Religion on the move: mobility, migration and internal religious diversity in biblical and early Israel and Judah

Religião em movimento: mobilidade, migração e diversidade religiosa interna em Israel e Judá bíblicos e antigos

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Abstract: Migration is a social process; Religion is fundamentally a social enterprise. Like other aspects of their cultural identities, humans carry their religious identities with them as they traverse geographies. This paper explores the effects of inter-regional movement, as both mobility and migration, on the religious practices and beliefs of ancient Mediterranean peoples, specifically of those who became known as Israelites. Several studies on internal religious differences in Israel and Judah explain Yahweh's multiple geographic associations as "poly-Yahwism," assuming that veneration of different geographic associations is actually worship directed towards different Yahwehs. Migration studies, specifically those engaging migratory instrumentalization of religion, have been minor conversation partners in these explorations of divine personage. Thus, I argue that the complexities of cultural exchange in the Levantine regions of the Mediterranean in the 1st Millennium BCE and the development of internal religious diversity in ancient Israel can be better understood by integrating modern mobility and migration data. Accounting for the dialogical relation between mobility, migration and religiosity allows scholars to better elucidate the cultural responses observed in resettlement and colonization spaces where religion functions both as a source of control and as a resource employed to undermine colonizing power structures. To this end, this paper addresses the occurrence of variant modes of Yahwistic religiosity through two case studies: the first is a migration-informed reading of the Judges 17-18. The second is a mobilities-informed analysis of four inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud (Horvat Teman). Together, these explorations provide answers to questions of Yahweh's multiplicity and his mobile nature.

Palavras-chave:Ancient Israel; Internal religious pluralism; Divine multiplicity; Migration; Mobility.

Introduction

Collectively, the biblical corpus maintains an abundance of disparate representations of Israel's God, who, though assumed to be the same deity before and throughout Israel's existence, is identified by different names (Yahweh, *El*, *Elohim*, *Eloah*, *El Elyon*, *El Shaddai*, "The Fear of Isaac," "The God of your fathers," etc.); associated with different locations of origin, residence, and veneration (Bethel, Edom, Dan, Hebron, Midian, Seir, Shilo, Sinai, Teman, Zaphon, Zion); described

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as having multiple bodies of varying size (Smith 2016; Sommer 2009; Wagner 2010), as associated with both masculine and feminine traits, as being both singular and multiple in person, and as being accompanied by a personal retinue or as leader over a divine council. These multiform portrayals of divinity appear throughout the biblical corpus, even following the editorial activities of redactors, like the Deuteronomists, who composed and consolidated texts to support the geographic and ideological centralization of Yahwism around Jerusalem/Judah (Smith 2001, 2002). Beyond the text, archaeological evidence also indicates an expansive continuum of Yahwistic religiosity wherein Israel's God was associated with and worshipped at various locations (Arad, Dan, Jerusalem, Samaria, Ta'anach) (Alpert-Nakhai 2001), assumed to have had a consort or wife (Dever 2005), and is depicted using imagery adopted and adapted from other religious contexts (Keel & Uhlinger 1998).

Several studies that discuss these variant depictions of Yahweh explain internal religious diversity in ancient Israel and Judah as "*poly-Yahwism*," assuming that religious activities directed toward different geographic manifestations of Yahweh are acts of worship oriented at discreet gods (Dever 2017; Stavrakopoulou & Barton 2010). This view overlooks two key sets of evidence. First, although deeply concerned with orthopraxy, the biblical authors do not once take up any polemic against poly-Yahwism (Allen 2015). Second, assertions of a fragmented Yahwism overlook traditions that specifically point to the trans-territorial and trans-national nature of Yahweh which allowed the same deity to be simultaneously accessible in multiple locations.

As a multi-ethnic demographic unit with complex social ties in and beyond the Levant, the group of people that becomes Israel is, in part, a product of the cultures of mobility that circulated in the Levant before and throughout the 1st Millennium. Inter-regional networks of migration, transit, and trade fostered trans-territorial internally-pluriform religiosity. This paper specifically addresses the occurrence of variant modes of Yahwistic religiosity through the lens of migration studies and draws on the findings from biblical studies, archaeology, anthropology, and the sociology of religion to better understand the development and constitution of internal religious diversity in ancient Israel and Judah. As a *point d'entrée* to this discussion, I will first provide an overview of the research on the intersections between religion and mobility/migration.

Religion in/and the contexts of mobility[1]

Migration studies offers us two fundamental assumptions upon which we might build better explanatory models for the intersection of religion and human mobility as interdependent social phenomena. The first is that people migrate primarily when faced with insecurity. The category of *insecurity* that instigates much of human movement also informs religious praxis. Insecurity is, by definition, related directly to the fulfillment of human needs. Thus, while religiosity is not simply a product of human insecurity, insecurity may heighten reliance on religious practice and belief as attempts to influence circumstances and outcomes. The second is that human movement is most often a calculated social strategy reliant on networks of biological and socially-constructed kinship, which are best understood within the framework of the *household*. Households are the main mediators of mobility. They function as sending and receiving units by making strategic choices regarding the temporary and permanent relocation of members based on collective needs and the present situation in which they are enmeshed. This remains true of social structures in the ancient Near East (Schloen 2001).

All religious practices are socially-regulated and culturally-limited behaviors ultimately oriented toward access of and efficacious engagement with superhuman

1 The contents of this section are a summation of a large-scale review on the nexus of mobility, migration, and religion in Trinka (2019).

entities (Smith 2017)[2]. I understand religion as a dynamic set of practices, beliefs, and values that, regarding migratory decision-making and travel, includes ritual or petitionary behaviors enacted to access and marshal superhuman entities/powers—as well as engagements with religious professionals or humans who have achieved a deified status, like venerated ancestors—for purposes that include, but are not limited to: acquiring supernatural indications or affirmations of human action, obtaining safety or health benefits, acquiring knowledge of loved ones left behind, engaging religiously-affiliated social networks and sacred spaces, regulating emotion, and providing psycho-social support by cognitive frameworks that express and interpret the spectrum of experiences encountered along the way (Eppsteiner & Hagan 2016).The boundaries of orthodoxy or tradition are easily blurred when life-altering decisions need to be made (Obadare & Adebanwi 2010; Picard 2013). While adoptive and adaptive religious behaviors are common in sedentary settings, the intensity of these behaviors often increases in contexts of human mobility.

Diversity of religious practice is not simply driven by human preference, but by need. This claim is not intended to offer reductionistic explanation of religion. Rather, it highlights the profound role that religion plays in the lives of humans. Individual, family/household, extended family/clan, village, and state levels maintain overlapping and variant concerns, needs, and wants. And each sphere has distinct modes of accessing superhuman goods and avoiding or resolving ills (Smith 2017). Religious practitioners gravitate toward and retain those practices that most effectively achieve their desired outcomes. This tendency often results in a willingness to try novel religious practices, thus introducing new modes of religiosity to the group. As a result, individuals commonly maintain a spectrum of practices and beliefs, some of which are cohesive and others which are contradictory. Through its processes of identity negotiation, the household and larger social groups discern and regulate which modes of religiosity fall within acceptable bounds.

Religion functions differently for different migrants, but it is recognized as something that many instrumentalize before, during and after their journeys. It can be a catalyst for movement or non-movement. Timing and self-evaluations of agency are integral aspects of the migration experience. Within the complex evaluative process of migration decision making, a potential mover's religious worldview offers both personally and socially located criteria by which one constructs a schema for determining if and when departure is necessary. For some, strong religious affiliation in a place of origin can override desires to leave, even in situations where departure is a reasonable expectation (Neudörfer & Dresdner 2014; Trinka 2018). For others, robust religiously oriented sending structures instigate and accommodate the movements of individuals and provide social support systems, meaning-making frameworks, and means of attaining desired spiritual and physical goods.

