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# Family and Household Religion

*Toward a Synthesis of Old Testament Studies,  
Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Cultural Studies*

*Edited by*

RAINER ALBERTZ, BETH ALPERT NAKHAI,  
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## *Family Religion from a Northern Levantine Perspective*

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Karel van der Toorn notes in his contribution to *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity* that family religion, though the most common and pervasive form of religious practice, has nevertheless been largely ignored in ancient Near Eastern studies (2008: 20). Although efforts have begun to redress this imbalance, particularly in the realm of biblical Israel and her neighbors, our knowledge of household religious practice in the Bronze and Iron Age cultures of Syro-Anatolia and the northern Levant remains woefully limited. This is due in part to the sparse documentary record available, but it must also be acknowledged that archaeological research has devoted very little attention to domestic contexts, as evidenced by the overwhelming focus—over more than a century of exploration—on the elite citadels and public spaces of ancient settlements. As a result, we know almost nothing about everyday life in the region, particularly during the Iron Age.

Filling this gap will require a redirection of research agendas, with excavations venturing off the upper mounds of sites and targeting a wider range of settlement contexts, including the residential areas typically found in the lower settlements that encircle most mounded sites. Fortunately, field projects have begun to focus efforts in this area, but it will take time to accumulate meaningful data. Consequently, in this paper I will examine a number of features in the religious traditions of the region that accentuate the central importance of the family and then attempt to identify (or anticipate) remains in the archaeological record that reflect these expressions of family religious life. In so doing, I wish to emphasize the importance of adopting a holistic view of ancient religious behavior. In contrast to our modern western conceptualizations, with their sharp distinctions between public and private life, there is little evidence to suggest that ancient Near Eastern communities maintained such a compartmentalized view of their world.

### ***The House of the Father***

A central theme of Levantine Bronze and Iron Age society, and indeed of the wider ancient Near East, is the powerful organizing principle of kinship. Although many scholars have discounted its pervasive influence, particularly in complex urban contexts, patrilineal kinship unquestionably was the idiom through which

social, economic, and political cooperation and organization were mediated in ancient Near Eastern society, as David Schloen (2001) and others have effectively demonstrated. Expressed metaphorically as the “House of the Father,” patrilineal kinship typically assumed the form of a nested hierarchy of households, beginning at the basal level with extended (or joint) family households and culminating at the apex with the household of the god(s). Kinship thus should be viewed as dynamic rather than static, employing the genealogical metaphor to represent each relationship of authority or dependence. Understood in this way, the symbolism of the patriarchal household can serve as both a metaphor of literary discourse and a template for practical social action (Schloen 2001: 350).

Although perhaps best characterized as “murky refractions” (cf. Schloen 2001: 350), West Semitic mythological narratives such as the Ugaritic ʾAqhatu and Baʿlu epics clearly held profound meaning for their native audiences and therefore provide a revealing—even if imaginative—reframing of the lived social experience of Levantine communities during this period. Their plots uniformly affirm the fundamental importance of the extended family household as the basic social unit, while highlighting the central drama of the perpetual quest to secure the heir to the *paterfamilias*, whether in the celestial world of the gods, the political realm of kings and the ruling elite, or the life cycle of the common household. These narrative myths thus portray a patrimonial existence that closely mirrors the patrilineal kinship structures reflected in contemporary administrative texts and material culture. They also emphasize the non-dualistic nature of the Levantine worldview and challenge the perception that ancient Near Eastern communities separated their public and private religious lives, maintaining a dichotomy between their formal, institutionalized religious beliefs and common everyday “folk” practice.

### ***The Cult of the Ancestors***

Family household religion in the ancient Near East had two key features: the veneration of a “family” god and the maintenance of a cult of the family ancestors (van der Toorn 2008: 20–21). The family god was never anonymous; he (or occasionally she) was always identified, or named, as the patron of a particular individual or family. In glyptic, for example, a seal’s owner would typically be identified as the “servant of god so-and-so.” The primary role of the family god was to serve as an intercessor, though in principle the relationship was mutually beneficial, since by invoking his name and offering their prayers and offerings, the family promoted and attended to him. As family patron, it was important that the family god lived in the immediate proximity, that the god’s cult place was local, whether the family residence was urban or rural. In urban contexts, these often took the form of neighborhood chapels or shrines. When a family moved or emigrated, they usually took the cult of their god with them (see further in van der Toorn 1996: 66–93; 2008: 21–23).

