near apotropaic symbols, which underline the need for protection in those environments. Several different individuals wrote the Kuntillet ʿAjrud blessing inscriptions in various scripts. Additional prayer inscriptions that inhabitants of the oasis wrote on the plaster doorjambs parallel the biblical injunction to write God's words on doorposts and gates.

The extant fragments of one wall inscription indicate that when Yahweh enriches a person that individual will give a gift to Asherah to repay the favor. This exemplifies a working partnership similar to the Canaanite El-Asherah roles in the Keret Epic in which Keret asks El for a new wife who will provide him offspring and promises to pay Asherah double his wife's weight in silver and triple her weight in gold if his mission is successful. The Kuntillet ʿAjrud inscriptions show that Israelites presented votive offerings to Asherah as Yahweh's intermediary. Asherah's role as mediator with the high
god in the Ugaritic texts survives as one of her primary functions in Israelite religion. The placement of her stylistic tree symbol in Yahwistic shrines and the Yahwistic blessing formula “by/through his asherah” indicate that Asherah as symbolized by the sacred tree was the means of approaching Yahweh as well as the vehicle of his provision and protection.

Although Smith and others argue that by the tenth century Israelites had combined Northwest Semitic imagery for El, Baal, and Asherah and attributed it all to Yahweh, Israelite religion in fact included a goddess. It seems that Yahweh indeed incorporated many aspects of the Canaanite gods El and Baal; however, rather than attributing goddess imagery to Yahweh, the Israelites conflated and attributed Northwest Semitic and Egyptian imagery for several goddesses to Asherah, whom they worshiped together with Yahweh. Although Asherah was an Israelite goddess, she was not worshiped separately. She functioned as an intermediary bringing people’s petitions to Yahweh, then served as Yahweh’s instrument for blessing and protection of individuals.

A supplicant crafts a cult object or a deity image for the express purpose of invoking the presence of the divine patron and for sustaining a votive relationship by reminding the deity and the supplicant of the contract they have established. Because of this principle the “asherah” cult symbol mentioned in the several Yahweh-Asherah Kuntillet ‘Ajrud and Khirbet el-Kom blessings and repeated so many times in the biblical texts refers to a personal goddess. Over and above the testimony that these texts afford to a Hebrew goddess behind the symbol, material archaeology demonstrates that goddesses did not disappear from Israelite religion by being absorbed by a putative radical
integration of powers into an all-powerful male deity. Examples of obvious goddess iconography from the ninth and eighth and later centuries, for example, the goddess head over the tree trunk on the Hazor ointment spoon and the ivory "woman at the window" plaque from eighth century Samaria, as well as the familiar female figurines, contradict the claim that as early as Iron I (the twelfth and eleventh centuries BCE) goddess symbols ceased to represent the goddess. The Israelites who made and revered the figurines clearly associated their blatant female character—in particular the pillar figurines' distended breasts—with a female deity rather than with a male god. The deemphasis on the sexual aspect of the Israelite figurines as compared with the Late Bronze Canaanite ones confirms that Asherah's power in Israelite thinking focused more on the nurture and protection of children than on enabling conception.

Just as the gods of Canaanite mythology and iconography functioned in both fertility and defense roles, the stylized tree of life symbolized both divine aid in fertility and divine protection for men and women, their children and animals, and their political territory. Although in the Near East the stylized sacred tree symbolized both fertility and protection, and both gods and goddesses provided fertility, protection, and ordered life in an ordered cosmos, the history of sacred tree symbolism in Egyptian and Levantine iconography connects it with goddesses rather than with gods. On Egyptian paintings goddesses form the trunks of trees to feed both men and women, and in this guise they provide grain for humanity and also represent the divine power and authority afforded the king to be a victorious ruler. In both fertility and apotropaic functions the sacred tree in
Egyptian, Ugaritic, and Israelite iconography symbolizes a personal goddess as the source.

The el-Kom and Kuntillet ʿAjrud inscriptions attribute more powers to Asherah than female and animal fertility since they protect men in a tomb and caravanserai. The Khirbet el-Kom inscription credits Yahweh with rescuing Uryahu from his enemies by his (Yahweh’s) Asherah, and the Kuntillet ʿAjrud apotropaic symbols and accompanying inscriptions that apply to “Yahweh and his asherah” for blessing appear to request protection for travelers. The several apotropaic symbols such as Bes figures, an upside down hand, and abecedaries that accompanied the inscriptions support Asherah as a protective force in addition to being a fertility goddess.

