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IRON AGE TZER: PRELIMINARY STUDIES TOWARD A HISTORY OF THE RELIGION OF THE GESHURITES WHO RESIDED THERE*

Jacob Neusner, the famous scholar of Formative Judaism, maintains that when one studies a religion, one must compare religions (Neusner 1988, p. 156 ff.). That is, one must compare the not-so-known religion under investigation with some knowns, or at least better knowns of similar religions. Concerning Judaism(s), one must compare one cultural artifact, a text for instance, with a similar cultural artifact in order to identify some points of difference (p. 156). The Bethsaida Research Project has produced enough artifacts of a material-cultural nature during its now sixteen years of examining *et-Tell* to hazard a preliminary study of the religion(s) practiced by its Iron IIB rulers.** In fact, the kernel for such a study has been undertaken, as one might expect, by Professor Rami Arav, Director of Excavations of the Project, in his "Toward a Comprehensive History of the Geshurites" in Volume III of *Bethsaida: A City by the North Shore of the Sea of Galilee* (Arav and Freund 2004, p. 1–37). But this work is designed to be a general approach to both the Geshurite culture and history as they reveal themselves from *et-Tell's* artifacts when combined with artifacts of other suspected Geshurite sites, as well as with literature concerning this people. Employing Professor Peter Berger's functional definition of religion as a world-building and also a world-maintaining system (Berger 1967), this study seeks to combine the approaches of Neusner and Berger, and bring them to bear on the evidence available to construct the outlines of the religion practiced at *Tzer* (*Bethsaida*) [and not just at its city-gate complex].

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** These rulers appear to have held loyalties to quite a number of religious practices and "traditions" because of the particular geographical "corner" they occupied. Yet, a common religious thread from their ancestral homeland seems to have run through the fabric of their later practices.

Religion at *tzer* (*et-Tell*)

Prolegomena:

Searching for Geshurites of *et-Tell*: Issues of Location: The Phenomenon of Pairs Plus

The argument that identifies the ruins of *et-Tell*'s Iron Age *strata* as a city named *Tzer* (following Joshua 19: 35, and Arav 1995, p. 193–201 on this passage) is still questioned (Lipinski 2000, p. 334–337). The argument holds further that *Tzer* was the capital city of the Kingdom of Geshur (Arav 2004). Archaeologists who study the “Land of Geshur” or “Kingdom of Geshur” (2 Samuel 3: 3; 1 Chronicles 3: 2) have had to concentrate on two different places: one near the extreme northeast of the territory occupied by Israel, and one located closer to the present-day Gaza Strip (Kochavi, 1989; 1994; 1996). From the mouth of David's rebellious son, Prince Absalom, one learns that the former Geshur was located east of the Jordan River in the area of the Sea of Galilee (“For your servant vowed a vow while I dwelt at Geshur in Aram, ...” (2 Samuel 15: 8). Joshua 13: 13 provides a supporting geographical location for Geshur. Information concerning the latter is found in Joshua 13: 2, where one learns that the Israelites did not capture all of the so-called Promised Land, and that there were possessions yet to be incorporated into Israel's God-given land (“This is the land that yet remains: all of the regions of the Geshurites ... east of Egypt, northward to the boundary of Ekron [which was one of the five cities of the Philistines]”). This text describes geography located along and near the southeastern Mediterranean coast. 1 Samuel 27: 8 reinforces this conclusion when one reads that David, now employed by the Philistines, “...made raids upon the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites...” The area occupied by the Amalekites and Girzites was well-known as having been located between the Mediterranean southeastern coastal plain eastward to the Negev. The northeastern Geshurites did not engage the Israelites militarily, as far as information suggests. There are periods during the 9th century B.C.E. when Geshur's status changed from independent to Aramean-dominated during which it could have been part of an Aramean coalition against Israel-the-Kingdom (Arav 2004; Greene 2004). We learn, then, that the Bible is aware of two groups of Geshurites, if not two Geshurs also. How is this so?

Brown, Driver, and Briggs (BDB), *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* 1977, p. 178, advises that *geshur* means bridge or land of bridges. An allied meaning is to arc a bridge. Thus the general meaning is to designate land connecting two major known regions. If this holds, then the northeastern Geshur region/kingdom would have bridged the Gilead

with the Hermon, being located as it was in the western Golan. In a similar manner in the southwest, those Geshurites probably occupied a (now unlocated) area between the "River of Egypt" boundary-marker and territory controlled by the Philistines. Here one could perhaps also use the term "no man's land." But here I merely speculate. Where I need not speculate, however, is in reference to a practice of several places bearing the same name in ancient Canaan – because they probably shared the same characteristics or functioned in the same [ritualistic] way (and in the modern world as well!).

The Canaanites were aware of three *Apheks*, one located in the eastern Plain of *Sharon*/western *Shephelah* (foothills), northeast of present-day Tel Aviv-Jaffa; a second located southeast of Acco in Phoenicia; and the third located on the eastern side of the Jordan in the ancient territory of Geshur opposite *Hammath*, itself on the western shore of the Sea of *Chinnereth*. *Aphek*, meaning riverbed, could have been as popular in Canaanite as the Arabic word for riverbed today, *wadi*! (May 1965, p. 62–63).

Carmel is both the name by which a mountain range in the north of the Canaanite territory, which juts into the Mediterranean (Great Sea), is known, as well as a small town in southern Judah (Northern Negev) from which King David took a wife, Abigail, widow of a prominent man there named Nabal. *Carmel*, from *Kerem* (vineyard of) and *El* (general designation for deity in the Canaanite world) combine to become the 'vineyard of God,' probably a most beautiful place (May 1965, p. 62–63).

There were four localities named *Gath* in Philistine or near Philistine territory, and one *Gath-hepher* in the central Galilee (May 1965, p. 62–63). The northernmost of the four *Gaths* was located northeast of ancient Joppa; it bears the combined name *Gath-immon* and is due west of *Eben-ezer* also. A second appears to have been the home of two *Gaths*, for it is also known as *Gittaim*. The ending, 'aim', signals the dual in Canaanite dialects. The Judahite prophet of the eighth century, Micah, is said to have hailed from another *locus* named *Moreseth-gath* located northeast of the southernmost of the *Gaths*. This third place would be the alternative home of the prophet. The southernmost *Gath* is located northwest of *Lachish*, one of the largest and most important towns in southern Judah. *Gath* means winepress, and with that having been such a common phenomenon, these *Gaths* were most likely official wine press centers bearing area-specific ritual significance.