The second component of ancient Near Eastern family religious practice was the cult of the ancestors. The responsibility for maintaining this cult rested with the eldest son, or heir, of the *paterfamilias*. The ancestor cult involved both an oral rite—invoking the name(s) of the dead ancestors—and a material component, a ritual meal known as the *kispum*. In Mesopotamian practice, the *kispum* was a daily rite performed in conjunction with the meals of the living, with more elaborate feasts

prepared once a month during the interlunar and in conjunction with important events in the family life cycle, signifying that these activities occurred in the presence of the ancestors (see further in Tsukimoto 1985; van der Toorn 1996: 42–65; 2008: 25–28). The cult place typically consisted of a house sanctuary, or dedicated room (*bit kispim*), located in the house of the *paterfamilias* and was equipped with a ceremonial table (*paššur sakke*) upon which were placed the offerings for the dead. Other features of the room included a sacred fireplace (*kinunu*) and a lamp (*nuru*).

In contrast to Mesopotamian practice, the cult of the ancestors and worship of the family god(s) were intermingled in West Semitic family religion (van der Toorn 1996: 153). The cult place of the family god(s) also served as the place where the family ancestors were venerated. The responsibilities of the *paterfamilias* are vividly portrayed in the Epic of ʾAqhatu (see specifically *KTU* 1.17 i 23–33). The driving theme of the narrative concerns the protagonist, Daniʾilu the king, and his desperate desire for a son who might succeed him and thereby secure the family line. The oracle who speaks to the king lists the primary duties involved. They included domestic tasks but significantly also a series of religious duties. The heir to the *paterfamilias* was to partake of the sacrificial meals presented to the family god(s), in this instance El and Baal, in their temple or sanctuary. The account is reminiscent of the scene in the story of Elkanah and Hannah, parents of Samuel, in which Elkanah gives Hannah a double portion of the sacrificial meal because of his love for her (1 Sam 1:4–5).

The heir was also to erect a stela (*skn*) of his father's *ilib* in a sanctuary or temple (*bqdš*) (*KTU* 1.17 i 26–27). There has been some debate whether *ilib* refers to a divinized ancestor, specifically a “divine father,” or to the paternal god of the household, thus “god of the father.” Van der Toorn has argued in favor of the deified status of the deceased ancestor (1993; 1996: 155–60), but a paternal god who served as protector of the household, or clan, seems preferable in this context (Schloen 2001: 343–45). Thus, the dutiful son places a stele of his paternal god, which serves as a “votive emblem” (*ztr*) of his clan (*ʾmh*), in a temple on behalf of his father. The list of filial duties, as outlined in the Epic of ʾAqhatu, may also have included communicating with the ancestral spirit, or necromancy, though the wording of the relevant couplet (lines 27–28) is uncertain, and it is plausible that the reference is to maintaining the domestic hearth as a sacred symbol of the family (for contrasting views, see Lewis 1989: 54, 60–65; and van der Toorn 1996: 165).

Whether or not deceased ancestors achieved divine status in Ugaritic society, it is clear that an ancestral cult existed. Some have tried to link the Mesopotamian *kispu* rites to the Ugaritic *marzihi* and its Hebrew cognate *marzeah* (cf. Pope 1981: 174–76), but there seems little if any connection (Lewis 1989: 80–98; Pardee 1996). Nevertheless, the presence of corbel-vaulted tombs beneath the floors of many of the houses in Ugarit provides indisputable proof that the deceased played a direct and continuing role in the lives of their associated households. While attempts to identify evidence of cultic activity in these tombs have not been convincing (see Pitard 1994; van der Toorn 1996: 161), this does not preclude the possibility that such activities did in fact occur in them or within their immediate vicinity. Indeed, this is implied by the funerary ritual that was performed at the burial of the Ugaritic king Niqmaddu III (*KTU* 1.161; for the text, see Bordreuil and Pardee 1991: 151–63), which included sacrificial offerings to the forefathers and a ceremonial meal partaken at a table (see further in Pardee 1996). In any event, it is clear from the filial

duties listed in the Epic of ʿAqhatu that a key ritual, the placing of the ancestral stele (see lines 26–27), occurred outside the household, in a temple or sanctuary.