The “asherah” symbol at Kuntillet ʿAjrud and Khirbet el-Kom attests that the Israelite “asherah” was available for the blessing of individuals. As I elaborated in Chapter Three: House Gods and Shrines in the Ancient Near East, the gods’ defense of individuals included the idea of fending off evil spirits, especially child-stealing gods and goddesses who threatened pregnant women and infants. The large-breasted female figurines and incense burners in Israelite houses indicate that Israelite women recited incantations, presented votive offerings, and burned incense to Asherah as the protective house goddess. These magical and religious rituals were designed to invoke her presence and deflect the child-stealing demons.

The medieval view of magic as opposed to (Church) religion, held also by late 1800’s and early 1900’s apologetic interests that deemed magic as foreign to or opposed to an Israelite religion distinct from its Near Eastern neighbors, has given way to seeing
magic and religion as complementary or operating on a continuum. Chapter Five stressed the commonalities in ancient Near Eastern apotropaic rituals, especially those related to mother and child protection, and the continuity between religion and magic. In Egypt and Mesopotamia, magic and religion interacted as the situation dictated, and both depended on each other. Incantation rituals derived power from the deity they named, and prayers to deities caught their attention through flames, incense, images or some other ritual instrumentality. Women base their protective rituals on legends about the magical powers, both for evil and for good, of certain gods and goddesses or their agents whose names change, but whose functions remain remarkably similar throughout four millennia of Near Eastern history. Forms and rituals that deflected evil eyes and child-stealing demigods passed between cultures and assimilated to each indigenous theological system. Egyptian legends about the evil eye of Apopis who attempted to disrupt the cycles of life and death inspired the symbolism of apotropaic jewelry. Israelite women wore eye beads, divine Horus-eye pendants, and Bes pendants in their homes at Lachish, Jerusalem and elsewhere while cooking, weaving, and feeding their children. Egyptian “sound eye” and “much-suffering eye” symbolism continued to protect Yahwistic women and their infants in the Jewish Second Temple and rabbinic and early Christian times.

Red, blue, and gold beads, pendants, rosettes, and eye designs symbolized divine nurture and protection in Mesopotamia also. Historically and cross-culturally women prefer blue beads, especially eye beads, to avert evil spirits. Blue resembles an eye, so has the power to repel it, and the color has an affinity with the moon, whose blue roundness symbolizes the full moon, giver of life, growth, and fertility, and the sky where the moon
rises. In ancient mythology the full moon and associated goddesses had a special effect on mothers and children. For example, Anahita purified women's wombs and breast milk for their infants, and the moon protected against Hecate, the mistress of black magic and her horde of ghosts. Several blue faience amulets rested with women's implements at Lachish.

Biblical references indicate that ancient Israelites routinely wore inscribed objects. Archaeology confirms this practice through two sheet-silver amulets inscribed in an ancient Hebrew script that came from the seventh century BCE Ketef Hinnom caves in Jerusalem. Similar foil amulets that protected women and infants came from the Roman and Byzantine periods in Palestine. For example, excavators of second to fifth century CE Jewish tombs at Irbid (Arbela) east of the southern end of Lake Galilee found several tiny metal foil amulets folded inside gold or bone capsules. One of the Irbid amulets, a bronze foil talisman probably intended to be worn by the child it protected, addresses the evil eye, calamities, and demons. A second century CE silver amulet that calls on Yahu to send his angel to protect a young woman and her unborn child from the "lilith" that hides in the canopy of her bed brings to remembrance the Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Kom inscriptions that name Yahweh and his Asherah, as if Asherah were the intermediary agent of protection. These examples indicate that Israelite women and their children wore inscribed jewelry and shared in the universal ancient Near Eastern belief about its powerful effects.