Religion serves as both an internal and external identity marker in contexts of contact and exchange. In an everchanging world, religious identity, as enunciated in practice and presentation, can give migrants a sense of rootedness unavailable elsewhere. By maintaining certain routines and rituals from their places of origin, migrants not only carry a piece of home with them but are also capable of creating distinct places by religious activity or engagement in the spaces they inhabit along their journey. While this process commonly takes the form of enacting religious practice, it can extend to the notion of building physical sites for religious worship along their routes (Hagan 2008b).

2 Following Christian Smith (2017: 22), I understand that religion is primarily a set of practices aimed at the access of and alignment with superhuman powers that can affect goods and help humans avoid ills. This aligns with Roger Stump's (2008: 7) definition of religion as "a compelling set of beliefs and practices whose truth is presupposed by faith and that ultimately relate to superhuman entities postulated by adherents to possess transcendent attributes or powers superior to those of ordinary mortals. [...] Whatever form they take, these entities are considered by adherents to exert crucial influences, directly or indirectly, for good or for ill, within and beyond the realm of human affairs."

Construction of shrines or altars is commonplace in the stories of travel we find throughout the Pentateuch (Genesis 12:8, 13:8, 26:25, 33:20; Josh 8:30 [Deuteronomy 27:1-8]). In the broader ancient Near East, imperial endeavors of the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians included building shrines for members of their populations that were relocated to the Levant (Koch 2017, 2018a). Undoubtedly, these sites encouraged local usage by those not directly associated with these imperial powers, thus instigating the kind of religious selection and blending that is central to this investigation.

Migrants' religiosity can also be seen in the items they carry with them, their modes of bodily adornment and representation, the spaces they create, the practices they perform, and the relationships they cultivate (Hagan 2008b; Knott 2016). Even though migrants often retain strong ties to the religious practices and beliefs acquired in their sites of origin, many exhibit a sense of openness to complementary and alternative religious symbols and practices. While the previously mentioned items represent traditional forms of religiosity, it is common for migrants to make use of known religious symbols and idioms in new ways. For example, artwork created by migrants frequently displays processes of blending religious tropes and imagery to express the role of the divine in the migration experience. Likewise, it is not unusual for migrants of one religion to make use of the sacred space of another (Frantz 2010). Ultimately, much of the research shows that for "many would-be migrants, the primary concern is what 'works,' meaning that there is a greater concern with which religious authority is putatively acclaimed to guarantee success [...], rather than his or her denominational identity" (Obadare & Adebanwi 2010: 33-34).

Besides recognizing that migrants instrumentalize religion as a planning, coping, and connective resource, it is also important to acknowledge that boundaries of orthodoxy and tradition are more flexible than sometimes imagined. Affirming this reality, Meredith McGuire (2008) has challenged assumptions that religion is a unitary or stable thing. In relaying the findings of her research among multi-ethnic and socio-economically differentiated North American populations, McGuire (2008: 186) concludes: "extensive religious blending and within-group religious heterogeneity are the norm rather than the exception". Robert Orsi (1997: 8) writes: "People appropriate religious idioms as they need them, in response to particular circumstances. All religious ideas and impulses are of the moment, invented, taken, borrowed, and improvised at the intersections of life." It is my assertion that these descriptions of modern religiosities do not drastically differ from the religious experiences of ancient persons.

Plasticity is the hallmark of most religiosities. Therefore, Orsi (1997) counsels espousing a "*hermeneutics of hybridity*," to better interpret instances of lived religion marked by volatility, unpredictability, ambivalence, and creativity. He admonishes readers to consider the intrinsic power-dynamics within religious interactions along with the ways that creativity in the religious sphere functions as a response mechanism in the political sphere (Orsi 1997: 9-13). Individuals, families, extended families, and broader social bodies each maintain simultaneously shared and variant concerns, needs, and wants, as well as shared and distinct modes of accessing goods and avoiding ills. Negotiating such complementary and contestant demands takes place at the intersections of Self and Other and are informed by both entrenched and emergent power dynamics in each realm.

While religious practices are socially prescribed and limited, they are not always necessarily performed in group settings. The tension between corporate and personal practice is especially important to attend to when discussing migrant religiosity since migrants are generally detached from the primary religious frameworks of their sending communities[3]. The internal pluralism that

3 Telecommunications are changing this reality, enabling migrants to stay connected across time and space to their sending communities and the religious professional who operate there. See Krueger (2004), Sheringham (2013) and Tiilikainen (2003).

tends to flourish among mobile populations develops through responsive interplay between corporate/institutional expectations for the contents of praxis and individual need since dislocation from familiar social contexts and geographies often results in migrants' innovative religious behavior (Knott 2016: 72). This same dialectics occurs in sedentary populations, but the demands resulting from insecurity in contexts of mobility typically stretch boundaries further as practitioners are generally more willing to try additional forms of praxis that draw from repertoires beyond their primary religious framework.

I rely on the concept of *internal religious pluralism* to describe the elasticity of religious praxis and belief found in ancient Israel (Albertz & Schmitt 2012), as it captures the range of praxis resulting from different and overlapping spheres of lived experience and religiosity. While individuals may adopt and adapt religious elements from varied contexts, including from other religions, few claim official associations with more than one religion at the institutional level. Additionally, the notions of religious belonging and group acceptance are constituted and controlled by more than an individual's desire to belong.

In conclusion, this broad data review shows that human mobility drives the need for responsive personal and corporate religiosities. Migrants' religious expressions tend to prefer comprehensiveness of both practice and belief rather than observable or systematic coherence. While this observation is also often true in the lives of non-migrant people, contexts of mobility tend to heighten religiosity in observable ways. The result of the current body of research is that although migrants almost always come in contact with a range of religions other than their own, they typically do not convert to a religion different than that of their community of origin. This is not to say that conversion is never an outcome. Instead, it is far more common for migrants to maintain their religious identity while adapting previous practices, adopting new ones and generally expanding their religious toolkits. The result is migrant religious repertoires that are remarkably internally plural in character (Leonard *et al.* 2005; Trinka 2019)[4]. Thus, rather than atomizing Israelite religiosity into discreet family religions or seeing each instantiation of Yahweh worship as a new Yahwism, I will draw on a body of research elucidating the elastic nature of religious identity in contexts of mobility[5].

Mobility and religion in the Levant during the 1st millennium BCE

Mobility, as both dynamic and symbiotic forms of movement, lies at the core of ancient Near Eastern people's existence. Even for those who themselves never traveled far from home, the predominant political and socio-cultural environment of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages was one of inter-regional movement and cross-cultural exchange. Though cities and smaller settlements constituted centers of political power and social control, society encompassed more than its sedentary elements. As we will see, it was frequently society's mobile elements that made centralized governance possible but could also upset political balance. Mobility, then as now, was simultaneously a source of power and an opposing force.

Period of robust inter-regional contact and exchange among polities in the Aegean, eastern Mediterranean, Mesopotamia, and Elam, the Late Bronze Age (1500-1200 BCE) has been described as an "age of internationalism"

4 The line between conversion and an expanding religious repertoire is murky and likely changes from emic to etic loci of observation. For example, a person may claim an affiliation with a primary religion while adopting several practices from another. The practitioner may not see any conflicts in maintaining these practices, but a representative of the institutional or official forms of that religion may say that maintaining such practices warrants excluding this person as an affiliate. The transition to internal religious pluralism at the elite or official levels occurs in part by including such adopted practices into the institutionalized religious repertoire.

5 The study of inter-religious pluralism within the contexts of lived religion differs from exploring the phenomenon of *multiple religious belonging*. For two brief introductions to this concept, see Ramey (2017) and Taves (2017). See also Bourguis (2017) and Weidenbaum (2017).

(Killebrew 2009). The political structure of the period was one in which independent but interdependent territorial kingdoms maintained political parity with one another via a system that employed the diplomatic language of the patrimonial household (Schloen 2001; Van der Toorn 1996). Scholars have explored the movement of peoples, ideologies, technologies, languages, religion, and more between the various places and polities in an area stretching east to west from Elam to Mycenae and north to south from Anatolia to Egypt. Like today, human movement took on many different forms, including various modes of travel, work, pilgrimage, forced migration/relocation, pastoral/subsistence nomadism, and climate-related migration.