Three cities/*loci* bore the name *Gilgal* (May 1965, p. 62–63). The most famous of these was the *locus* northeast of Jericho in the Jordan Plain. It served as one of the staging areas for the military campaigns of Joshua (Joshua 4: 19) and the Israelites who had just crossed over the Jordan and set up operations. Just southwest of the city of *Shiloh* was located another *Gilgal* in the central hill country Israel would occupy. The third *Gilgal* was

located south of the Brook of *Kanah* in the Plain of *Sharon*, near the above-mentioned *Aphek* of this plain. All three seem to have in common that they were originally cultic centers where series of circled stones served to demarcate special, hallowed, or holy ground, or where moving in a cultic, circular fashion was part of the ceremonies conducted there. 'Sacred circle of stones', suggests BDB 1977, p. 166.

The Canaanites knew of (at least) two *Bethlehems*, i.e., 'House of food (bread),' as well: one in the territory that came to be known as Israel, and one in Judah. These two *Bethlehems* have dictated restudy of the genealogical tables and movements of the family of the infant Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.¹ The northern *Bethlehem* was located north of the *Kishon* River that followed a southeast-northwest trajectory through the Plain of *Megiddo* on the northern side of the *Carmel* Mountain Range. *Bethlehem of Judah* is far better known from the literature about Ruth, David, and the Jesus nativity story in Matthew. This *Bethlehem* is located southeast of and near Jerusalem (May 1965, p. 62–63).

Nor do these examples exhaust the doublets (triplets or quadruplets!?) of cities in ancient Canaan. *Janoah*, *Aijalon*, *Jezreel*, *Rimmon/Ein-Ain-Rimmon*, *Kanah* (in Phoenicia) and the Brook of *Kanah* north of *Joppa* in the *Sharon* may be appended to this list (May 1965, p. 62–63).

That there were two *Geshurs*, then, need no longer dismay or delay us. The ancient writers were not in error, and they knew their geography well, better than most modern Bible readers! While therefore not being oblivious to the fact that two *Geshurs* existed, we want herein to focus on the Geshur closest to the Kingdom of Aram, and attempt to develop the outlines of its religious traditions. While the "southern Geshurites" may have been of (uncertain) Hamitic/Semitic/Aegean-Mediterranean origin,² we know with a certainty that the "northern Geshurites" were neither of Semitic nor Indo-Aryan/European origin. Morrison, quoted by Arav, says of them "The Hurrians were a unique non-Semitic and non-Indo-European ethnic group that originated in northern Mesopotamia and constituted the kingdom of Mittanni" (Morrison 1992; Arav 2004, p. 6). We will pay close attention to what we know about the religious sensibilities of the Mittannians/Hurrians therefore.

¹ The genealogical tables have no geographical connection to the contents of these infancy narratives. They reflect more ignorance of the geography than a specific argument for a southern (i.e., Judah-based) provenance.

² Morton Smith and others have studied the demographics of this corner of the Mediterranean and suggest quite the mixture of peoples. Cf. Smith's *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament* (SCM Press, Ltd., New York & London 1971).

Part one: Description The Data from *et-Tell* and the Region

A. Some Preliminary Considerations

The “Northern Geshur” bordered on the Yarmuq River in the south, its western border was the Jordan River and eastern shore of Lake Kinneret, its northern border abutted the Hermon Mountain range, and seems to have had the western territory of *Bashan* and its capital, *Ashtarot*, as its eastern border, in all some 700 square meters (Arav 2004, p. 7). Socio-politically, it seems to have developed from city-states organized into a league before becoming a kingdom (Maoz 1992, p. 996; Kochavi 1996; Glueck 1940; Arav 2004, p. 6) during the 11th century B.C.E. The leadership of the Geshurites, on the strength of names of rulers alone [viz. Amihud/Amihur, Talmai whose daughter had the Hurrian name Maacah/Machi=nickname? (Mazar 1986; 1975)] was of Hurrian descent (Aharoni 1962, p. 130; Yon 2000, p. 200). Arav (Arav 2004, p. 6) states categorically “The name Talmai (2 Samuel 3: 3) is the latest Hurrian name known to us.”

If we’ve learned anything from the studies of border religions by Yohanan Aharoni (Aharoni 1962),³ our task is complicated by the knowledge of the outlines of the territory occupied by the Kingdom of Geshur and its four borders, and that they were controlled at various points in their existence by the Egyptians (14th century [*Tel El-Amarna Letters*]),⁴ perhaps by the Ammonites to their south, as well as neo-Hittite/Arameans on their northern border. And because it abutted eastern Canaan/Israel on its western side, we should not be surprised were we to uncover evidence of that combined influence as well. This said, what should be expected is an example of a major (near or pro) syncretistic religious practice at the capital city (which would reflect vestigial Egyptian and Hurrian, as well as aspects of the “common religion of the ancient Near East” (Smith 1952, p. 135 ff.), and variations on that practice/theme on the fringes of the kingdom. We shall proceed, therefore, with these suspected pro syncretisms in mind.

³ Aharoni advanced the thesis that significant changes in the normalized state religion(s) were noticeable wherever they were practiced on the fringes of that state. There practices tended to “bleed” over into those of the surrounding area. The Temple at Arad was for him a classical example. Both at the fortress temple (with its holy of holies) and the cultic center at *Kuntillet Ajrud* – both suggesting worship of Yahweh and his Asherah – are illustrative of this practice.

⁴ *Stelae* from this period – such as Akhnaton’s *stelae* at *Aketaton* – may have influenced the use of *stelae* discovered at *et-Tell* and elsewhere in the region.

B. Possible Material-Cultural Evidence of a State Religion at *Tzer*

Foreword

What building blocks does the historian of religion(s) need in order to construct the outlines of a given religion? The immediate response is evidence! Here we mean physical evidence, and specifically in the form of material culture. Below we shall study what religious paraphernalia Level 5 has offered up, and how parallel material-culture from other sites throughout the ancient Near East illuminates these paraphernalia. In PART TWO we shall bring all of these data together in an analysis of what it may tell us of the religion(s) practiced at *Tzer*.