Egyptian texts and paintings portray Hathor in her capacity as hypostasis of the Living Eye of the sun-god driving away the evil eye of a demon who tries to destroy life
and order. The goddess Asherah, Hathor's equivalent in function and iconography, protected Israelite women and their newborn infants from sickness and death by countering the destructive eyes of gods and people with her own powerful eyes, shown outlined in red or black on the pillar-base figurines that invoked her guarding presence in Israelite houses. Examples from Egypt and Mesopotamia document the widely accepted use in the ancient Near East of eye paint to deflect the destructive evil eyes of hostile gods, demons, and people. They suggest that the red and black paint on the heads and particularly the eyes of female pillar figurines served the same purpose. Israelite women, along with their ancient Near Eastern neighbors, practiced apotropaic and empowerment rituals with images. Israelite female pillar-base figurines with full breasts and guarding eyes duplicated their full breasts in the breast-feeding mother and deflected demonic evil eyes. The effect was triggered by prayers and incantations accompanied by fire and incense, all of which invoked the power of Asherah, the personal family goddess. Amuletic jewelry magnified the apotropaic effect.

Ethnographic parallels from Iran, Afghanistan, and Lebanon demonstrate that twentieth century Middle Eastern women employ religious and magical practices to prevent the effect of envious eyes of people and *jin* or *peri* demonesses on their breast milk and on their young children. They pin metallic amulets, jewelry that resembles eyes, or jewelry that symbolizes protective goddesses on themselves and their infants' clothing to nullify these evil forces that could sicken them. If they perceive an evil effect caused by an adverse power, they burn incense and recite a prayer or incantation in the name of their
deity in hopes of reversing it. In modern as well as in ancient Near Eastern cultures women invoke the presence of protective deities through burning incense or oil. The flames and fragrant smoke pleases the deities and purifies the surrounding area from illness caused by supernatural evil influences. Because of this association, incense burners and lamps accompany prayers and incantations in ritual texts, and they are present frequently in excavated household shrines in the ancient Near East. Biblical texts refer to incense burners and oil lamps in connection with religious ritual as well as in the list of duties of a good woman in her home. Incense burners and lamps accompany female figurines in many Israelite houses.

Names and images were important vehicles of power in ancient Near Eastern cultures. Benevolent eyes and names protected against evil eyes and names. Evil powers were repulsed by seeing their own or equally powerful images, or by hearing their own names or names of more powerful deities. In biblical Deuteronomistic religion and in iconoclastic Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions, the power of the divine name survives the reliance on divine images. Naming the patient’s protective deity was an important ingredient in ancient Near Eastern prayers and incantations as well. The primary function of personal gods and goddesses was to care for and protect the family. They often were addressed as intermediaries with the more powerful high gods. The Arslan Tash plaques date to the time of the divided Israelite monarchy. They are inscribed in a West Semitic dialect similar to Hebrew and illustrate a woman’s naming her personal protective deities in order to prevent the entrance into her house of a child-stealing goddess. The figures on the plaque and the descriptions of the demonic flying night
goddess employ motifs known from Assyrian Lamashtu incantations and Egyptian magical texts as well as from Talmudic and medieval Jewish literature. Israelite pillar-base goddess figurines fulfilled the same function in ancient Israelite homes as the magically protective Mesopotamian figurines and plaques that represented deities or their emissary spirits who protected the inhabitants of the house, especially from child-stealing demons. The figurines played the same role as the Arslan Tash inscribed plaques—women placed them near the doorway of the house courtyard or living room like the mēzūzāh, the Israelite portal inscription, and the Jewish Kindbettzettel that hung in the room where a woman was giving birth to protect it from malevolent supernatural beings.

In Semitic cultures, the evil eye of gods, demons, or people presented a dangerous force that only the protection of a more powerful divine name or image could resist. The goddess Asherah, invoked through her image in the large-breasted pillar-base figurines, served as the protective spirit of ancient Israelite houses. Her conspicuous guarding eyes, often emphasized or outlined with demon-protective red or black paint, warned away the evil eye and the child-stealing demons during childbirth and the delicate neonatal period. Parallel to their ancient and modern neighbors, Israelite women protected themselves and their newborn infants with personal deities, incense, and jewelry, especially eye-motif jewelry, to deflect evil eyes and child-stealing demons. As modern Middle Eastern women name their protective deity in situations of crisis for themselves and their newborn infants, Israelite women invoked the goddess Asherah through her name and her image. Believing that the fragrance of burning oil or incense brought blessing and prosperity, they burned incense or oil on special incense altars or lamps in their living
rooms in order to invite the protecting presence of their personal goddess and to frighten away unwanted supernatural beings.