### **Syro-Hittite Funerary Monuments**

To date, more than one hundred funerary monuments have been identified within the territories of the Syro-Hittite states of southeast Anatolia and northwest Syria. These include statues (30), carved stelae (70), and at least 13 inscribed stelae (Bonatz 2000a, 2000b: 189).<sup>1</sup> Although many—indeed almost all—of these intriguing monuments suffer from poor provenance, their appearance as a group has been dated generally to the ninth and first half of the eighth centuries B.C.E., placing them within the fluorescent phase of these diminutive Iron Age kingdoms. Hawkins’s identification of several inscribed stelae as funerary monuments (1980; 1989) confirmed Orthmann’s earlier proposal that the feasting scenes carved on many of these stelae represented a funerary ritual (1971: 366–93).

The carved scenes typically depict a single male figure, though occasionally male and female couples occur, seated at a table partaking of a meal. The tables are supplied with a variety of foods (usually a combination of stacked loaves of bread or cakes and meat, generally waterfowl, fish, or sheep) and accoutrements. The seated figure(s) is sometimes accompanied by a smaller, standing individual who often is shown waving a fan over the table, as though attending to the care of its contents. The scene is strongly reminiscent of the Mesopotamian *kispum* ritual, with the seated figure representing the deceased ancestor, the former *paterfamilias*, and the smaller figure signifying the person charged with maintaining the ancestral cult, namely, the eldest son or heir (Bonatz 2000a; 2000b: 191). The seated figure often holds a drinking cup in one raised hand and various symbols of fertility or regeneration, such as an ear of corn, a sheaf of wheat, a bunch of grapes, a pomegranate, a flower, or a pine cone (as in the KTMW stele from Zincirli; see further below) in the other, while women are often depicted holding a distaff and spindle (Struble and Herrmann 2009: 23–24). Other scenes portray a family unit, sometimes with the father figure embracing the child, a protective gesture that further confirms the filial relationship (Bonatz 2000b: 191–93).

Standing and seated statue figures, the latter often displayed holding a drinking cup in their right hand, also served a funerary function, as indicated by their iconography and sometimes by an accompanying inscription (Bonatz 2000a; 2000b: 193). However, poor provenance prevents a more precise understanding of the potential role of these monuments in ritual activity, though they are generally found in association with palaces and temples or in public spaces, such as monumental gateways.

Despite the general lack of provenance, it is clear that Syro-Hittite funerary stelae were intended as memorials to mark a particular location, presumably—though not necessarily always—the actual grave site of the deceased. The in situ discovery of the KTMW mortuary stele at Zincirli (ancient Samʿal), found in a residential area of the lower town, therefore offers exciting new insight into the functional role of these monuments. The accompanying inscription on the Zincirli stele also provides specific details about the rituals that were expected to be performed in its presence,

1. A similar unpublished study was conducted slightly earlier by J. Voos (1986); see also Voos 1988a and 1988b.



including the nature and quantity of the offerings (though the meal portrayed on the stele does not correlate well with the offerings described in the text), their recipients, the practitioners, the frequency of the offerings, and their source (Struble and Herrmann 2009: 29–30; see also Pardee 2009). In contrast to the carved scene, which depicts a male figure seated before a table stacked with loaves of bread or cakes, a duck or waterfowl and a pyxis, the offerings prescribed for KTMW were a leg-cut of mutton and grapes or wine (see lines 8–13; Pardee 2009: 54). The offerings were to be provided annually in perpetuity (line 10), not simply at the time of death and burial, and they were to be supplied, it would appear, from some type of endowment (line 9). As Struble and Herrmann state (2009: 30), however, we should not assume that all such offerings were similar in nature or frequency, since specific reference to a food offering occurs in only one other inscribed funerary stele (specifically Kululu 3; see Hawkins 1989: 191; 2000: 490–91). Nevertheless, the expectation that food and drink offerings were to be presented to a deceased ancestor is clear, as evidenced by the royal mortuary inscription of Panamuwa I, king of Sam'al, preserved on the statue of Hadad found at nearby Gercin (Tropper 1993: 154–58; van der Toorn 1996: 166–68). Although previously thought to have been a privilege reserved for the king (cf. Orthmann 1971: 378; Niehr 1994), the non-royal KTMW stele clearly indicates a broader social practice (Struble and Herrmann 2009: 30–31; see also earlier, Dion 1997: 267–70).