Two significant studies (Monika Bernett and Othmar Keel, *Mond, Stier und Kult am Stadttor: Die Stele von Betsaida (et-Tell), Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 161 (Universitätsverlag, Freiburg 1998) and Tina Haettner Blomquist, *Gates and Gods: Cults in the City Gates of Iron Age Palestine, An Investigation of the Archaeological and Biblical Sources, Coniectanea Biblica, Old Testament Series* 46 (Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm 1999) have focused on gate cults during the Iron Age, and both have involved artifacts from *et-Tell's* Level 5. The former work focuses on the cultic value of *stelae* at *Bethsaida (et-Tell)*, while the latter seeks a broader connection of gate cult phenomena at some eleven sites throughout ancient Palestine.⁵ Each work marks a major milestone within the study of gate cult phenomena and their significance for the history of ancient Israelite and regional religion. Bernett and Keel focused on the numerous *stelae* at *et-Tell*, one in particular, and their relationship with other *stelae* of similar morphology throughout the ancient Near East located at city-gates. Blomquist's study – when examining *et-Tell's* yields – included the:

- 1) aniconic & iconic *stelae* <at various corners of the gate complex >
- 2) two perforated tripod cups found in a
- 3) basin of a podium <near the iconic *stela* >
- 4) numerous shards of similar vessels, bowls, plates, juglets and
- 5) an *ostrakon* bearing the inscription *LSHM* (in the name of...) [One thinks of a given god's name here] followed by an *ankh*-like sign/symbol <1>.⁶

⁵ Cf. Note 2 of Dr. Nikolae Roddy's review of Blomquist's work in *Review of Biblical Literature* (2002).

⁶ Refers to the List of illustrations on the end of this paper (see p. 90).

One major difference between these works and the present work is that the present author is not convinced that the data suggests that even quasi-Israelite religion or even general Canaanite/Aramean religion is what is mirrored in the artifacts uncovered at *et-Tell* and that are presently available for study. Moreover, due to the unique history of the region in which *et-Tell* is located, *Tzer* – what we argue was the identity of the city located there – was occupied by a unique people who, consequently, practiced – while not totally unique! – something bordering on not a syncretistic religion, but one that made sense to the sensibilities and problem-solving needs of those inhabitants of *Tzer* who lived at the confluence of several national borders – Israel, Aram-Damascus, and vestigial Geshur – (and who couldn't ignore those (conflu-) influences?).

The present work casts its net more broadly both in terms of on artifacts it focuses as “of religious value,” and on how all of these artifacts both in/at the city-gate or elsewhere in Area A's Iron Age *strata* may be able to yield valuable information about the religious sensibilities of the inhabitants of *Tzer*. For instance, in addition to the above-mentioned gate-based artifacts included in Blomquist's study, the present study includes:

- 1) a male figurine wearing an 'atef crown
- 2) a *Pataikos*/*Patekos* figurine of faience, and
- 3) a female figurine with the typical *Hathor*-style headdress

as being relevant also for assessing the religious sensibilities of the inhabitants of *Tzer*. Moreover, the present study questions the suggested identity of the horned figure of *et-Tell*'s iconic *stela*⁷ on the basis of who would have been occupying *Tzer*, and makes some suggestions as to the possible identity of this deity and a closer relationship of the artifacts identified as:

- 1) the male figurine with 'atef crown
- 2) the female figurine with *Hathor*-like headdress
- 3) the iconic *stela*, and
- 4) the *ankh*-like sign/symbol.

We shall accordingly describe and examine the relevant data available in the form of *et-Tell* artifacts yielded by excavations, as well as allied artifacts from other excavations in the general region relevant to those at *et-Tell* [including Egypt, Israel, Judah, Aram-Damascus, Mesopotamia, and Anatolia]. These include (1) *stelae* (both inscribed and uninscribed) and seals;

⁷ It appears that Keel is convinced – in a faxing to Dr. Arav – that the iconic *stela* depicts the god *Reshef*.

(2) high places; (3) city-gates [and permanent installations]; (4) various pottery and (5) artwork that may assist us in a broader analysis of the religious sensibilities (i.e., world-building and world-maintaining system(s) that may have been exercised at *Tzer*. We shall take up in turn descriptions of material-culture in each of these categories. *Tzer's* artifacts are preceded by an asterisk.

1. Stelae

Stelae are upright slabs or pillars (including obelisks) of stone bearing an inscription or sculptured (iconic) design, or nothing at all (uniconic). Oftentimes they were utilized as religious "billboards" for various communications, such as funerary *stelae*, inscribed ones depicting a particular deity, *stelae* marking boundaries of a given ruler's territory, or what ruler had been conquered by whom. Sometimes, as in the case of obelisks, they were huge and contained a bevy of information, at other times they were miniscule and left blank. There could be combinations of *stelae* types in one *locus*, and they are evident in the ruins from the entire ancient Near East.

a*. **Uninscribed/Uniconic *Stelae* at *et-Tell*.** Convincing arguments have been presented that identify *Tzer*, the capital of *Geshur*, with the Iron Age II ruins of Levels 5 and 6 at *et-Tell* (Arav 1995, p. 193–201). Arav argues that "Although there is not yet enough evidence to date precisely the foundation of the earliest stratum at [*et-Tell*] Bethsaida, the monumentality of the [*Tzer*] Bethsaida remains indicates that this was their permanent capital city from at least as early as [the] mid-tenth century B.C.E." (Arav 2004, p. 6). Both excavations from *Tel Hadar* (Stratum IV/Kochavi 1994, p. 136–141) and from *et-Tell* (Level 6B/Arav 2004, p. 6–7), demonstrate that two of the most important cities of the Geshurites were destroyed by major conflagrations. Arav argues further that when the city enshrined in the former (i.e., *Hadar*) was destroyed it gave rise to founding *Tzer* as its (new?) capital city (Arav 2004, p. 6). That new city was itself destroyed or damaged severely in ca. 925 B.C.E. The two conflagrations may reflect either internal strife among former Geshurite independent city – states during developments toward a monarchy-which would not have been unheard of – or aggressions from one of its neighbors on its southern or western borders – because of the location of *Tel Hadar*. Although a fuller discussion of the capital's state religious practices will be conducted below, evidence of a religious nature from this late tenth century B.C.E. gate complex area in Level 6B turns up in the Level 5 eastern wall of one of the two grain silos

(Chamber 2) located there in the new city-gate complex as a recycled, uninscribed stela.⁸ Since *stelae*, especially uninscribed ones (Na'aman 2000), were found *in situ* in such abundance – 6 *stelae* – in religious contexts in Level 5 at *et-Tell*, we proceed on the assumption that this imbedded lone *stela* (number 7!) had served some religious purpose in Level 6b also. Numerous *stelae*, therefore, are one major indicator of state religious *accoutrements* at *Tzer*. How they were possibly utilized will be discussed below.