The beginning of the first millennium in the Levant followed in the wake of the dramatic shifts in the regional systems of power and international exchange at the end of the Bronze Age that were accompanied, if not also instigated, by ecological stressors and population movements (Bloch-Smith & Alpert-Nakhai 1999; Dever 2017; Killebrew 2009). In the Levant, these larger regional changes happened locally by the slow decline of Egyptian hegemony across the 13th-12th centuries and the related disintegration of their vassal Canaanite city-state networks. Already before the Egyptian withdraw from southern Canaan, their client kingdoms struggled to maintain economic and political prominence, a reality registered in the Amarna Letters which catalogue their inabilities to resolve inter-regional conflicts among leaders of the Canaanite city-states and to control non-sedentary groups like the ʻapiru and Shasu (Kitchen 1992; Moran 1992)[6].

Within this power vacuum, new political actors and socio-political structures emerged. Among them was Israel, which has been associated with a marked increase in small rural settlements in the northern central highlands of Palestine (Van der Steen 2004)[7]. The appearance of these new sites coincides with the rise of other neighboring polities like Ammon, Moab, and Edom to the east, Cyprus to the west, Philistia to the south, and the Neo-Hittite kingdoms to the north (Dever 2017; Faust 2006). Elite-associated movers remained present in the Iron Age but were fewer in number and now related to these smaller polities that had less economic, military, or political influence throughout the region. As these new regional polities, which were defined primarily by ethnic association, sought to assert their sovereignty, build alliances, and gain territory, they too tried to capitalize on and influence patterns of mobility by organizing armies, moving troops, and even colonizing sites.

Early on, contact and conflict between these new political actors included the continued attempts at expansion by the Philistines, the Israelite (Omride) domination of Moab (2 Kings 3:4-12) and perhaps also of Judah[8]. The 9th century Damascean attacks on Israelite cities in the Shephelah, including Philistine sites like Gath, allowed for Judahite expansion into the Shephelah (Faust 2008). Encounters and exchange among this new imperial actors are especially noticeable in border regions at sites like Bet Shemesh, Lachish, and the northern coastal regions where cohabitation with the Philistines or other Sea Peoples and those populations identified as Canaanites or Israelites occurred (Bunimovitz & Lederman 2011; Yasur-Landau 2012). This

6 In modern nation states, the ultra-transient person, be they Romani, nomad, vagabond, pastoralist, hobo, vagrant, or otherwise known, raises serious concerns by straining the typical structures of observation, accountability, and control. A similar tension between mobility and social control prevailed in the ancient world. Several of the letters unearthed at El-Amarna depict struggles against semi-nomadic *ʻapiru*, identified in part by the problematic nature of their uncontrollable migration. Likewise, Egyptian execration texts are concerned with cataloguing encounters with a nomadic population identified as the *Shasu*. Concerning the *ʻapiru*, see Moran (1992: *EA* 68, 71, 74, 75, 185, 243, 254, 271, 286, 288, 289, 299, 313, 366). For commentary on the *Shasu*, see Kitchen (1992: 21-27).

7 For a summary on four decades of archaeological surveys documenting this transition, see Van der Steen (2004: 96-101).

8 As signaled by Athaliah and Jehoram's marriage (2 Kings 8:18; 2 Chronicles 6:13-21).

resulted in reformulated socio-cultural norms and ethnic identities (Faust 2006).

By the Iron II period, new imperial actors arrived on the scene and the peoples of Canaan fell under the spheres of subsequent Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian influence. Already at the late Bronze Age, Assyrian leaders like Assur-uballit I, Tukulti-Ninurta I, and Tiglath-pileser I expanded their empire's boundaries to the doorstep of the Levant before subsiding for a time. Renewed Assyrian domination of the region began under Assurbanipal II in the 9th century but was more fully recognized with Shalmaneser III's repeated campaigns beyond the Euphrates to squelch Neo-Hittite growth (Steiner 2014). In the 8th century, Tiglath-pileser III started a powerful resurgence of Assyrian control over the Levant (Schneider 2014). These collective incursions, which spanned multiple centuries, resulted in the provincializing of Levantine polities. The reborn Babylonian empire continued similar efforts in the second half of the 1st millennium BCE by overtaking many of the territories previously subdued by the Assyrians. We also witness Egypt's momentary resurgence at the time of Neo-Babylonia's rise to power.

The ubiquity of human transit in these ancient contexts raises questions of cultural influence (Koch 2018a, b). Among those elements that are highly responsive to new cultural inputs are various forms of religious expression. What effects experiences of inter-regional movement by trade, travel, and nomadic and pastoral rhythms of life have on the religious lives of those who lived in these dynamic social structures?

While the collection of practices that constitute Israelite religiosities arise from a west Semitic context of shared religious idioms and symbols, they are not synonymous with it. This is partly beacuse Israelite religiosities emerge from west Semitic foundations that are themselves partly original and partly hybridized forms distilled from Aegean, Syrian, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian backgrounds (Smith 2002; Staubli 2016). Like their neighbors, the adaptations which Israelites made using this shared repertoire formed their own novel religious identities.

The earliest rendering of Israelite religiosity likely gave prominence to the deity El, as can be seen in the name Isra-el (Keel & Uehlinger 1998; Smith 2002). Yet, by the start of the 1st Millennium, we find a predominantly Yahwistic religious orientation throughout at least Judah, in parts of the Northern Kingdom. The Yahwism of this period is characterized by significant internal variation that sometimes included worshiping other deities besides Yahweh, and applying the surrounding deities' characteristics to Yahweh (Smith 2001, 2002). Yet, I argue that these religiosities can be understood as a singular phenomenon of *Yahwism*.

The archaeological evidence indicates a dearth of institutional or "prestigious" cultic sites for Iron Age Israel (Alpert-Nakhai 2001; Mierse 2011). Compared with the Bronze Age, where excavations have found a remarkable number of identifiably religious sites in both urban and rural contexts, the popularity of religious structures, or the type of religiosity most common to those earlier periods appears to have changed at the turn of the Iron Age (Alpert-Nakhai 2001; Dever 2017; Greener 2019; Zevit 2001). William Dever (2002: 113-114) characterizes this drastic drop in the occurrence of cultic sites as indicative of a transition to a "simple, aniconic, noninstitutionalized cult." The differences in Israel are especially stark when seen in conjunction with the comparatively abundant number of cultic sites among Israel's contemporaries (Ben-Shlomo 2019; Faust 2010, 2019; Steiner 2019; Tyson 2019).

Avraham Faust (2008, 2010, 2019) has convincingly argued against the current consensus that Israelite (broadly construed) religious praxis was primarily oriented around regional and central temple worship and posits that temples should not be considered the normative religious site in ancient Israel, but rather as exceptions. One possible reason for the lack of cultic sites may be that a mobile heritage—and potentially their lifestyle of regular mobility—inspired a weakened dependence on permanent shrines as a primary focus of

Israelite religiosity. This assertion aligns well with elements of data gathered on migrants who still build shrines along their routes, but which are generally temporary in nature, and thus, regarding ancient Israelites, not always intelligible in the archaeological record as such (Hagan 2008b; Soto 2016).

The lack of cultic sites during the Early Iron Age indicates decentralized loci of religious enactment that were presumably attended by a wide religiosity spectrum. As already discussed, the usual response to the evidence has been to suggest that diverse religious enactments among ancient Israelite people would indicate not only the presence of multiple religions, but also of multiple forms of Yahwism (Stavrakopoulou & Barton 2010). My argument is that while we can recognize different religions co-existing in the geographical region of Canaan in the Iron Age, the conclusion that there are multiple contemporaneous Yahwisms is a *non sequitur*. Each instance of Yahweh worship that appeals to Yahweh and another place's name, such as Teman, or Shomron, need not be classified as a different form of Yahwism.