As noted, the KTMW stele was discovered in a residential area of the lower town at Zincirli. More specifically, it was found in the northwest corner of a small room, ca. 3.75 × 3.0 m, of a building (Building II) that formed part of a larger complex (Complex A) in the northern lower town. An earlier phase of the building included two circular ovens, suggesting a possible domestic function for the structure. The stele stood against the back (western) wall of the room and was surrounded by a series of large flagstones, creating a pavement or platform in front of the stele, with a large flat-lying basalt stone to its right that might have served as a bench. A “pedestal” of stones, ca. 0.65 m in height, stood to the left of the stele. These installations presumably served as the immediate setting for whatever cultic activities might have been performed in the room. Unfortunately, the room appears to have been systematically cleaned when it was abandoned at the end of its use, leaving no indication of the activities that might have taken place there, although the cylindrical foot of a basalt vessel was uncovered in the debris above the flagstone pavement, and a blackened fragment of a basalt object was found reused in a later renovation of one of the room’s walls. The room produced no human remains or any trace of a burial. Due largely to the modest size of the associated building, the excavators conclude that the KTMW stele appears to have been housed within a freestanding mortuary chapel, rather than in a cult room belonging to a residential complex (Struble and Herrmann 2009: 33–36).

### ***Syro-Hittite Mortuary Chapels***

Although Syro-Hittite or, more specifically, Syro-Anatolian religious architecture has been the focus of study (cf. Naumann 1971: 433–72; Mazzoni 2010, and further references there), mortuary chapels have not received much attention in the literature. Perhaps the best example of such chapels is the “Kultraum” that was discovered

during excavations in the lower town at Tell Halaf (ancient Guzana) (Müller 1950: 357–60). A narrow, rectangular structure, the building measured 6.8 × 10.9 m. The building was oriented to the east, and its central room, or cella, was entered through its east wall by means a small antechamber. An elevated platform, or podium, was built against the western wall of the cella. A statue of two seated figures, a male and a female,<sup>2</sup> was found on this podium, with a second statue, an upright male figure, standing nearby. Both statues faced eastward toward a mud-brick altar and a rectangular basalt “offering table” outfitted with two recessed impressions. The room was also equipped with a bench along its north wall, and it contained a variety of cultic paraphernalia, including basalt vessels and male and female votive figurines made of stone or bronze. Three interconnecting rooms formed a small annex to the south, accessed via a doorway in the south wall of the cella (Müller 1950: 357–60). Two small multi-room structures near the southern gate of the citadel, Baugruppe 1 and 2, were found in association with a subterranean chamber containing human remains (Langenegger 1950: 171–75) and therefore might also have functioned as mortuary chapels (Niehr 2006: 131).

Indirect evidence of mortuary chapels might also have been discovered at Carchemish. Although no funerary stela or statues have been recovered in situ, a tower-shaped stele bearing an illegible Hieroglyphic Luwian inscription was found in a subsidiary building in the courtyard of the Storm-God Temple (Woolley and Barnett 1952: 167, pls. 29, 36a), a second stele was uncovered in the vicinity of the Kubaba Temple on the acropolis (Woolley and Barnett 1952: 213, pls. 49 and 50a), and a seated male figure was found next to the Hilani Building (Woolley and Barnett 1952: 181, pl. 38). These prompted Woolley (Woolley and Barnett 1952: 184) and later scholars (e.g., Bonatz 2000a: 154; Niehr 2006: 131) to speculate that the Storm-God Temple and the Hilani building were in fact royal mortuary chapels (Struble and Herrmann 2009: 36–37).