b. *Stelae* at Hazor's Area C. Although from an earlier era, but still in the general neighborhood, a shrine discovered in Area C of *Hazor's* Lower, Late Bronze Age city, and now displayed in Jerusalem's Israel Museum, has similarities to the collection of iconic and uniconic *stelae* discovered in the city-gate at *Tzer*. Sometimes known as the *stelae* shrine or temple, this one small room contained a row of eleven *stelae* with the central one having been carved in relief. <2> I shall describe that one in section 1.e. of *Inscribed/Iconic Stelae* immediately below.⁹ Included in the shrine were a miniature relief of a crouching lion, a statue of a sitting male figure [either a god or a priest] and an offering table made of one stone slab. It is possible that the uniconic *stelae* contained in the shrine/temple had the same function as those found at *et-Tell*. But this is yet to be determined.

c. *Stelae* at the Tel Arad Sanctuary. Similar in morphology and arrangement to the sanctuary at the inner gate at *et-Tell* – *altars in close relationship to stelae* – is a “holy of holies” in the sanctuary inside the Israelite fortress at *Tel Arad*. Therein, (non-identical) twin square incense altars are accompanied/flanked by (non-identical) twin uniconic *stelae*. <3> In his Jerusalem Post Online article, Haim Shapiro advances the theory concerning the function of the two *stelae* and the two altars that “one represents the masculine deity, the other the feminine,” i.e., one representing *Yahweh* and the other his *Asherah* (p. 5). Because *Arad* was located on the border between Judah and Edom, the Judahite deity – normally viewed in the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures as a bachelor [and perhaps single father!] is there depicted as having a female consort – a wife, lover, queen, colleague!¹⁰

⁸ This *stela* had been beheaded just as those we discovered at *et-Tell's* cultic center. However, it was taller and more narrow, thus belonging to a different genre of *stelae*, and thus probably earlier. Its having been masonried into a wall suggests that specific *stelae* have specific value for only specific people. Similarity does not guarantee veneration or symbolic significance, especially by enemies.

⁹ Included in the shrine were a miniature relief of a crouching lion, a statue of a sitting male figure [either a god or a priest] and an offering table made of one stone slab.

¹⁰ A photo can be obtained from the Jerusalem Post Online, p. 1 in an article entitled “Day Tripper: Mound of Mystery” written by Haim Shapiro, Sunday June 10, 2001.

d. **Tel Dan's Masseboth/Stelae.** Nickolae Roddy, reviewing Blomquist's work, *Gates and Gods*, mentioned above, writes of Tel Dan's evidence: "...there is a prominent limestone ashlar structure adjoining the outer face of the northern tower of the lower main gate complex (*Strata* 3-2), an additional podium structure nearby, and a number of *masseboth*, or standing stones. Between the main and outer gates were found a number of vessels, including tripodal incense cups similar to those recovered at Bethsaida."¹¹ As at *Tel Arad*, *Tel Dan's* installation bears many – but not identical! – features and appurtenances to those of *Tzer's* city-gate installation(s) which are thus not unique in themselves, but all mirror religious significance.

Et-Tell's (*Tzer's*) uniconic stelae share the characteristics of being located at shrine/cultic areas of either city-gate complexes (Dan) or small temples located within cities or fortresses (Arad). And they share these areas with iconic stelae, incense stands and ceramic accoutrements and/or altars.

2. Inscribed/Iconic

The inscribed/iconic, basalt *stela* discovered at *et-Tell* is impressive and fascinating for westerners. Those who discovered it must have experienced a tremendous rush of excitement. Subsequent to this discovery it has become known that several other similar inscribed/iconic *stelae* exist throughout the modern Middle East.¹² Their overwhelming similarities so impressively dull the senses that one is in danger of failing to notice glaring dissimilarities which tend to disassociate them, i.e., *foci* on specific identity and function(s) of a given deity represented on an iconic *stela*. Some of these differences are detailed in Note 44 of PART TWO. They also share a number of other characteristics with other iconography discovered throughout the region, some of which have been found on a number of clay seals and inscriptions discovered at the Hurrian capital, *Nuzi*, on the Tigris. Their comparative value is significant for explaining the features of *et-Tell's* iconic *stela*.

a. **Three Seals from *Nuzi* with Stylized Bovine Imagery.** Cylinder seals were rolled onto clay tablets or clay sealings for identification, verification or authorization purposes. They were the ancient equivalents of today's official stamps and seals. Treasure troves of seals have been discovered throughout the area of the ancient Near East. From ancient *Nuzi*, three seals are of importance for the present study. In bold are the focal images

¹¹ See Note 5 above.

¹² An iconic *stela* very similar (but not identical!) to *et-Tell's stela* is housed in the National Museum of Damascus. Unlike the *stela* at *et-Tell*, however, it was not discovered *in situ*. Further confer: I. Skupińska-Løvset, "The Results of the Excavations at Et-Tell, The Cult Site at the Gate", [in:] *The Orient and the Aegean Papers presented at the Warsaw Symposium, 9th April 1999*, F. M. Stepiński (ed.), Warsaw 2003, p. 131–144.

of each seal. Consult the ILLUSTRATIONS section <4> that accompany this work.

1. Bulla with Seal of King Ar-Shali: Two figures face a central star-standard; a storm god holding lightening bolt and sickle sword stands on a fire-spitting dragon (left); a worshiper holding a sacrificial kid raises his right hand toward the standard¹³ (right). *Field*: Star, antelope head, bird. *Inscription*: "Ar-Shali son of Aria, servant of the gods Shamash and Ishkur." [The standard is described and discussed immediately below in 2.d.]
2. Seal of Ithi-Teshshup Two figures stand beside a star-and-crescent standard; the ruler raises his right hand (left); the other figure (right) grasps the standard. *Inscription*: "Ithiya, king of Arrapha, son of Kipi-Teshshup." This seal comes from the palace of Stratum II at Nuzi (Yorghana Tepe).
3. Seal of Ithi-Teshshup *Primary scene*: the ruler stands facing right. *Secondary scene*: a winged human-headed reptile, kneeling scorpion-man with tongue of fire, storm god on fire-spitting dragon wielding lightening bolt, bird-man bent at waist, winged fish-demon, double-headed griffin, frontal nude female. *Field*: star-disk crescent, demon mask. *Inscription*: "Ithi-Teshshup, son of Kipi-Teshshup, king of the land of Arrapha, uses this seal in matters pertaining to land and buildings. May no one ever break (this tablet)."