Moreover, while our focus on the household as the primary locus of religious socialization and practice is important, it does not exclude other forms of religious socialization as important sources of practical influence (Albertz & Schmitt 2012). Focusing on the household should not lead scholars to assert that varying practices between households means that each household had its own religion. These arguments will be further examined in the two case studies that follow.

Discussion of religion and mobility in the ancient world have often explored the notion of pilgrimage or ritualized movement that may include the practice of traveling to a site of religious importance. Although worthy of our inquisitive energies, this facet of religiosity is not the focus of this project, which expands the study beyond human movement to or towards religious sites with the specific intention of worship, veneration, or access, to consider two other important elements of the religion/mobility landscape. First, is a set of observations about the presence of religion in contexts of mobility as an ever-present reality in multiple points of migration decision making. Second, the ubiquity of religion in the migratory enterprise leads to the additional observation that characterizations of Yahweh's mobility respond to the functions of religion in mobile contexts.

Two case studies, one biblical and another extra-biblical, will provide opportunities to elucidate several ways that the Israelite religion, as accessible in both text and artifact, evidence the effects of mobile environments on internal religious pluralism. The first is a migration-informed exegesis of Judges 17-18 in which the tribe of Dan migrates to the Laish region. The second is an exploration of two inscriptions from the site of Kuntillet 'Ajrud that mentions Yahweh with different toponyms.

Migration and internal religious pluralism in Judges 17-18

The compositional history of the book of Judges is the subject of intense debate. Commentators posit varying periods of authorship that span the 6th century BCE into the Hellenistic period. Most agree that the Masoretic Hebrew version of the book contains ancient traditions, particularly elements in Judges 5. There is little doubt that the present version of the text is the product of later redaction, though scholars disagree over the purpose and extent of editorial activities. Unable to resolve these complex disputes here, I adopt in my analysis the claim that Judges preserves aspects of broader cultures of mobility in the ancient Near East that are more expansive than its compositional horizon.

Judges 17 begins with the story of a certain Ephraimite named Micah whose household resides in the northern central hill country. At the beginning, we find that Micah stole a significant sum of silver from his mother but has since returned it. She responds to its reinstatement by commissioning a statue or image of the deity (לְסֶפֶ֫ל) be made with a portion of the silver. The statue is set in Micah's household shrine—for which he has also created an *ephod*, an instrument of divinatory

importance, and a *teraphim*, which are typically understood as representations of ancestral spirits—and in which he has installed one of his sons as a priest.

Our first opportunity to consider the intersections of mobility/migration and religion in this text comes with the arrival of an itinerant Levite—a member of the landless priestly class—who had left Bethlehem in search of work and a new home, and who Micah hires as the household's priest (Judges 17:7-8; cf. Numbers 3:1-18). The household is the primary locus of religious socialization and the site in which migratory sending and receiving occurs. Kinship structures are often malleable and responds to the demands of social, economic, environmental, demographic, and geographic variation. This is readily apparent in the narrative first when Micah petitions the Levite to stay with him and "become like a father to me" (Judges 17:10) and again when the Levite comes to appreciate Micah "like one of his sons" (Judges 17:11).

Furthermore, Judges 17 can be interpreted using the conceptual rubric of internal religious pluralism. Micah's piety is laudable. His name, meaning "Who is like Yahweh?" speaks not only of his personal religious allegiance, but also to that of his entire household. Yet, his religiosity reflects the tensions between popular praxis and "proper" religiosity, as defined in larger social contexts. He is concerned with worshiping Yahweh well, but relies on the use of an image and practices of ancestral veneration, likely inspired by the immediate needs of daily life (Van der Toorn 1996). Moreover, he can only initially install his son as a functionary in the family shrine. Later, when he replaces his son as priest with the more appropriate Levite, he declares that having an official Yahwistic religious functionary in his household will bring him success (Judges 17:13). Micah is acutely aware of the increased efficacy maintained by an official priest. Although the text does not linger on the details, the spectrum of religiosity that arises in response to changing needs and available religious resources is readily apparent.

While the idol that Micah's mother commissioned is not described in the text, we might infer based on other biblical content associated with the region of Dan and evidence from the cultural material record that it was a depiction of Yahweh as a bull or calf. Metal bovine figurines have been found throughout the Levant in both the Bronze and Iron Ages. Earlier instances of such artifacts are generally associated with the Syro-Phoenician worship of El, Bull-El, and Baal-Hadad; later, bovine characteristics were extended to Yahweh. We find evidence for this association and its overlap with the worship of Baal in several biblical texts (Exodus 32:4; Deuteronomy 9:16; Nehemiah 9:18; 1 Kings 12:28; 2 Kings 10:29, 17:16; 2 Chronicles 11:5, 13:8; Hosea 10:5). Beyond the Hebrew Bible, we have the material evidence of the Iron Age bronze bull figurine found near Dothan and a Bronze Age version at Hazor that bear striking resemblance to one another. Both sites are near to that depicted as the origins of Dan and of Micah's home (Mazar 1982).

Finally, the mobile nature of Levitical life, at least as described in the text, may attest to the ubiquity of Yahweh worship throughout the land and indicates that the efficacy of the Levites' work as religious professionals surpasses the central shrine in Jerusalem. The common occurrence of Levites traveling in search of patronage and work could also imply that Yahweh is considered to be the same deity in all locations.

The plot thickens in Judges 18, when members from the tribe of Dan living in the coastal region of northern Canaan began to recognize a new place of residence north of Ephraim (cf. Josh 19:40-48). On their journey, the scouts from Dan pass by Micah's home, who extends hospitality. During their stay, they recognize the Levite's voice as such—perhaps indicating a regionally-specific dialect familiar to the men of Dan—and approach him. Knowing that as a Levite he is a priest of Yahweh, the Danites request a prophetic indication of the outcome of their scouting venture to Laish. The Levite responds positively, noting that their journey is being led (תֻּכַּן) by Yahweh (Judges 18:5-6).

Upon returning from their initial survey of the land, the scouts give a positive report and assemble a large group of armed men who set out

to conquer Laish for the tribe. The citizen army follows the same route as the scouts and passes Micah's house, from which they attempt to steal the silver idol, the ephod and the teraphim before convincing the Levite to join them as their patron priest. The Levite acquiesces and actually carries the religious implements off with him. Micah's attempts to stop them go unheeded and they proceed to destroy the people and place of Laish before occupying the site.

Several additional migration-informed observations can be made about these texts. The first rests on the body of evidence indicating that people's primary reason for migrating is insecurity (Sirkeci *et al.* 2016). Personal aspirations and the promise of success in a new location rarely play as vital a role in human movement as does the impetus to escape present social, environmental, political or economic insecurities. Still, barriers for relocation are often high, so humans generally move only when the insecurity of their present situation becomes intolerable (Cohen 2004; Cohen & Sirkeci 2011). The Levite's insecurities move him to journey north from Jerusalem in search of sponsorship that will provide work and a place to live; the people of Dan respond to the insecurities of their situation by looking for an alternative home. Although the text is mute on their reasons for migrating, it may retain a modicum of historical facticity whereby coastal populations were displaced first by the arrival of Sea Peoples and then again as they expanded inland from coastal settlements (Yassur-Landau 2012). Judges 18 begins with the cyclical declaration of Judges, (בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם אֵין מֶלֶךְ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל), "In those days there was no king in Israel," which speaks not only to the people's recurring ambiguous moral situation but also to the more mundane recognition of a lack of central authority that could offer protection or provide well-being to those like the Danites or the Levites.

Even though migration is a response to insecurity, it is not an uncalculated knee-jerk reaction. Migration is not unplanned and random, rather it is defined by socio-cultural dispositions toward mobility. Thus, besides accounting for the role of insecurity as a catalyst for migration, we must also consider the fact that human movement is almost always a calculated social strategy that relies on the networks of biological and socially-constructed kinship structures best understood within the framework of the *household*. As recognized earlier, households are the main mediators of mobility since they promote and facilitate particular attitudes in favor of or against mobility (Cohen & Sirkeci 2011).