Beginning in the time of the Judges and continuing to a large extent into the monarchical period, Israelite households were independent cultural and economic centers which formed the basis of a tribally-organized society. The strict division of labor in the practically self-sufficient Israelite household placed a high value on women's work. Because of the division of labor and a woman's resulting presence and position in the household, it is likely that she also supervised religious duties there. While Israelite men fulfilled public roles in the religion and the clan government and engaged in the intense work of clearing forests, cutting cisterns, maintaining terraces, and supervising the sowing and reaping of field agriculture, women managed the household economy including clothing manufacture, food storage and preparation, and producing and educating offspring that could add to the labor force and perpetuate claim to the family land inheritance. Men respected her wisdom and educational skills. The Prov 31:10-31 acrostic poem values the successful matriarch's business acumen and industrious work for the benefit of her household—weaving and clothing manufacture, as well as keeping the lamp burning at night, an indication that she initiated and supervised household cult as well. In the famine and disease-prone environment of early Israel, high infant mortality and short female life span threatened the important role of women as wise household administrators and educators, so they needed, made, and revered the household goddess figurines.
The forty-two Roman-era Aramaic incantation texts from Nippur that Montgomery cataloged affirm women's leadership in protective household rituals. These incantations were designed to protect aspects of the domestic welfare of a married couple and their children, house, property, and cattle, and they included various texts against child-stealing demons. Frequently women procured the incantations without reference to their husbands, and Jewish as well as Mandaean and Greek protective household rituals always required the name of the mother of the household. The Talmud reflects this role of women when it stipulates in *b. Shab.* 66b that “all repetitive incantations are in name of the mother.” According to Montgomery, the matriarchal condition of society rather than an elder principle of *pater incertus, mater certa* forced the requirement that protective incantations include the mother’s name.

Women were sometimes involved in public religious leadership, but they usually performed religious offices in the context of their normal domain—the household. Although the Hebrew Bible highlights public male leaders, it also speaks of women who figured occasionally in public religious roles: judge, prophet, wise woman, singer/dancer, keener, door attendant at the meeting tent, necromancer, consecrated woman, weaver of clothing for divine images, and Queen Mother who made a covering for the “asherah.” *Judg 5:7* calls Deborah who counseled and pronounced juridical decisions for the Israelites “mother in Israel,” signifying someone who bore a particular kind of religious authority. Women such as these were important and respected in their public religious roles in Israelite society. Biblical texts also give various examples of women, viewed both positively and negatively, performing religious or magical activities in their homes, and
sometimes they mention that their families supported them. The woman of Endor consulted the dead Samuel, then cooked and served King Saul a meal. Huldah prophesied to the high priest and the king’s cabinet while in her home. Some women baked cakes, burned sacrifices, and poured out wine offerings to the “Queen of Heaven” goddess in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. Israelites also paid women divining prophets to tie magic bands on them. The Israelite woman’s household was the center of her religious as well as her economic activity.

Although the biblical texts portray Israelite society as largely patriarchal, legislated authority does not necessarily coincide with power, especially in cultures with designated interdependent gender roles. Israelite culture, although patrilineal, was not patriarchal in the sense of men having control over females, male family heads having control over their wives and other family members, or of women being subservient, despite some biblical texts or features of biblical languages that seem to imply this. Social reality confirms that authority does not necessarily coincide with power. Nabal’s wife Abigail exemplifies the independence and power sagacious women had as household managers. The Israelite woman’s sociological position as household manager gave her a measure of independence which allowed her to choose to direct her energies in several directions. She had power to work for the benefit of her family and household within the accepted cultural norms and conversely the freedom to assert her independence to the detriment of her husband and children. Ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Ugaritic mythologies, as well as the biblical book of Proverbs describe women and goddesses who strengthen or weaken the family-centered social order.
Proverbs delineates two contrasting images of women. The first is positive—a metaphorical wise teacher, and the second is negative—a sexually provocative stranger. Both are symbolic personifications based in Israelite sociological history, and both are illustrated in the lives of real biblical women. The Proverbs collection of Israelite poetry reflects concerns that span its entire history from the household struggle for survival in the difficult hill country environment of the pre- and early monarchical period to Jewish identity issues that climaxed in post-exilic times.