A key feature of mortuary chapels might have been their orientation to the east, toward the rising sun (Bonatz 2000a: 152; Niehr 2006; Struble and Herrmann 2009: 38), although the limited evidence available to date argues for caution on this point. More importantly, the association of funerary stela and/or statues with dedicated religious structures, specifically sanctuaries or chapels, seems unequivocal and closely parallels the view conveyed by the textual evidence. It also argues for the possibility that other such buildings might exist.

Also significant are the locations of these funerary monuments and chapels. Although some funerary monuments have been found in elite contexts, the location of both the Kultraum at Tell Halaf and the Zincirli stele (and chapel) in the lower towns of these two sites points to the possibility that mortuary chapels might exist in the lower towns and residential areas of other Iron Age settlements, and indeed funerary monuments have been found in similar non-elite contexts, as well as in extramural cemeteries. Unfortunately, the limited amount of excavation conducted thus far in the residential areas of Iron Age sites hampers our ability to explore this possibility. As first noted by Matthiae (1992), a possible neighborhood chapel was excavated by the Syrian-Hittite Expedition at Tell Judaidah in the North Orontes

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2. Several other seated statues have been found at Tell Halaf and in the vicinity, including two of females that were associated with burial shafts containing cremation urns (Langenegger 1950: 159–67).

Valley (Haines 1971: 28–29, pls. 42–43, 56–57), one of the few Iron Age settlements where a residential area has been excavated, although no funerary monuments were reported in association with the structure. The rectangular building, which measured  $9.5 \times 26.25$  m, bordered the north side of an east–west street and was surrounded by what appears to have been a series of domestic structures. We should anticipate additional discoveries, as excavations begin to focus more explicitly on the residential areas of sites.

As stated, the practice of erecting non-royal funerary monuments flourished in the ninth and eighth centuries B.C.E., during the high-point of the Syro-Hittite period. Equally striking is their disappearance after the Neo-Assyrian annexation of the region in the latter decades of the eighth century. The production of the Syro-Hittite funerary monuments has clear antecedents in the funerary rituals and iconography of the Hittite Empire period and can be seen in the sculptural traditions that persisted into the twelfth century, following the collapse of the Hittite Empire, and continued through to the appearance of the first funerary stelae in the late tenth/early ninth century B.C.E. Bonatz has associated the florescence of these funerary monuments with the emergence of local elites who sought to emulate the royal practices of the ruling dynasties that had secured control of the Syrian-Hittite states of this period and thereby achieve identity and status within the revived social hierarchies of these diminutive kingdoms (2000a: 161–65; 2000b: 204–10). Although this may be true, it nevertheless is important to remember that the central theme articulated in both the inscriptions and iconography of these monuments was not the deceased person's position with respect to the king or the state but to their family, and the critical importance of maintaining the integrity and continuity of the extended family household (Struble and Herrmann 2009: 42).

### ***Family “Household” Religion at Tell Tayinat***

Tell Tayinat is located on the southern flank of the Amuq Plain at the northern bend of the Orontes River, approximately 30 km east of modern Antakya (classical Antioch). The site was excavated over four field seasons between 1935 and 1938 by the University of Chicago's Syrian-Hittite Expedition. Their excavations, which were largely confined to the site's upper mound, or citadel, revealed a series of large monumental buildings, including several *bit hilani*-style palaces (most notably Building I) and a small temple (Building II) (see summary report in Haines 1971). Identified by contemporary sources as Kunulua, the royal city of the Syro-Hittite kingdom of Patina/Unqi, the Chicago excavations at Tayinat have furnished an illuminating view of the impressive regal cities built by the ruling dynasties of the Syro-Hittite period. Certainly, their monumental construction must have heightened the prestige of their builders if not the legitimacy of the local ruling dynasty. However, even within this elite context, there are indications of the persistent influence of kinship and the importance of the patrimonial household metaphor, particularly as expressed through the language of covenant.

In 2004, excavations were resumed at Tell Tayinat by the University of Toronto's Tayinat Archaeological Project (TAP). The TAP excavations, in addition to investigating new areas of the site, have revisited the Chicago trenches, most notably the West Central Area, which produced the monumental buildings of the Syro-Hittite citadel.