Households function as sending and receiving units by making strategic choices regarding temporary and permanent relocation of members based on collective needs and the present situation in which they are enmeshed. The household's bank of tangible and intangible resources determines its dispositions toward mobility. "[M]igration is rooted in the understanding of the household as an adaptive unit where social actors make active decisions" (Cohen & Sirkeci 2011: 2). Not all members of a household will move. Additionally, for most movers, deciding to migrate is seldom an individual decision. Communities and their individual members maintain varying levels of resiliency to disruptive events depending on their motility toolkits, as different households maintain varying levels of motility and networks to capitalize on it (Flamm & Kaufmann 2006; Urry 2007). But *disruption*—as a descriptive category of human experience—is not synonymous with migratory causation (Morrissey 2015). A situation that causes greater insecurity for one group may not threaten another in the same way, since the household's resiliency depends on its collective resources, age, and life cycle stage of its members (Cohen 2004). Family financial resources, the welfare of those left behind, perceived acceptance and the success of future generations in both home regions and settlement sites are all questions potential migrants and their social networks must answer.

The socially-selective processes of moving, receiving, and sending we see in the Judges texts are common functions of households and extended communities operating in mobile contexts. As with the Danite migration, the smallest necessary group is mobilized so as not to disrupt the stability of the household in

their absence (Cohen & Sirkeci 2011). Once potential relocation sites have been scouted, larger contingents of the sending population may take the journey. Historically, this stage of movement sometimes involved conflict between new arrivals and settled populations (Pitkänen 2016). It need not always be characterized by violent removal or displacement of peoples, but in the Danite narrative it is. The armed members of the tribe travel behind the livestock and their un-armed children and kinsfolk.

The Danites approach of the Levite to inquire on the outcome of their relocation endeavor finds several analogues among the ways modern migrants rely on a spectrum of religious resources when deciding whether or not to migrate and, if so, how to proceed. Migrants are prone to visit sites of religious significance where they deposit petitionary offerings and request safety for themselves and family (Eppsteiner & Hagan 2016). They also actively seek out the counsel of religious leaders and participate in prayer and blessing ceremonies before and throughout their journeys (Hagan 2008a; Hagan & Ebaugh 2003). For many, further movement depends on an affirmative response either directly from God or from a religious leader (Rothe & Salehi 2016; Hagan 2008b; Van Dijk 1997). Some Latin American migrants also partake in *ayunos*, a type of religious ceremony where fasting and prayer takes place while a prophetic prediction of migratory success is solicited (Hagan 2002; Hagan & Ebaugh 2003; Sarat 2013). We observe a similar phenomenon among the men of Dan in Judges 18.

Transporting deities was both common and necessary in the ancient Near East given the understanding that their powers were typically limited to the immediate area in which they resided. In an archive text of Zimrī-Līm from Mari, a sickly servant implores his master for leave to return to home where he can worship his personal god that is inaccessible to him in his current location. If the master will not grant him leave for travel, the servant hopes he will at least allow a letter to be sent from the servant to his god asking for healing (Charpin & Durand 1988: 403). Maria M. Luiselli (2014) offers a set of examples that echo accounts of modern migrants relying on the intercession of non-migrants. She cites Egyptian letters containing requests from their senders to their recipients, who are members of their households, to go to the local temple and pray for their protection while they are away from home and thus unable to offer prayers to their personal deity on their own (Luiselli 2014).

Carrying deities into battle is another common practice across the ancient Near East, as is capturing the deities of one's enemies (Zaia 2015). Not only does the deity's immediate presence at the battlefield contribute to the fighters' morale, in many instances it seems presumed that the deity actually partook in the battle. Texts in the Hebrew Bible maintain similar understandings of Yahweh fighting on Israel's behalf and 1 Samuel recounts an instance of 'godnapping,' when the Ark of the Covenant is taken in battle (1 Samuel 4). In light of these examples, we can see that, on the one hand, the Judges text preserves the notions of either traveling with a deity or carrying one into battle. On the other, the use of (תָּכַן), which can mean "to lead," in 18:5-6 may indicate a critique of the idea that it is the Danites who carry Yahweh into battle. Rather, the claim may be that it is Yahweh, as the more mobile and capable of the two parties, who carries the Danites forward. In either case, the text offers no comment on whether the Danites assume the existence of multiple Yahwehs. Yet, it would seem that there is only one, represented in hypostatic form by the stolen statue.

After conquering Laish and rebuilding the city, the Danites erect a shrine for the Yahweh statue and the other cultic items they stole from Micah. Construction of religious spaces in a new destination is often observed among migrants. Such spaces serve many functions among which are expressing gratitude to a particular deity for success, as well as attempting to recreate former sites of religious activity and access in new locations (Soto 2016). The case of St. Michael's church, which was built by migrants in the Calais camp that has since been destroyed, is an excellent example of such activity (Saunders *et al.* 2016).

In sum, the accounts of Micah's household religiosity and the Danite migration display the internal religious pluralism extant in many contexts, but especially in those of human mobility. Flexibility, fluidity, and integration of practices from multiple spheres characterize the accounts found in Judges. Simultaneously, the religious practices associated with worshiping Yahweh in the story are not all consonant with later notions of Israelite religiosity. Religious enactments accepted in the lived religious experience of Micah's family, such as those in which the household uses an image of Yahweh, would not hold in other religious spheres. Even though Micah's household's shrine was likely commonplace for most ancient Israelites, it does not qualify as "orthodox" religion for later biblical authors. Thus, the Judges text shows us that there was an understanding among later generations that at an earlier point in Israelite history, it was common for individuals and households to take religious matters into their own hands, including the creation of personal and ancestral religious figurines, divinatory paraphernalia, and distinct sites for their use. While such means of worship were once the norm, they are no longer. Processes of tempering belief and praxis over time are integral elements of negotiating internal religious pluralism. This account in Judges may also function etiologically to tell the origins of a later cult site in Dan that coexisted with others in Shiloh, Bethel, and Jerusalem.

Mobility and internal religious pluralism at Kuntillet 'Ajrud

The now-famous 9th-8th century BCE desert caravansary, Kuntillet 'Ajrud (*Horvat Teman*), provides another case for exploring the spectrum of religiosity in ancient Israel. Situated in an isolated arid region, Kuntillet 'Ajrud is by all measures a liminal site in comparison with those destination points it stands between (Thareani 2017). Excavated in the late 1970s, it was first identified as an Israelite religious center in northern Sinai (Meshel 2012). Later analysis of the finds raised questions about the site's "Israelite" nature since the plaster paintings, inscribed votive bowls, and decorated *pithoi* failed to align with biblical accounts of Israelite religion, even those expressed in the text as being explicitly unorthodox (2 Kings 23)[9]. Other questions have surfaced regarding whether designating the site as cultic is at all correct (Keel & Uehlinger 1998; Lemaire 1984; Smoak & Schniedewind 2019). Thus, the architecture of the two buildings on the site has been described as temples, fortifications, and guest houses. This paper supports the site's classification as Israelite, but its religious nature requires further discussion.

The material evidence recovered from the site does not indicate that it served a strictly religious purpose. While there are no remains of statues or figurines like those found at the Iron Age Moabite wayside shrine WT-13 of Wadi ath-Thamad, the comparative absence of such items does not mark the site as non-religious (Daviau & Steiner 2017). The data from Kuntillet 'Ajrud actually align well with the general archaeological picture of the central highlands in the Iron Age, where village sites have less religious paraphernalia than surrounding polities, maintain no distinctive altars, contain few figurines, and possess little religious architecture comparable to the types seen elsewhere (Hess 2007)[10].

In the end, discussion of *whether* Kuntillet 'Ajrud is a religious or cultic site is ultimately misguided. Smoak & Schniedewind (2019) come close to recognizing this when they briefly discuss how religion is a part of life for those in Kuntillet 'Ajrud. Nevertheless, it is important to recall that locations where religiosity is enacted need not be explicitly or primarily cultic or religious. Similarly, spaces not initially intended to be religious can become so through use.