Proverbs personifies wisdom as a woman linked with God as a source of truth, righteousness, instruction, and knowledge. Woman Wisdom’s cosmic role is expressed with domestic metaphors—the house she builds and the table she sets. In a wisdom association with teaching and procreation in which women act as agents in their own destiny and their agency affects others, the Hebrew Bible refers to the basic Israelite living unit as “mother’s house.” Mothers and fathers shared responsibility in the socialization and education of their children. The advice Lemuel’s mother gave to her royal son in Prov 31:1-10 illustrates the woman’s primary role in this process. Some scholars see in Woman Wisdom the reflection of a Near Eastern goddess prototype or antitype. Woman Wisdom has many characteristics in common with her alter ego the Foreign/Strange Woman, and together they outline the boundaries of acceptable and non-acceptable social connections for Israelite young men. The valued sociological function of women as family educators and wise household-builders as contrasted with foreign or strange women is the best explanation for the use of the Woman Wisdom metaphor in Proverbs.
Even if a woman was not actually foreign, if she belonged to another man, she was "other," and off-limits. A virgin’s reproductive function was owned by her father and a wife’s by her husband. This principle was a basic tenet of the Israelite patrilineal society. Biblical genealogies, terminologies for the household unit, and inheritance laws confirm that the Israelite agricultural economy was based on patrilocality and patrilineality. In this system if a woman had a son by a man other than her husband, the illegitimate son might mistakenly inherit land and responsibilities that did not rightfully belong to him. However, Israelite tradition did not always condemn adulteresses and foreign seductresses. If they accepted the mores of Israelite culture and their actions benefited the community, it excused them for their unconventional morality and accepted them as part of it. Tamar, Ruth, and Rahab all came into the Davidic matriarchy because they valued the welfare of their chosen community.

The distinction between personified Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman derives more from their representations of order and disorder than from their actions. Both women speak with persuasive rhetoric; this shows the crucial importance of language in society, and especially in the wisdom tradition, and the dangers of its abuse. The Proverbs portrait of the Israelite woman as a powerful source of wisdom contrasts with the traditional impression of patriarchal social and theological order in the Bible. In Proverbs she is the source of life for the community, not for her sexuality and childbearing capacities, but in a socio-cultural and religious sense of life. The wise and strange characterizations of Proverbs reflect society’s value of women’s spirituality and leadership in family religion.
The characters of Pughat and Anat in the Ugaritic legendary Aqhat poem presage the wise and strange woman dichotomy of Proverbs. Pughat and Anat, the two females set in opposition in the Aqhat story, reflect two roles goddesses and women play in ancient Syro-Palestinian society—nurturer and destroyer. Barren and perpetually virginal Anat who feeds on the children of real flesh-and-blood mothers contrasts with wise, hard-working, and self-controlled Pughat. Ugaritic mythology also contrasts Anat with Asherah. In the Baal Cycle Anat threatens El, whereas Asherah intercedes with him. This motif echoes the Egyptian idea that the eyes of gods oppose each other. Apopis tries to introduce chaos by staring at the sun god with his evil eye. Hathor, the Eye of Re, withstands the demonic eye of Apopis, who would like to destroy the order of the universe. In Ugaritic mythology Asherah likewise supports the pantheon’s high god by resolving the conflict between him and the demonic Anat, who threatens the order of the pantheon. Asherah presents a wise mother figure, whereas Anat destroys household order by violence and by feeding on other women’s children. The cosmic stand-off reflects a societal stand-off and vice versa.

Israelite women occasionally appeared in public religious roles; however, their primary leadership was in household religion. The culture esteemed them as wise speakers, educators, mothers and administrators. Outside influences—foreign women who disrupted family commitments to fidelity, patrimony and worship; jealous barren neighbors who could not or would not bear children to increase the labor force; and night flying demons who sickened, poisoned, and dried up their breast milk and the body fluids of their newborn children—threatened Israelite women’s practical and spiritual
leadership. As part of their religious duty to the household, Israelite women set up household gods to protect themselves and their families.

Houses excavated at Tell Masos, Tell el Far'ah, Beer-sheba, and Lahav produced clusters of religiously-related artifacts including female figurines and incense burners. Some of the houses with cultic clusters had benches or alcoves in their courtyards where women stood their protective deity figurines. Archaeologists found incense burners and female figurines primarily in houses, which were female domains, with women’s artifacts such as apotropaic jewelry, cosmetic sticks, cooking pots, food remains, needles, and loom weights. The iconography of the figurines and their occurrence with incense altars in Israelite houses, coupled with inscripotional evidence that women were expected to produce large healthy families in a high mortality environment, suggests that women revered Asherah in household shrines in an effort to thwart the deadly powers, also perceived as female, that threatened to destroy them and their newborn children. The figurines, when interpreted as votives that mean either “this is me” or “this is you” represent a covenant relationship between the nursing mother of a newborn infant and a powerful protective female deity.