In 2008, in an effort to circumvent a Chicago trench, an area was opened to the east of what remained of the *bit hilani* (building I) complex. Over the next two field seasons, excavations proceeded to uncover the burned remains of a second temple, which has been designated Building XVI (for a more description of this structure, see Harrison 2012: 11–18; Harrison and Osborne 2012).

Building XVI, which measured 9 × 21 m in size, was approached from the south by means of a monumental stone staircase. A small basalt column rested on the western edge of the staircase, just in front of the southern end of the building's west wall. The staircase led to a porch, which supported an ornately carved basalt column base set deeply into its floor. The column base is virtually identical in size, shape, and design to column bases found in the entrance of the nearby Building I. The porch was separated from the central room of the building by two brick piers that served as a doorway. The central room was largely devoid of pottery or organic remains but produced a substantial quantity of bronze metal, including riveted pieces and several fragments of carved ivory inlay. Though heavily burned and damaged, these remains suggest the central room had been equipped with furniture or fixtures, perhaps for a door. The room also produced fragments of gold and silver foil and the carved eye inlay from a human figure. A thick layer of collapsed burned brick sealed the entire room and in some places had fused with the brickwork of the temple's outer walls, vivid evidence of the intense conflagration that had consumed the structure.

A second set of piers separated the central room from a small back room, the inner sanctum, or "holy of holies," of the temple. This northernmost room contained an elevated, rectangular platform or podium, clearly a later addition to the room. The surface of the podium was paved with ceramic tiles and accessed by steps in its two southern corners. A mud-brick altar stood on the east side of the podium. The room had also been burned intensely by fire, preserving a wealth of cultic paraphernalia found strewn across the podium and around its base, including gold, bronze, and iron implements, libation vessels, and other ornately decorated ritual objects. The surface debris also contained a fragmented assortment of cuneiform tablets written in Late Assyrian script. The analysis completed to date has identified at least eleven discrete texts, all except one preserving literary or historical documents. The most notable document, T-1801, records an oath imposed in 672 B.C.E. by Esarhaddon on the governor of Kunalia, the Assyrian designation for the province that replaced the Syro-Hittite Kingdom of Patina/Unqi, confirming that the final use-phase of Building XVI extended until at least the mid-seventh century B.C.E. (for a preliminary description and assessment of this remarkable temple corpus, see Lauinger 2011; also Lauinger 2012).

The construction methods used to build the exterior walls of Building XVI are identical to those typically found in the other public buildings of the West Central Area, including use of the distinctive "wood-crib" construction technique (for more detailed description, see Haines 1971: 45–46). In addition, the exterior face of the temple's west wall was decorated with a white painted plaster, and the building was surrounded on its west and south sides by a flagstone pavement, part of an expansive open courtyard, or plaza. Significantly, several Hieroglyphic Luwian fragments were found scattered on this stone pavement. Moreover, we have been able to link some of the stones in the pavement in front of the temple entrance directly to a section of pavement uncovered by the Syrian-Hittite Expedition in a probe they ex-

cavated at the end of their final season in 1938. The Chicago probe also uncovered a square-shaped platform built of finely-dressed basalt orthostats, which appears to have served as the support for a free-standing monument, situated directly in front of the stepped entrance to Building XVI. The Syrian-Hittite Expedition also reported finding numerous Hieroglyphic Luwian fragments in the vicinity, including parts of a block-shaped stele, Tell Tayinat Inscription 2 (see detailed description and commentary in Hawkins 2000: 367–75), and it is tempting to conclude that this stele once stood as a monument on the platform.

Since its discovery in 1936 by the Syrian-Hittite Expedition, Building II at Tayinat has been upheld as an exemplar of Iron Age Levantine religious architecture. Many scholars, including its original excavators (Haines 1971: 53), have identified Building II as a *megaron*-style temple, part of a long-standing West Syrian (or West Semitic) religious tradition. Biblical scholars have largely favored this view, drawing visual inspiration for the various components of the Solomonic temple described in 1 Kgs 6 (cf. Wright 1941; Busink 1970: 558–62). However, others have emphasized the building's similarities to Neo-Assyrian religious architecture, most notably its *langraum*-like plan and the magnificently carved double-lion column base(s) that once graced its entrance (in particular, see Frankfort 1954 [1996]: 289–90). These diverging views have all suffered from the limited contextual information available to date.