With these considerations in mind, its best characterization to date is as a *caravansary*, a term flexible enough to account for the

9 The title of Meshel's (2012) full site report captures the ambiguity that still plagues the site's identification. For another set of full translations of all the inscriptions found at the site see Dobbs-Allsopp and collaborators (2005).

10 Hess (2007: 235) does, however, note that we find a few "simple cultic structures" among domestic sites in Dan, Ai, Khirbet Raddana, Tell Irbid, and Tell es-Sa'idiyeh.

reality that the site could have simultaneously served more than one purpose, including those recognizable as religious, given the realities of interregional mobility in the Sinai during the Iron Age (Thareani-Sussely 2007). Its location near water sources could certainly contribute to the site's function as a place for resting, giving thanks, and making requests for continued success on one's journey. In light of this designation, the more important question at Kuntillet 'Ajrud is not whether it was a religious site but rather—assuming that religion permeates a variety of social spaces—what traces of religiosity can be found at the site? And how could such use or activities associated with the site be illuminated by the evidence collected on the forms and functions of religion in contexts of mobility and migration?

The inscriptional evidence from Kuntillet 'Ajrud attests to the simultaneous association of Yahweh with different geographic locations. The theophanic inscription on the plaster wall of the "Bench Room", in turn, indicates that several deities, including Yahweh, could have been venerated through blessing and petitionary practices at the site (Aḥituv, Eshel & Meshel 2012; Mastin 2009). Though no evidence remains, some scholars have posited that there may have been a tree at the site that could have been a point of religious engagement (Na'aman & Lissovsky 2008). It is reasonable to assume that the presence of natural elements like trees and water might foster religious behaviors among those taking refuge at the site.

Among the various inscriptions, the ones found on the Bench Room and on *Pithoi* A & B are relevant to the present study. Scholarly discussion has often centered around the question of whether these engravings conclusively show that Yahweh maintained a female counterpart or consort. Although a pertinent question to the study of internal religious pluralism, the present essay is more concerned with the nature of the different geographic associations for Yahweh.

The first of these on *Pithos A* reads:

> *Message of '[-]M[-]K: "Speak to Yāhēlî, and to Yô'āśāh, and to [...] I have [b]lessed you to YHWH of Shômrôn and to His asherah"* (Aḥituv, Eshel & Meshel 2012: 87 [fig. 3.1]).

The second, found on *Pithos B* reads:

> *Message of Amaryaw: "Say to my lord, are you well? I have blessed you to YHWH of Teman and his 'asherah. May he bless you and may he guard you, and may he be with my lord [forever(?)]"* (Aḥituv, Eshel & Meshel 2012: 95 [fig. 3.6]).

The third, also found on *Pithos B* reads:

> *to YHWH of the Têmān and His ashera; Whatever he asks from a man, that man will give him generously. And if he would urge – YHW will give him according to his wishes* (Aḥituv, Eshel & Meshel 2012: 97 [fig. 3.9]).

A fourth, found in ink on plaster in the "Bench Room," reads:

> *... May] He lengthen their days and may they be seated [...] recount to [Y]HWH of Têmān and His ashera [... because (?)] YHWH of Tê[mān], has shown [them(?)] favor, has bettered their da[ys...* (Aḥituv, Eshel, & Meshel 2012: 105 [fig. 4.1.1]).

The author(s) of these inscriptions are unknown and their identity cannot be deduced by textual analysis alone. Asserting that the inscriptions share a common epistolary form, Smoak & Schniedewind (2019) surmise they are the work of a scribe(s) in training at the site, a position that I will show need not be the only conclusion to the evidence at hand. Along with Smoak & Schniedewind (2019), Baruch Levine (2014) makes a compelling argument for the text being northern Israelite/Israelian in form.

The presence of different associative points of provenance for Yahweh has led many scholars to suggest that what is observed at Kuntillet 'Ajrud is the kind of "*poly-Yahwism*" extant throughout the region in the first Millennium BCE (McCarter 1987; Stavrakopoulou & Barton 2010). P. Kyle

McCarter (1987: 139) argues that "these are local forms or manifestations of the national god." He goes on to suggest that in an era before Israel resided in the central highlands of Canaan, there were likely several desert shrines devoted to different Yahwehs (McCarter 1987). Even if the widespread presence of such sites was provable, it would not be a basis for claiming that the Yahweh worshiped at each site was considered a distinct god. Nor would it provide evidence to support McCarter's (1987) implied argument that worship at each site constituted unique forms of Yahwism that should be deemed as distinct religions.

Arguments in favor of a poly-Yahwism are generally premised on the claim that formulaic compositions using the divine name (DN) in conjunction with a specific geographic region or site (GN) function in similar ways across the ancient Near East. Early on, scholars posited that each epithet represented a localized manifestation that was understood to share in the greater identity of the deity. This argument has typically been made by referencing lexical god-lists, which some scholars believe reveal the process of syncretic association of some deities with others (Beaulieu 2004; Lambert 1975). Subsequently, the vast pantheons of Mesopotamian deities are reducible to a number of major gods/goddesses who subsumed the attributes or identities of the multitude.

In recent decades, scholarly opinion has begun to shift, with a growing consensus that each Ištar is a deity wholly distinct from the other Ištars. For example, McCarter (1987) cites Ištar's two main geographic associations and posits that ^{d}*Ištar ša* ^{uru}*Ninua* (Ištar of Nineveh) and ^{d}*Ištar ša* ^{uru}*Arbela* (Ištar of Arbela) were conceived by worshippers to be two distinct goddesses (cf. Allen 2015; Hutton 2010; Porter 2004)[11]. Spencer Allen (2015: 27) has characterized this shift as one toward "maximizing multiplicity." Yet, even if multiplicity is normative in Mesopotamia, it should not be over accentuated, particularly in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian eras when one-god movements took place (Smith 2001). It is in light of such considerations that Allen (2015) argues that what is true regarding ancient Near Eastern conceptions of divine multiplicity may not hold true in ancient Israel or Judah.

Jeremy Hutton's (2010) analysis of the inscriptions leads him to restate the claim an existing variability of acceptable religious expression that responded to the different geographic locations of Yahweh's residence. Hutton (2010) importantly places the epigraphic record in conversation with the biblical text. By relating the 9th century BCE inscriptions to the later 6th century text of Deuteronomy he illuminates some of the religious tensions present across different geographies and chronologies in Israelite society. Building on an initial understanding that the *Shema's* (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) proclamation of Yahweh's oneness is partially a consolidation of his multiple geographic manifestations, he presents data from Kuntillet 'Ajrud as a case study for the ways inter-religious tensions among localized Yahwehs played out at the site.

Hutton's (2010) work comes closest to integrating a mobility-centered perspective. According to him, Kuntillet 'Ajrud is a space of confluence for both locals and travelers, and as such, provides a place where multiple expressions of deity co-exist without marked signs of competition. He argues that the presence of multiple inscriptions declaring Yahweh's origins in Teman and only one proclaiming "*Yahweh of Samaria/Shômron*" denote that designating a Temanite origin for Yahweh is the more accepted expression of divine manifestation at the site (Hutton 2010). Addressing the fragmentation of Yahweh's person across various geographies, he notes that spaces of religious discourse "could be permeated by other manifestations of the same deity to whom the shrine was dedicated, even if they were in 'competition' with the 'host' manifestation" (Hutton 2010: 178). Hutton's assertion that different geographic associations of Yahweh co-exist at Kuntillet 'Ajrud does not imply that these names are for different Yahwehs.