Ancient, medieval, and modern Semitic amulets, incantations, and prayers against the child-stealing demon often exhibit an image of the family’s supernatural protector and name the household mother and the powerful name of the deity she has contracted with for protection. The Yahweh-Asherah inscriptions exemplify the general protective covenant use of deity images and names. Ancient Mesopotamians burned incense and oil in reverence of their personal house gods and goddesses. Modern ethnographic parallels
also include burning incense to please the gods and to overcome evil. Israelite women with newborn infants set up an Asherah figurine on an offering bench in the courtyard access to the street, near a living room doorway, or perhaps on the roof. They dedicated votive or luxury items to the goddess and invoked her with incense, prayers, and incantations on a regular basis during the first vulnerable weeks and months of a child’s life or resorted to this if the child refused to nurse and showed signs of illness. They wore beads, pendants, and phylacteries to deflect the evil glances of people and gods during the day and fastened such jewelry on the babies as well. Israelite women kept a lamp burning all night to ensure the presence of their protective powerful-eyed goddess and to deter demons from entering their dark chambers. They invoked Yahweh’s protection through his intermediary goddess Asherah before they slept at night.
REFERENCES

Abusch, Tzvi

Ackerman, Susan

Aharoni, Yohanan, ed.
1975 Investigations at Lachish: The Sanctuary and the Residency (Lachish V). Tel-Aviv: Institute of Archaeology, Tel-Aviv University.

Ahituv, Shmuel

Ahlström, Gösta W.

Albenda, Pauline

Albertz, Rainer
Albright, William F.
1940 From the Stone Age to Christianity. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press.

Alroth, Brita

Ammermann, Rebecca M.

Angel, J. Lawrence

Ardener, Shirley, ed.

Auerbach, Elise
Avigad, Nahman

Barkay, Gabriel

Barnett, Richard D.

Barrett, John C.

Beck, Pirhiya
1982 The Drawings from Horvat Teiman (Kuntillet 'Ajrud). *Tel-Aviv* 9:3-68.

Berlinerblau, Jacques

Bertelson, Reidar, Arvind Lillehammer, and Jenny-Rita Naess, eds.

Bird, Phyllis
Black, Jeremy, and Anthony Green  

Bloch-Smith, Elizabeth  

Böhm, Stephanie  

Bomann, Ann H.  

Borghouts, J. F.  

Borowski, Oded  

Brav, Aaron  

Brenner, Athalaya  
1985 The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative. Sheffield, Eng.: JSOT Press.

Bretschneider, Joachim  
Brown, Francis
Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson.

Bruhns, Karen O.

Budge, Ernest A. Wallis

Burkert, Walter

Camp, Claudia V.

Caquot, André

Caquot, André, and Robert du Mesnil du Boisson

Caquot, André, and Maurice Sznycer

Carless-Hullin, Linda S.
Chambon, Alain

Chase, Debra A.

Cogan, Mordechai (Morton)

Contenau, Georges

Contenson, Henri de

Coogan, Michael D.

Cooke, George A.

Courtois, Jacques-Claude

Crawford, Osbert G. S.

Cross, Frank M.

Cross, Frank M., and David N. Freedman

Cross, Frank M., and Joseph T. Milik

Cross, Frank M. and Richard J. Saley

Crowfoot, John W., Grace M. Crowfoot, and Kathleen M. Kenyon

Curtis, Edward M.

Darr, Katheryn P.

Davies, Graham I.

Day, John

Day, Peggy L.

Day, Peggy L., ed.
1989 *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis: Augsburg.

Deller, Karlheinz

Delougaz, Pinhas, Harold D. Hill, and Seton Lloyd

Dever, William G.


Dietrich, Manfred, and Oswald Loretz

Dijk, Jan J. A. van, Albrecht Goetze, and Mary I. Hussey

Dommasnes, Liv H.

Donaldson, Bess A.

Dorsey, David A.
1980 The Location of Biblical Makkedah. Tel-Aviv 7:185-93.