The TAP excavations now offer an opportunity to clarify the lingering stratigraphic and chronological questions that concern this intriguing complex, while clarifying the broader functional role of the Tayinat temples within the religious life of the Iron Age community that erected them. Although a definitive assessment must await the completion of excavations, the existing evidence points to at least two distinct phases of use. Since I have detailed my arguments elsewhere (Harrison 2012: 18–19; Harrison and Osborne 2012), I will only summarize the relevant points here. In short, the Tayinat temples exhibit the characteristics of a religious architectural tradition, the temple *in antis*, indigenous to West Syria and the Levant, with antecedents that can be traced back to the third millennium B.C.E., though not to be confused with the *migdal*-type common in the second millennium B.C.E. or its often (wrongly) assumed correlate the Aegean *megaron*. The salient feature of the *anten* temples were their distinctive columned-porch entryways or façades and flanking *antae*, the projecting, or pilastered, ends of the lateral walls that framed the long central room of the building. Access to the central room was restricted by two large piers, or dividing walls, with the cultic sanctum, or *adytum*, centered at the back of the room, often further secluded by a second internal dividing wall (see the convenient summary in Mazzoni 2010).

The construction methods employed, especially the “wood-crib” technique but also the almost identical size, shape, and design of the basalt column bases in Buildings I and XVI, clearly link both temples architecturally to the adjacent *bit hilani* palaces and mark them as an integral, though subsidiary, component—essentially a sacred precinct—within the Syro-Hittite citadel complex. The associated Hieroglyphic Luwian fragments further confirm the ninth–eighth century B.C.E. date of this phase of the complex. Meanwhile, the architectural renovations (e.g., the ceramic tile surfaces and elevated podium) in both buildings and the artifacts associated with their terminal phase of use, most notably the cache of Late Assyrian

cuneiform tablets found in Building XVI, indicate that both temples also formed part of an Assyrian religious complex during the late eighth–seventh centuries B.C.E., following Tiglath-pileser III's conquest and annexation of Kunulua and the Kingdom of Patina/Unqi.

As part of the royal Syro-Hittite citadel complex at Tayinat, the twin temples must have participated in the official state cult of the Kingdom of Patina/Unqi. Similar double temple complexes have been found elsewhere in northwest Syria, notably at Late Bronze Age (thirteenth-century) Emar (Margueron 1982: 29–31; Pitard 1996: 17–18; but see also the renewed excavations of Finkbeiner et al. 2002: 110–15), and most significantly, at neighboring Alalakh (Yener 2005: 110–12), which served as the capital of the North Orontes Valley region during the second millennium, before the principal settlement shifted to Tayinat in the Iron Age. The twin temples at Emar appear to have been dedicated to Baal (or the Storm-God Hadad) and Aštarte (or Ištar?), and there is good reason to believe that the same was true of the structures at Alalakh, as inferred by Idrimi, or alternatively to their Hittite counterparts, the Storm-God Tešub and his female consort Hebat (Yener 2005: 109; see also van der Toorn 1996: 174–75). It thus seems reasonable to posit a similar syncretistic alignment for the twin temples at Tayinat, although this is certainly speculative at this point.

In any event, there are intriguing hints that the rituals performed in the Tayinat temples and in the paved central courtyard shared similarities with the cultic activities that took place in the non-royal mortuary chapels, and that these rituals were couched in the familial language of kinship. The presence of inscribed stelae, in particular, suggests that this sacred precinct held an important commemorative, if not memorializing, function. Although heavily broken and incomplete, Tell Tayinat Inscription 2 appears to have been part of such a commemorative monument. The highly fragmentary text includes tantalizing references not only to various gods, but to the king, to (his?) children, and to grain (or bread?) and wine offerings (see Hawkins 2000: 370–71). Moreover, the cultic paraphernalia found in situ within the inner sanctum of Building XVI, while dating to the Neo-Assyrian use-phase of the temple, not only included a variety of serving vessels, including a pitcher for pouring liquids but also a cylindrical stone box, or pyxis, commonly attributed to the Syro-Hittite period (cf. Mazzoni 2001), and more importantly, frequently portrayed as part of the tableware on Syro-Hittite funerary stelae, including the Zincirli KTMW stele (see Struble and Herrmann 2009: 26–28). The Tayinat pyxis itself was decorated with an elaborate carving of the ancestral feasting scene (see fig. 1), leaving little doubt about the broader symbolic significance of the cultic activities that took place within this room.