The Harvard Semitic Museum hosted recently an exhibit entitled Nuzi & the Hurrians: Fragments from a Forgotten Past, curated by Dr. James Armstrong, wherein these seals are displayed.¹⁴

On one panel of a seal belonging to King *Ar-Shali*, son of Aria, servant of the god Shamash and Ishkur, one notices four figures in *bas relief*: from left to right, a bearded deity armed with a shield and tri-sword standing squarely on the back of a mythological figure of a winged lion or dragon. On the extreme right side of this panel one notices an anthropomorphic figure, highly distorted due to damage of the seal. Its outline suggests the same or similar armed figure as that located on the extreme left side of the panel. In the very center of this panel there is a figure holding a small animal with two non-distinct objects at its feet; they could be birds, but could be small, dependent children or even other small animals. This figure looks in the direction of an object to its right which, with its right hand in

¹³ These three seals are described in James Armstrong, curator, [www.fas.harvard.edu/semitic/hsm/Nuzi Home Page.htm](http://www.fas.harvard.edu/semitic/hsm/Nuzi%20Home%20Page.htm).

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

some presumably significant gesture, it salutes. This brings me to the fourth object on this panel and the one that interests and fascinates me most.

This figure, second from the left side of the seal's panel, has what appears to be the head of a horned beast with prominent and erect, outstretched ears. The horns/crescent encircle partially or nestle a disc that is inscribed with what appears to be a star around which, as if fixed in orbit, are a series of "spheres", "balls" or "orbs." Below the "disc and horned head with prominent ears"¹⁵ is a plaque with a non-distinct, carved, geometric design that forms its border. The plaque looks like rectangles fused together whose four corners have been extended to appear like the tips of spears. This extension appears at the mid points along the two longest sides of the distorted rectangle also. Below this plaque extends a stout pole or staff that appears to have been simply anchored into a small mound in the ground.¹⁶

The principle elements seen on this standard appear also on the two seals of King *Ithi-Teshup* mentioned above: star and (disc-) crescent symbols on a standard and symbolic circles (what they represent is unknown to this writer). Their arrangement, however, is somewhat different. But cf. similar imagery when we discuss the *ankh* symbols below, and the dual *ankh* symbols illustrated in <5>.

From the *Nuzi* seals, therefore, we have the common images of a set of horns or crescent holding either a moon, star, or either with lesser "orbs." These symbols are accompanied by large circles near the crescent-moon symbol; itself located very near to a figure identified as a deity such as, in this case, *Teshub/p*, the well-known chief/storm god of the Hurrians. Because these symbols appear so frequently and in various configurations throughout the ANE, we will need to describe some of the other and allied configurations as we proceed with our descriptive elements.

b*. The Iconic Stela from *et-Tell*. These clay seals from *Nuzi* contain several features/elements they share in common with the iconic *stela* discovered in Level 5 at *et-Tell* <6> and its allied *stelae* elsewhere in the ANE: (1) prominent horns/crescents-stylized horns embracing and supporting a (only in the case of the *et-Tell* – hypothesized) disc symbol with astral figures therein [Space for such a disc is obvious but the disc and symbols may have been obliterated intentionally on *et-Tell*'s figure by the neo-Assyrian conquerors {or may have been altogether absent here!}.] We accordingly don't know what, if any, astral symbol may have existed between the horns of *et-Tell*'s iconic figure; (2) an apparent bovine headed, large,

¹⁵ But cf. below in d. another possibility of interpretation.

¹⁶ See below section d. for a discussion of "poles" and "staffs."

prominent-eared likeness of a creature¹⁷; and (3) below what appears to be a breastplate,¹⁸ a long pole or staff or standard that is rooted into a base [the earth?, foundation of the universe?, etc.]. This pole or staff or standard may even have a sexual connotation, as I will discuss in SECTION TWO. If Stein's interpretation is correct when she identifies what I term a "breast-plate" as two battle axes back-to-back, then *et-Tell*'s sword-girded, bovine-headed figure shares a fourth characteristic in common with the standard on the seal of *Ar-Shali* from *Nuzi*: (4) weaponry. Four out of four correspondences is not bad!

c. **The Hurrian God *Teshub*: A Possible Paradigm for the 'Horned Deity' of Tzer?** Who was the deity inscribed on the iconic *stela* discovered at *et-Tell*? Even those who have excavated him and those who have since studied him and compared his morphology to other similar figures on similar-looking *stelae* want to know.

What is clear from the *Ar-Shali* seal is that the deity to the extreme left, the one riding upon what Stein describes as a lion-dragon, and wielding a triple-pronged lightning fork in one hand and a sickle sword in the other, is the Storm-god of the Hurrians known as *Teshub*. He is described variously as a ruler-god (like *Ba'al* of the Canaanites), a fertility-god, 'The Conqueror', 'King of Heaven', and the son of *Kumarbis*, the father of all gods. His wife was *Hebat*. As chief among the gods, his symbol is the bull, and he is a god of battle and victory. With the assistance of the gods *Anu(s)*, *Tasmisus*, and *Aranzhus*¹⁹ he succeeded in seizing kingship in

¹⁷ I include the description of this panel by Diana Stein to demonstrate just how subject to interpretation is this seal. She writes:

A deity (Storm god) on his lion-dragon mount opposite a kid-bearing worshiper, flanking a six-pointed star surrounded by six drillings (rosette petals) within a crescent-disc on a volute standard, which is transected by a double-axe and a frontal antelope head on the lower right. The deity stands on his fire-spitting lion-dragon mount, whose rein he holds in one hand together with a triple-pronged lightning fork, while the other hand holds a sickle sword down behind. He wears a double-horned cap with a knob at the top over a neck-length chignon and an open skirt with a ridged edge. The kid-bearing worshiper stands facing left with his right hand raised before his face. He wears a round cap and an open mantle with ridged edge over a pleated kilt. Behind his feet is a bird.

(See ILLUSTRATIONS *infra* #s 1 & 2 and Note 12 above.)

¹⁸ But cf. Stein's illustration in #2 *infra*.