Dothan, Moshe

Dothan, Moshe, and David N. Freedman
Dubin, Lois S.

Duling, Dennis C.

Dundes, Alan

Dundes, Alan, ed.

Durand, Jean-Marie, ed.

Edwards, Iorworth E. S.

Emerton, John A.

Englehard, D. H.

Engle, James R.

Erikson, Joan M.
Exum, J. Cheryl  

Farber, W.  

Fisher, Eugene J.  

Fowler, Mervyn D.  
1985a Excavated Figurines: A Case for Identifying a Site as Sacred? Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 97:333-44.  

Frankena, Rintje  

Frazer, James G.  

Freedman, David N.  

Friedman, Richard E.  

Fritz, Volkmar and Aharon Kempinski  
Frymer-Kensky, Tikva

Gaster, Moses

Gaster, Theodor H.

Gero, Joan M.

Gero, Joan M., and Margaret W. Conkey, eds.

Gesell, Geraldine C.

Gibson, John C. L.

Giles, M.
Gilula, Mordechai

Gitin, Seymour

Goodenough, Erwin R.

Gottwald, Norman K.

Grant, Elihu

Grant, Elihu and Wright, G. Ernest

Green, Anthony

Gunneweg, Jan, Isadore Perlman, and Zeev Meshel

Hackett, Jo Ann
Hadzistelioit-Price, Theodora


Hadley, Judith M.

1987b *Some Drawings and Inscriptions on Two Pithoi from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud*. *Vetus Testamentum* 37:180-211.

Hahn, Herbert F.


Haines, Richard C.


Hallo, William W.


Harfouche, Jamal K.


Harris, Rivkah


Hastorf, Christine A.


Hawley, Richard, and Barbara Levick, eds.


Hayes, John H.

Hazard, Willis H.

Healey, Joseph P.

Heinrich, Ernst

Hermenary, Antoine

Herzog, Ze'ev
1984 *Beer-Sheba II: The Early Iron Settlements*. Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University Institute of Archaeology and Ramot Publishing Co.

Herzog, Ze'ev, Anson F. Rainey, and Sh. Moshkovitz

Hestrin, Ruth

Hestrin, Ruth, and Michal Dayagi-Mendels

Higgins, Reynold A.
Hoffner, Harry A.

Holladay, John S., Jr.

Holland, Thomas A.
1977 A Study of Palestinian Iron Age Baked Clay Figurines, with Special Reference to Jerusalem Cave 1. Levant 19:121-55.

Hopkins, David C.

Hübner, Ulrich

Hughes, D. R.

Hutter, Manfred
Jacobs, Paul

Jacobsen, Thorkild

Kapelrud, Arvid

Karageorghis, Vassos

Kaufmann, Yehezkel

Keel, Othmar

Keel, Othmar, and Christoph Uehlinger

Kent, Susan, ed.

Kenyon, Kathleen M.
Kippenberg, Hans G.

KlengeU Horst

Kletter, Raz


Kramer, Carol

Kuemmerlin-McLean, Joanne K.

Lacheman, Ernest R., and David I. Owen

Lambert, Wilfred G.

Lamon, Robert S., and Geoffrey M. Shipton

Lapp, Paul W.
Lawson, John C.
1910 *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion.* Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Lemaire, Andre

Lesko, Barbara S., ed.
1989 *Women's Earliest Records from Ancient Egypt and Western Asia.* Atlanta: Scholars.

Lewis, Theodore J.

Lichty, Erie

Lipinski, Edward

Lloyd, Seton
1984 *The Archaeology of Mesopotamia.* London: Thames and Hudson.

Loud, Gordon

Lowell, Julie C.
Maekawa, Kazuya

Maier, Walter A.

Mallowan, Max E. L.

Marcus, Joyce

Margalit, Baruch

Margalith, Othniel

Marquet-Krause, Judith

Matheney, M. Pierce

Matsushima, Eiko

May, Herbert G.
Mayer-Opifius, Ruth  

Mazar, Amihai  

McCarter, P. Kyle  

McCown, Chester C., Joseph C. Wampler, and William F. Bade  

McCown, Donald E., Richard C. Haines, and Robert D. Biggs  
1967 _Nippur; Excavations of the Joint Expedition to Nippur of the University Museum of Philadelphia and the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago_. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

McGovern, Patrick E.  

McKay, John  

Mendenhall, George E.  