The inscriptions at Kuntillet 'Ajrud are somewhat similar to biblical texts that

11 Based on McCarter's (1987: 142) interpretation of the naming of these two deities in separate lines as witnesses in Neo-Assyrian treaties.

announce Yahweh's movements from Teman/Paran (Habakkuk 3:3), from Seir/Edom (Judges 5:4), or from Sinai to his home in Zion (Psalm 68:1-35; 132:13-14). Again, Allen (2015) has adeptly refuted the notion that ancient Israelites worshipped multiple Yahwehs. The glaringly clear yet commonly overlooked fact is that while biblical authors deal shrewdly (and repeatedly) with the problem of Israel's worship of many gods, they never once engage in a polemic against the practice of worshiping multiple Yahwehs[12]. This is not because they ignore that there are multiple manifestations of Yahweh, but because they do not see the different manifestations of Yahweh as distinct gods. Thus, Hutton's (2010) explanation for the polemical role played by the Shema falls short. And even if arguments like McCarter's (1987) and Hutton's (2010) were correct, worshiping more than one deity that shares the same first name with another, but has a different geographic association, does not necessarily constitute a separate religion. In short, the problem of poly-Yahwism—as a phenomenon perceived as incongruent with biblical portrayals of Israelite religion—is a problem that arises from scholarly constructs, not from the material or textual evidence.

These observations are further supported by data gathered on religiosity in contexts of mobility. As stated previously, the primary driver of religiosity is the demand for effective achievement of goods and avoidance of ills. To accomplish these goals, practitioners must procure reliable forms of access to divine/superhuman powers. Migrants secure this access by carrying items of religious significance such as amulets, images, statuettes, figurines, by generating textual reminders of faith and material art, and by constructing religious shrines along their journeys (Eppsteiner & Hagan 2016; Hagan 2008b; Soto 2016). Within each of these practices and expressions, multiple ways of speaking of the same deity can exist alongside one another without any sense of competition or tension. And disparate practices can be seen as elements of a comprehensive religious toolkit. Hutton's (2010) overemphasis on the uniqueness of religion at Kuntillet 'Ajrud perpetuates the problematic assumption that Yahwism was somehow internally divided against itself regarding the personhood of its main deity. This is not to say that those who composed the texts at the site were adherents of a Yahweh-only religion. The inclusion of Yahweh's consort, *Asherah*, on the *pithoi* inscriptions and the presence of multiple deities on the Bench Room inscriptions are evidence enough against such an assumption. Disagreement over the acceptable pantheon of Yahwism could certainly have been at the forefront, but the question of whether there was more than one Yahweh does not appear to be a central concern.

Brian Schmidt's (2002) work illuminates this set of issues by approaching the inscriptional evidence via iconographic analysis. In doing so, he investigates if and how ancient Judahite and Israelite peoples visually represented their god(s). While there remains significant disagreement among biblical scholars on the aniconic nature of Israelite religion, Schmidt (2002: 94) ultimately answers this question positively, stating that while scholars forwarded "the recognition that feminization significantly impacted early Israel's concepts of the divine and the acknowledgement that symbiosis characterized the earliest Israelite henotheistic-monotheistic tendencies," they overlooked the evidence substantiating the notion that "the concrete visualization" of deity(ies) was also a key aspect of Israelite religion (Uehlinger 1998).

The question of *bovine* imagery raised in the analysis of Judges 17 resurfaces in our evaluation of the artistic depictions on *pithos* A. Discussions over the last several decades have attempted to resolve the issue of the type of animal(s) represented on the vessel. I contend that the inscription is a characterization of Yahweh and his consort, both as bovines, that emerges from the convergence of Yahweh and

12 This argument cannot be fully discusses here as it is the outcome of more than three decades of debates concerning the nature of divine multiplicity and unity in the ancient Near East. For an introduction to the discussion, see: Allen (2015), Porter (2000, 2006, 2009), Smith (2016), and Sommer (2009).

El. If this is the case, the bovine depiction could indeed be readily identified with the Israelite site of Samaria since bull iconography played a central role in the religious expression of this region (Keel & Uehlinger 1998; Smith 2002).

The drawings on the two *pithoi* have often been viewed as separate compositions, and in recent years, skepticism has grown over the relationship between the drawings of the bovine characters on pithos A and the inscription that overlaps with it, containing the words "I have [b]lessed you to Yahweh of Shômron and to His *asherah*" (Meshel 2012: 87)[13]. Resisting any tendency to atomize the evidence, Schmidt (2002) contends that both drawing and inscription are the work of the same hand and asserts that the inscriptional evidence of texts and drawings from *pithoi* A and B form a coherent whole that bears several stylistic commonalities with ancient Near Eastern art from the same period. Schmidt's methodological protest is commendable since he rightly recognizes that the meanings of artistic and linguistic representations depend on interpreting both their parts and the whole. It is apparent that he sees meaning in both but believes, regarding *pithoi* A and B, that the whole provides a more accurate representation of the religious ethos present at the site.

Schmidt's (2002) observations can be put into productive conversation with a well-known body of research on migrant religious artwork. Over the last several decades, Jorge Durand & Douglass Massey (2010) have catalogued votive paintings left by migrants on their journey through Mexico to the United States. Such paintings are broadly known as *retablos*, a Spanish word that derives from the Latin *retro-tabula*, meaning "behind the altar" (Durand & Massey 2010; Giffords 1974; Solis 2018). Ex-votos like *retablos* are not unique to migratory contexts, but integrate a long tradition, primarily among Catholic adherents (Briscese & Sciorra 2012; Roque et al. 2004). Comparative exploration of these mobile mementos may give us renewed insight on the depictions found at Kuntillet 'Ajrud.

Traditionally, *retablos* have been painted on small tin sheets, containing three common elements: an image of a holy entity, a depiction of the event to which the *retablo* refers, and a text of resolution and gratitude (Durand & Massey 2010). Though these works of art present a broad stylistic spectrum, the intention behind them all is similar: They are offerings of thanksgiving for receiving a divine favor or miracle, including completing the journey, mitigation of legal problems, rescue from imminent danger or death, returning to their country of origin, and thriving at the migrated location (Durand & Massey 2010).

While *retablos* share no direct stylistic similarities with the *pithoi* painting(s) from Kuntillet 'Ajrud, two elements bear further discussion in light of the finds there. As Durand & Massey (2010: 228) note, "*retablos* testify to the feelings and experiences of people who migrate back and forth to work in a strange land". This sentiment aligns with the likelihood that most who passed through Kuntillet 'Ajrud maintained transitory existences as part of a greater context of interregional mobility that facilitated work and trade. The *pithoi* inscriptions there evidence the very types of concerns for continued blessing that travelers of many stripes desire for themselves, their companions, and those they left behind. They are exemplary forms of mobile religiosity. Even without comparison to modern *retablos*, the *pithoi* inscriptions bear resemblances to other Mesopotamian travel poems, prayers, incantations, hymns, and accounts of blessing or gratitude in contexts of movement[14].

Depictions of holy figures, explanations of the events, and related statements of gratitude on *retablos* all follow formulaic norms. While images are meant to conform to typical iconic depictions, artistic abilities and license govern the final forms, though rarely beyond easy recognition. The same tendencies are at work

13 Criticism of this linked nature between drawing and inscription is most prominent in Pirhiya Beck's and J. A. Emerton's separate analyses of the inscriptions. See Beck's work in Meshel's (2012) site report. See also Emerton (1999).

14 For two examples, see Wilfred G. Lambert (2007) (ND 5491 [IM 67692]) and Ivan Starr (1990).

in the depictions found in Kuntillet ʻAjrud. The images trade on recognizable contemporary motifs that onlookers would have been able to identify (Schmidt 2002). Similarly, the text of each retablo utilizes "standard vocabulary that has evolved over hundreds of years" (Durand & Massey 2010: 217). This fact reminds us that formulaic writing is not simply the domain of scribes, contrary to Smoak & Schniedewind (2019). Even contexts of limited literacy, like those of ancient Israel and of illiterate Central American migrants, does not completly preclude the ability to compose basic texts reflecting formulaic depictions of blessing, religious disposition, and personal aspirations.