¹⁹ Along with *Teshub* himself, the four orbs/balls seen on the iconic, bull *stelae* from both *et-Tell* and Damascus could signal this association. But this is a far, interpretive reach I make here.

heaven.²⁰ But he is not depicted as some bovine deity: he has no bovine head on a human body, he has no horns inside of which is some astral symbol, and while "armed to the teeth" in both hands, he is not accompanied by any astral symbols such as orbs, etc., and he does not need the support of a standard or stake protruding from his crotch into the [cosmic?] ground (ing). Instead, *Teshub-of-the-seal of Ar-Shali* is associated with a set of standard (ized) symbols that subsequently recall his 'majesty and prerogatives'. Among the most prominent and recurring of these symbols are weaponry, horns/crescents, astral symbols and other either small or large orbs/circles, and an apparent "standard base" all of which represent other astral and cosmic powers. Are these the same symbols reflected on the *et-Tell* iconic *stela*?

d. Poles/Stakes/Standards. The horned/crescent symbol located next to the god *Teshub* on the seal of the Hurrian King *Ar-Shali* (discussed above in 2.a.) may have held all of his "offices," "attributes," and astral symbols associated with him; a kind of "billboard" on a pole or stake, oftentimes termed a standard. This in itself is not unique in ANE imagery concerning deities, even Hurrian deities. The pole image one also notices, for instance, when one references another of the Hurrian gods, *Telepinu(s)*. As an agricultural deity, he is the favorite son and firstborn of *Teshub* and *Hebat* (and thus another possible candidate for the deity on the *et-Tell stela*). He "harrows and plows. He irrigates the fields and makes the crops grow."²¹ His prosperity and fertility (associated with dying and rising deities) are symbolized by a pole suspending the fleece of a sheep.²² The pole/stake/standard imagery was also employed by the Egyptians. Known as the *Fetish*, an animal skin hanging from a stake or pole, was understood as a symbol of both Osiris and Anubis, deities associated with the chthonic realm.²³

On the seal of King *Ithi-Teshshup* of Arrapha (Stratum II at *Nuzi* [*Yorghana Tepe*]) mentioned above in section 2.a. (and illustrated in <4>), two figures stand beside a star and crescent standard. Instead of the crescent cupping the star, both symbols are side-by-side on this seal <4>. Below them are corresponding smaller circles (very similar to the circle motifs noticed on the *ankh* symbols associated with Egypt) all mounted on a stake rooted into the earth (chthonic realm?) [or possibly the cosmic foundation].

²⁰ This recalls *Marduk's* seizing of power in the cosmos after defeating *Tiamat* and *Kingu* in Babylonian mythology, but which is not necessarily earlier in chronological consideration.

²¹ O. R. Gurney, p. 113 in Christopher B. Siren, Hittite/Hurrian Mythology REF 1.2, <http://members.bellatlantic.net/~vze.33gpz/hittite-ref.html>.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ Cf. <http://members.aol.com/egyptart/symlist.html> [p. 10 of 12].

The king raises his right hand in some sort of salute toward the standard that is being grasped by the adjoining anthropomorphised figure.²⁴ What this suggests is a separating out of single symbols representing aspects of deities and their power(s). What the reader should not miss, however, is that they are four in number: (1) horns/crescents, (2) astral bodies, (3) small circles (or something they represent), and (4) a stake or pole.

Level 5's iconic *stela* (and symbols contained therein) has counterpart *stelae* located in Anatolia/Turkey and in Syria (National Damascus Museum). They share the same characteristics of astral symbol(s), horns/crescents, weaponry and standards (rooted in the chthonic realm). They also differ in what I term significant ways as well. The connections are, however, therefore significant in terms of meaning and possible identification of *et-Tell's* horned deity.

But concerning standard imagery this is not all, for *et-Tell's* horned deity shares this pole or stake imagery with one other deity in addition to the Damascus and Turkish horned deities to which I have already alluded (probably *Reshef*), the *Fetish* of Egypt, the stake of *Telipinu(s)*, the "standard" portion of the *ankh*, and the standard of *Ithi-Teshup* of *Nuzi*: the god *Apis*. A study of *Apis* imagery presents him in two major ways: (1) as a bovine deity with a sun disc between his horns, and (2) a bovine deity with a sun disc between his horns and a thick standard or stake protruding from his abdomen and anchoring him to a podium! <7> The stake/standard is unnecessary to anchor the statue to any base, for the four legs provide any balance necessary to such a basic purpose. It is there to represent an aspect of *Apis* not always presented. Here we argue that enough has been presented concerning poles/standards/stakes and their purpose elsewhere in the ANE to suggest a similar purpose when appearing as part of *Apis* statuary or art. Should this not suffice, we may consider the Phoenician deity *Moloch*. He is described as having a bovine head and a human body. His statuary was presented on a pole or stake at the pedestal/base of which is where sacrifices, including children, were burned to him. That purpose associates the standard with the chthonic realm. But more of this in the Analysis section of PART TWO.

e. Hazor's Iconic Stela: "Square" Horns/Crescent and Moon Symbol. We stated above in Section 1.b. that an iconic *stela* was among the numerous *stelae* discovered at *Hazor*. This helped to illustrate the fact that both uniconic and iconic *stelae* were known elsewhere in the (almost) immediate area of *et-Tell* (although not during the same historical period). Located directly in the center of the row (five uniconic *stelae* on either side), this

²⁴ As viewed at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~semitic/hsm/NFNuziSeals.htm>, p. 2.

stela depicts two large hands and arms raised in a prayer-like position. Above the hands are a moon cupped in a crescent – or horn-shaped – symbol <2> similar to those viewable on the seals from *Nuzi*, and the iconic *stela* from *et-Tell* (and associated *stelae*), although the horns/crescent are presented in a more “square” form of the Late Bronze Age. This crescent/horn and astral symbol imagery may be still further illustrated and multiplied, as we shall accomplish below.

f. *Bar-rekub* of Damascus. Although the image was not available to this researcher, its existence serves to illustrate that the imagery described above was multiplied throughout the ANE. The symbols of astral entity, horns/crescent, and bovine-headed entity are alluded to in the description immediately below as well.