In light of the accompanying textual evidence, in particular the oath-tablet, which records the provincial governor's covenanted loyalty to Ashurbanipal, Esarhaddon's chosen successor (see further in Lauinger 2011: 8–10; 2012), it seems clear that the double temple complex or sacred precinct at Tayinat functioned as a stage for enacting the rituals (and theater) of divinely sanctioned authority, framed within the symbolic language of family, with the inscribed stele serving as both a verbal and a visual reminder of the royal ancestral *paterfamilias*. During the period of Assyrian hegemony, an additional tier was simply added to the nested hierarchy. The broader sacramental importance of the Tayinat sacred precinct, when considered within the context of the covenant language of the Esarhaddon oath-tablet, is also reminis-



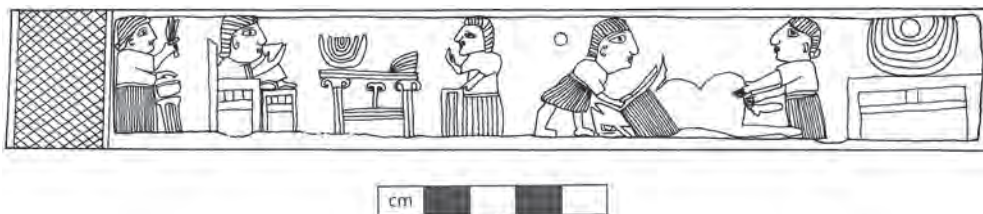


Fig. 1. Ancestral feasting scene carved on a stone pyxis found in the inner sanctum of the Tayinat temple (Building XVI) (drawing by F. Haughey).

cent of the covenant renewal ceremony between Yahweh and the tribes of Israel at Shechem described in Joshua 24. We are told that Joshua recorded the covenant on “a great stone” (*’eben gēdôlâ*), which was then erected in the “sanctuary (*miqdāš*) of Yahweh” (Josh 24:26), a structure that has been convincingly identified with the so-called Fortress-Temple, or “Temple of El, Lord of the Covenant” (*bēt ’el ba’al bērit*; see Judg 9:4, 46), excavated at Tell Balatah by the Drew-McCormick Expedition (Stager 1999). The Tayinat sacred precinct might similarly have been the setting for ceremonies that sought to emphasize (or reaffirm) the community’s corporate identity and social unity.

### Summary Observations

Despite the limited evidence presently available, family religion was an undeniable presence in the everyday lives of the Bronze and Iron Age communities of the northern Levant. Its strong influence is reflected particularly in the wide distribution of small, portable cult objects, such as clay figurines, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic vessels, models, and incense burners, found at sites. The Syrian-Hittite Expedition’s excavations at Tell Tayinat, for example, recovered more than 120 figurines from its Iron Age levels, while their investigations at nearby Chatal Höyük produced 78, of which 33 came from secure Iron Age contexts, mostly evenly split between female and male representations (M. Pucci, e-mail communication 2009). Intriguingly, at Tayinat, 22 of the figurines were found in Building I, the principal *bit ḫilani* palace, while the adjacent temple, Building II, produced none (H. Snow, personal communication 2009). Although beyond the scope of the present paper, the spatial distribution of these objects, as well as their specific find contexts, will undoubtedly provide valuable insight into the religious dimensions of the everyday activities of these communities.

As archaeological projects begin to focus more intentionally on the non-elite, residential areas of settlements, the physical evidence of family religious practice is sure to increase. This evidence will almost certainly demonstrate that religious activity was widely distributed throughout communities and was not simply confined to the “formal” institutions centered on the citadels of the ruling elite. Moreover, it is likely to be multi-dimensional in character and to display a diverse and syncretistic synergy of contrasting ethnic customs and ritual practices encompassing highland Anatolian and lowland Semitic cultural traditions. Unifying this heterogeneous expression, and giving it social coherence, was the powerful idiom of patrimonial kinship.

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