The propensity for combinatory iconographic constructions in mobile contexts raises further questions about the relationship between the texts and drawings at Kuntillet ʻAjrud. Perhaps for the creator(s) of these inscriptions, the impossibility of generating a coherent visual representation of the spectrum of Yahweh's person resulted in the use of a combination of visual and textual mediums to clarify the nature of Yahweh's character, abilities, and actions. Beyond expanding image with text or vice versa, we should also consider the possibility that the images themselves are composite in nature. In a way, it may be that bovine imagery has been joined with that of the Egyptian deity Bes and his consort, though such an argument requires nuanced considerations of iconographic blending (Barkay & Im 2001; Thomas 2016). In another, the figures on pithos A might be both bovine and leonine in character. Overlapping multiple theriomorphic motifs to represent deities is common practice in the ancient Near East and in the Hebrew Bible, where we find depictions of Israel's God as a bull, lion/leopard, and bear (Numbers 24:8, Hosea 13:7-8; Lamentations 3:19) (Lewis 2016)[15]. Thus, what we see is perhaps the bull-imagery prevalent in the North joined with that of the leonine imagery of Judah in the South to represent Yahweh in a uniquely comprehensive manner.

15 Keel & Uehlinger (1998: 173-175) have traced the general decline in anthropomorphic iconographic representations in the Levant during the Iron IIa period.

Conclusions

Once one recognizes that Bronze and Iron Ages societies of the ancient Near East were highly mobile, other strategies for studying the people and places of these periods must be employed. This paper has applied a mobility-centric methodology to the study of religion and religiosity in ancient Israel and Judah. Mobility and migration influence the contours of daily life for ancient and modern peoples alike. As a result, religious practice and belief are reciprocally informed by experiences of movement. Both of the case studies presented here capture the responses of local populations to cultural and political realities that arise from migration and colonization. They also provide glimpses of responsive religiosity in contexts of human mobility.

By investigating examples of the kinds of malleable religious praxis found among modern migrants, this project has further illuminated elements of religious fluidity and hybridity that occur in liminal geographies. The paper also bears witness to the preservation and delineation of religious particularity in such contexts of exchange. Internal religious pluralism exists in a various settings, including those that are sedentary. Yet, mobility is a catalyst for intensified internal religious pluralism as being on the move typically increases demands for effective resolution of physical and social-emotional needs. The evidence presented here indicates that internal religious pluralism can be seen in settings of mobility associated with Israel's emergence and settlement as well as in later periods when a more centralized religious apparatus existed.

Each instantiation provides us with a glimpse of related aspects of Yahwism. The religion we find in the Judges texts and that which is maintained in the inscriptional evidence from Kuntillet ʻAjrud is a coherent but internally plural Yahwism cultivated in part by responses to contexts of mobility. The cohesiveness of Yahwism is maintained in part by Yahweh's character as a mobile deity. The religious demands of a highly mobile people necessitate the intervention of a highly mobile god. Thus, Israel's preference for a highly

mobile deity who is non-autochthonous—like some of its own members—is noteworthy (Killebrew 2006, 2017). Yahweh is capable of moving across geographies under his own volition and without fracturing his person (cf. Na'aman 2018)[16]. It may be that this characteristic of personal mobility is a catalyst for Yahweh's rise to the head of the Israelite pantheon and eventual subsumption of the characteristics and domains of other deities.

Although the predominant group that formed the earliest Israel was completely Canaanite regarding ethno-cultural composition, the collective identity of an external mobile social contingent, personified by runaway slaves from Egypt or re-sedentarized nomadic groups, gained immense traction among the population that emerged in the wake of the Late Bronze Age regional power and settlement vacuums (Finkelstein 1994, 1995). These mobile social contingents, though comparatively smaller than the embedded populations of Canaan, contributed a cultural element (and founding narrative) of mobility that resonated with local populations who had themselves experienced smaller migrations from the lowland regions to the highlands. The emergent narratives of escape from enslavement and entry into a land of promise with a new social order bound these diverse groups together and fostered the ethnogenetic processes that would result in the people known collectively as Israel.

I have asserted that processes of acculturation resulting from migration not only resulted in Israel's ethnogenesis, but that the religious distinctiveness that later characterized Yahwism were, in part, products of mobile experiences.

In reflecting their own mobile origins, which are both real and fictively adopted by settled counterparts, the central religious assumptions of the group we might today call proto-Israel relate to the mobile nature of their deity. Thus, narratives of Yahweh's non-autochthonous southern origin (Habakkuk 3), and those of his salvific activities over Egypt (Exodus 1-20; Deuteronomy 1-8) converged with other local anthropomorphic attributes of Canaanite deities (Smith 2002). Yahweh's character as a desert god with potentially nomadic origins meshed well with Canaanite understandings of Ba'al as a sea-skirting mobile deity. The resulting religious practices would reveal the belief that this deity was not only highly mobile and capable of traveling to multiple sites, but also indivisible. As a result, biblical texts not only foreground his capacities for travel by displaying a single divine being capable of moving between disparate geographic spaces in real space and time, the collection of texts testifies to the assumption that this deity, variously named and described, is in fact the one and the same. In this way, biblical authors preserve an extra-biblical understanding apparent at sites like Kuntillet 'Ajrud, that there is only one Yahwe[17].

16 Nadav Na'aman (2018) has recently shown that transporting soil from one sacred location to another was common practice in the ancient Near East. The only biblical example of this type of behavior is 2 Kings 5:17 in which a foreign ruler requests relocation of enough soil to build an altar for YHWH in the land of Aram. This further bolsters the claim that ancient Near Eastern peoples saw their gods constrained by national boundaries and highlights the Israelite understanding of YHWH as a traveling and border-crossing deity.

17 This appears in many episodes of the Divine meeting ancestral personages such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in contexts of travel and leading them to various sites (Genesis 12-14, 22, 32); in wilderness wandering narratives about the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant as moveable sites of worship and residence for a deity that is on-the-move (Exodus 25-26, 36-37; Numbers 7:1-6); and in texts recording Ezekiel's vision of the divine presence traveling from Jerusalem to Babylon (Ezekiel 1, 10).

TRINKA, E. M. Religião em movimento: mobilidade, migração e diversidade religiosa interna em Israel e Judá bíblicos e antigos. R. Museu Arq. Etn., 33: 66-90, 2019.

Resumo: Migração é um processo social. A religião é fundamentalmente um empreendimento social. Como outros aspectos de suas identidades culturais, os humanos carregam suas identidades religiosas com eles enquanto atravessam geografias. Este artigo explora os efeitos do movimento inter-regional, como

mobilidade e como migração, sobre as práticas e crenças religiosas dos antigos povos do Mediterrâneo, especificamente daqueles que vêm a ser chamados de israelitas. Vários estudos que abordam as diferenças religiosas internas em Israel e Judá explicam as múltiplas associações geográficas de Javé como "polijavismo", presumindo que a veneração de diferentes associações geográficas são, na realidade, atos de culto dirigidos a diferentes Javés. Os estudos de migração, especificamente aqueles que envolvem a instrumentalização migratória da religião, não têm sido parceiros centrais de conversação nessas explorações de personagens divinos. Assim, argumento que as complexidades do intercâmbio cultural nas regiões levantinas do Mediterrâneo no primeiro milênio a.C. e o desenvolvimento da diversidade religiosa interna no Israel antigo podem ser melhor compreendidos pela integração dos dados modernos sobre mobilidade e migração. Além disso, a elucidação da relação dialógica entre mobilidade, migração e religiosidade permite que os estudiosos expliquem melhor as respostas culturais observadas nos espaços de reassentamento e colonização onde a religião funciona tanto como fonte de controle quanto como recurso empregado para minar estruturas de poder colonizadoras. Para este fim, este trabalho aborda especificamente a ocorrência de modos variantes da religiosidade javista através de dois estudos de caso: o primeiro é uma leitura informada de migração de Juízes 17-18; e a segunda é uma análise informada das mobilidades de quatro inscrições de Kuntillet 'Ajrud (Horvat Teman). Juntas, essas explorações fornecem respostas a perguntas sobre a multiplicidade de Javé e sua natureza móvel.

Palavras-chave: Israel antigo; Pluralismo religioso interno; Multiplicidade divina; Migração; Mobilidade.

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