The Damascene ruler, King *Bar-rekub*, is depicted in a palace-inscription found in *Zinjirli* seated upon his throne with attendants in waiting. In the surrounding field of the inscription are the emblems of a full moon and a crescent or horns. He ascribed these symbols to “*Ba'al* of Harran,” the famous center of moon-worship in Northern Mesopotamia. In other words, the deity could be represented to symbols with no image of a deity anywhere nearby. Thus the importance of the standard or similar imagery. This practice we saw already in effect at *Nuzi*. *Ba'al* of Harran, a deity in Hurrian territory (now *Zinj/girli*), was related by this monarch to the great Hurrian deity, *Teshub*, who may/might have been worshipped locally as (a) *Ba'al/Teshub*.²⁵

g. The *Hadad* Colossus of *Panammu I*: Bovine Symbols Transferred to a *Helmet*. At *Gerjin*, not far to the northwest of *Zinjirli* in Northwest Syria, was found a colossal statue of *Hadad*, chief god of the Arameans. *Panammu I*, king of *Ya'di*, erected the statue and wrote upon it that he had received (authorization and sonship) from *Hadad* and other gods, including *El*, *Rekub-el*, *Shamash* and *Reshef*. *Hadad's* beard and horned headdress, with which he is adorned, modeled on that of Babylonian and Assyrian gods, were symbols of divine power. Here, the horn/crescent symbol has been transferred to a helmet/headdress and worn directly by the deity. But the astral symbol of either sun or moon is absent in the colossus (as with the figure from *et-Tell*). This may represent a reduction/adjustment in the *foci* of this deity's attributes by the Arameans of *Gerjin*.²⁶

²⁵ This according to www.sacred-texts.com/ane/beheb.htm-101k April 29, 2004.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

h. The Sun and the Lioness: *Sakhmet* of Egypt. Such reduction in symbology as seen on the *Hadad* Colossus is underscored further by considering the Egyptian goddess, *Sakhmet*. As the daughter of the sun god, *Re*, *Sakhmet* is depicted as wearing the solar disk in her headdress. Unlike *Hathor*, however, *Sakhmet*'s headdress contains no horns, for she has the head of a lioness! not a cow. Why a lioness? Because lions were solar symbols because of their golden color, their ferocity, and their strength.

i. Pharaoh *Akhenaten*'s Stelae: Boundary-Markers with an Altar in Between. This 14th century B.C.E. pharaoh and religious reformer established the northern and southern boundaries of his new capital city, *Akhetaten*, with two *stelae* cut into the cliffs that surrounded the site. They include dedications to the *Aten* (i.e., *sun disc*), as well as a list of buildings he planned to build there. The imaginary line between the two *stelae* established an axis along which all the temples he built were aligned. Halfway between the two *stelae*, *Akhenaten* established the city's first altar to the *Aten*. Inscribed *stelae* and altars are demonstrated here to have a relationship that one notices also at *Hazor*, *Tel Arad* and *et-Tell*.

j. The Byblos "*Masseboth*". *Byblos* in present-day Lebanon is home to the *Temple of the Obelisks*. Some 30 standing stones, known in Hebrew as *Masseboth*, were cultic symbols of fertility worship there. While some of the *stelae* measure as much as two meters in height, others are a mere 25 centimeters in height. Located in the Temple's central chapel stood one tall obelisk (*stela*), a symbol of the war-god, *Reshef*. This deity, like *Hadad* in 2.g. above, was related to the imagery and general duties ascribed to the Hurrian deity, *Teshub*, in 2.c. above.

k. Summary. The symbols of horns/crescents, sun, lesser stars (i.e., small orbs or circles), moon, large circles (i.e., larger, non-specific astral bodies), weaponry (trident swords, hooked swords, standard swords), and standards, poles, stakes ally the images inscribed in the *et-Tell stela*, corresponding *stelae* now in Syria and Turkey with inscribed *stelae* discovered in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Syria and Israel, and inscribed *stela*'s location in relation to altars and/or "high places" located at city-gates and other locales within cities and forts. *Et-Tell*'s inscribed *stelae* fit remarkably the area-wide practice involving inscribed/uninscribed *stelae*-in-relation-to-altars/"high places"/*Masseboth* at areas of cities reserved for religious practice(s).

3*. "High Places"

One of the most basic *loci* for beginning to consider the religious history of a given site has been the raised mound of dirt (and its later mud brick improvements) in an otherwise fairly flat area. We surmise that some structure/fixture rested or was erected on or near that mound. Here we describe the most elementary *bamah*. A most extreme development of the *bamah* is to be found at Megiddo's ruins with its massive, round altar made of thousands of stones.²⁷ Tzer's ruins have offered up at least two small *bamoth*, one erected into the eastern face of the north tower of the inner gate near the threshold leading into the four gate chambers, the other located west of the four-chamber area of the gate complex. Arav suspects that there is yet another located just north of the south, inner gate tower near the threshold also (Arav 2004, p. 36). The two (or three!) *bamoth* may have served three separate yet related aspects of the sacrificial/offertory practice of the citizens of Tzer.

4*. The City-Gate²⁸

What could be easily overlooked-like the forest because of the trees or vice-versa – is the religious role of the city-gate (complex) itself. Far from just providing a venue for entering/exiting a given city, gates were the hub of the city. The Book of Ruth provides two glimpses into the buzz that occurred at Bethlehem-of-Judah's city-gate: once when Naomi returns from Moab with her daughter-in-law, Ruth, during barley harvest (Ruth 1: 19–22), and again when Naomi's kinsman, Boaz, goes to the gate to make his matrimonial – if not levirate – intentions toward Ruth known in the legitimate manner of the time [viz., in the days of the Judges (Ruth 1: 1)] (Ruth 4: 1ff.). From these glimpses we learn that grain was harvested in the field but threshed (and perhaps stored!) in or near the gate (Ruth 3: 2–7), and that it was the place of business: the city elders and rulers conducted the city's business secular and religious there.

1 Kings 22 provides another glimpse into how city-gates were utilized. During what was a major holiday celebration in Israel-the-Kingdom (probably New Year), two kings one host (Ahab), and one guest (Jehoshaphat), sat on thrones in their royal finery at the city-gate of the capital city, Samaria. The reader is told also that the threshing floor was located at the city-gate.

²⁷ This altar may be seen in Kathleen Kenyon, *Archaeology in the Holy Land* (Praeger Publishers, New York 1970), p. 112. It is known as Altar 4017 at Megiddo.

²⁸ These two important studies are referenced above in the Foreword section.

Bethlehem and Samaria thus shared threshing floors at their respective city-gates, and in the case of Samaria, was also a place where at least one major state religious holiday was observed.²⁹ There were also gruesome ceremonies that took place at city-gates when a city was conquered; the Assyrian conquerors, for instance, bragged constantly in their annals that they exacted justice and tribute from, and inculcated fear in the inhabitants “opposite the city-gate” (Greene 2004).