Meshel, Zeev  


Meshel Zeev, and Carol L. Meyers

Mesnil du Boisson, Robert du

Mettinger, Tryggve N. D.

Meyers, Carol L.

Meyers, Eric M., ed.
Meyers, Eric M., James F. Strange, and Carol L. Meyers

Miller, Patrick D.

Mittmann, Siegfried

Montgomery, James A.

Morden, Margaret
(To be published in the *University of Arizona Expedition to Idalion Vol. 1: the Hellenistic Levels of the Temple Terrace, SIMA.*)

Morris, Brian

Mulder, Martin J.
Mylonas, George E.

Naveh, Joseph

Netzer, Ehud

Negbi, Ora
1976 *Canaanite Gods in Metal: An Archaeological Study of Ancient Syro-Palestinian Figurines*. Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University Institute of Archaeology.

North, Robert

Nougayrol, M. Jean

Ockinga, Boyo

O’Connor, Michael P.

Oden, Robert A.
1977 *Studies in Lucian’s “De Syria Dea.”* Missoula, Mont.: Scholars.

Olyan, Saul
1988 *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel*. Atlanta: Scholars.
Oppenheim, A. Leo
1966 The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 46(3).

Oppenheim, A. Leo, Erica Reiner, and Robert D. Biggs, eds.

Orman, Tallay

Pardee, Dennis, and Pierre Bordreuil

Parker, Simon B.

Patai, Raphael

Pettey, Richard

Pinch, Geraldine

Platt, Elizabeth E.

Pollock, Susan
Pritchard, James B.


Pritchard, James B., ed.


Reed, William L.


Reiner, Erica


Reiter, Rayna R., ed.


Renfrew, Colin


Ritner, R. K.


Roberts, John M.

Rogers, Susan C.

Rosaldo, Michelle Z., Louise Lamphere, eds.

Rose, Martin

Rouillard, Hedwige, and Josef Tropper

Roux, Georges

Sadek, Ashraf I.

Sass, Benjamin

Scott, Robert B. Y.

Scurlock, J. A.

Seger, Joe D.

Silberman, Lou H.
Singer-Abitz, Lily

Smith, Mark S.

Smith, Morton

Smith, Patricia, Elizabeth Bornemann, and Joseph Zias

Sperling, S. David

Spieckermann, Hermann

Spycket, Agnes

Stager, Lawrence E.
Stern, Ephraim

Straten, Folkert T. van

Tadmor, Miriam

Tappy, Ron

Taylor, J. Glen

Thureau-Dangin, Francois

Thurston, Edgar

Tigay, Jeffrey H.
Titiev, Mischa

Terczyner [Tur-Sinai], Harry [Naphtali Herz]

Trachtenberg, Joshua

Tooley, Angela M. J.

Toorn, Karel van der

Toorn, Karel van der, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, eds.

Tregelles, Samuel P.

Tsukimoto, Akio

Tufnell, Olga
Tufnell, Olga, C. H. Inge, and L. Harding

Ucko, Peter J.

Uehlinger, Christoph

Van Buren, E. Douglas
1945a *Amulets in Ancient Mesopotamia.* *Orientalia* 14:18-23.
1955 *New Evidence Concerning an Eye Divinity.* *Iraq* 17:164-75.

Van de Mieroop, Marc

Versnel, H. S.

Voigt, Mary M.

Vorländer, Hermann
Vrijhof, P. H. and Jean Jacques Waardenburg, eds.

Walde, Dale, and Noreen D. Willows, eds.

Walls, Neal H.

Watson, Patty Jo
1979 Archaeological Ethnography in Western Iran. Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press.

Weippert, Helga

Wenning, Robert

Westenholtz, Joan G.

Westenholz, Aage

Westermarck, Edward
Widbin, R. Bryan  

Wiggermann, F. A. M.  

Wiggins, Steve A.  

Wilson, Veronica  

Winter, Urs  

Woolley, C. Leonard  

Wright, George R. H.  

Wright, Rita P., ed.  

Wyatt, Nicholas  

Yon, Marguerite  

Young, Gordon D., ed.  

Zagarell, Allen  

Zeeb, F.  

Zevit, Ziony  
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS FOR ANCIENT TEXTS

ABRT Assyrian and Babylonian Religious Texts, James A. Craig. Leipzig.
PE Eusebius, Praeparatio evangelica.