Excavations at *Tzer*’s Iron IIB Level city-gate have revealed that two of the four-chambered gate’s chambers (Chambers 2 and 3) were utilized as grain silos. This suggests that *Tzer* may have contained a city-gate threshing floor as did Bethlehem-Judah and Samaria, or one very close by, as in the case of Araunah’s threshing-floor in Jebus. Although it is yet to be discovered, one looks correctly for religious significance and practice, therefore, at *Tzer*’s gate as well. High places (*bamoth*) located near grain silos, themselves located in (or near) city-gates seem to suggest that long before public structures such as chapels and temples replaced them, the heart of the religious practice/observation of a city – and especially a capital city – was located at the city-gate. Note, however, that while it probably had religious significance long before David purchased it, the so-called *Threshing-floor of Araunah*³⁰ eventually served as the foundation for Solomon’s (the Second, and even later Herod’s) Temple. This *locus* was immediately north of the walled, Jebusite city, and not within the precincts of the main gate of that city-state – which was most probably located on the eastern side of the city. That the Temple was eventually erected there shows its religious significance as “holy ground” or “sacred space” for the ingathering of grain, which was itself considered as having had its own sacred significance.³¹ *Tzer*’s gate complex was therefore a religious (as well as a secular) site similar to the one discussed above at Tel Dan. (l.d.).

5. Various Pottery Types

Probably the most difficult material culture type to analyze is ceramic remains: either vessels or image-oriented. For this reason I shall examine both types separately.

²⁹ My suggested New Year Festival is based on the time that kings went out to war, i.e., springtime. Jehoshaphat’s presence at Samaria, however, suggests that Judah’s New Year Festival was celebrated at a different time of the year, probably in the fall.

³⁰ Araunah may be identical to the priest-king who ruled Jebus before David took it. Thus, since it belonged to him, it may be that he had utilized it for his own priest-kingly rituals involving agricultural ceremonies. Agreeable to this point of view is Jonathan Kirsch, David King, *The Real Life of the Man who Ruled Israel* (Balantine Books, New York 2000), p. 265–267.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

a*. Ceramic Vessels. While *et-Tell* has yielded up numerous shards of ceramic vessels – both restorable and representative of various historical periods – the preponderance are – as one would expect – of the utilitarian type. One of those vessels is discussed below under 5.b.3. No student who studies with us fails after some time at pottery-reading to recognize shards of eastern *terra sigillata* (=signed earth, the equivalent of today's very fine china), the everted rim of a Hellenistic-era cooking-pot, a Hellenistic-Roman Era casserole, the near-metallic cling of a Roman-Era, globular cooking-pot – with or without lid device, *mortaria*,³² a crater, a baby-feeder,³³ juglets, jewelry, loom weights – both Iron Age and Hellenistic/Roman Era, *amphorae* for shipping, storing and dispensing oil and wine, as well as water, and other common ceramic utensils of the three major ages³⁴ we've investigated.

What have not been so common at *Tzer* are several vessels discovered at the “scooped, stepped altar” in front of the North Inner Gate Defense Tower. Behind, i.e., just west of, this tower is located Chamber 4 of the four chambers built into the inner city-gate complex. Therein were unearthed numerous shards which enable the restoration of numerous vessels that were stored there. The restored vessels suggest that Chamber 4 was used as a storage room for ceramic vessels used in the cultic rituals in honor of the city-god (or cathenotheistic chief of the gods) of *Tzer* at the city-gate. These vessels are globular in morphology, standing on three stump legs, have everted rims, and were handled by sacerdotal functionaries by two stub handles located on either side of the vessels. They were discovered in a sealed *locus* under slabs of the incised *stelae* that lay broken over the “scooped altar”, as well as in front of it. Obviously those who ransacked this religious area broke the *stelae* deliberately.³⁵ What is still a mystery, however, is the function of the numerous small holes that perforated the globular portion of each vessel. Imaginative and enthusiastic suggestions and speculations have been forwarded, and tests involving various liquids, semi-solids, and incense to determine function(s) have been made;³⁶ none have withstood scathing scrutiny and critique to date.

³² These were large flowerpots brought by mourners to the gravesite and deposited there. They would be replanted with new flowers as needed.

³³ This is a juglet with a “nipple” which has been perforated.

³⁴ The Bethsaida staff has concentrated on the Early Roman (ca. 60 B.C.E.–200 C.E.), Late Hellenistic (ca. 150–60 B.C.E.), and Iron Ages (1200–500 B.C.E.).

³⁵ The principle was simply, “Not only was a people conquered, their deity (deities) was/were conquered (defeated) also.” Damaged icons, therefore, signaled this defeat of the god(s).

³⁶ Nickolae Roddy, (cf. Note 5 above) however, expresses no doubt that they were indeed utilized for the burning of incense when he refers to “tripodal incense cups similar to those recovered at Bethsaida.” in his review of Tina Haettner Blomquist, “Gates and Gods: Cults in the City Gates of Iron Age Palestine, An Investigation of the Archaeological and Biblical Sources”, *Coniectanea Biblica*, Old Testament Series 46 (Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm 1999) in a *Review of Biblical Literature* 10 article published in 2002.

b*. Image-Oriented Pottery/Ceramic Artifacts. Of the image-oriented yields at *et-Tell*, three, relevant for studying the religious sensibilities practiced at *Tzer*, include: (1) a male-figured figurine with skittle/cone-shaped, bulbous crown headdress, flanked by plumes of feathers known as an 'atef crown, (2) two female-figured figurines with bulbous eyes and headdress, (3) a shard of pottery incised with what appears to be an *ankh*-like symbol/sign, and (4) a faience figurine of the dwarf, Egyptian god, *Pataikos*.

*1) The 'Atef-Crowned Figurine. One figurine discovered at *et-Tell* was crowned with what one terms 'atef gear. <8> It was discovered within the *bit hilani* structure. A mold cast figurine, it "presents," writes Dr. Arav, "the head of a male wearing a tall crown with a thick knob at the (upper) end, perhaps representing a precious stone." (Arav 1995, p. 17) What remains of the figurine now was part of a complete figure that still awaits discovery. The crown, festooned with two large feathers, one on either side as the figurine presents, was certainly utilized by the king of the Ammonite peoples according to the description contained in 2 Samuel 12: 30. After this kingdom's defeat by the forces of King David, such a crown was taken from the head of the defeated King *Malkam*,³⁷ a questionable name! and placed on David's head. This action showed that David had inherited all of the powers [and thus significance] of the one who had formerly worn the 'atef crown. It made quite the political/religious statement.

This 'atef crown, described in 2 Samuel 12: 30 as having been worn by the defeated king of the Ammonites, was, from numerous reliefs and paintings found in Egypt, one of at least five crowns worn by pharaohs on various occasions. The *Deshret* (red crown) represented Lower Egypt. The *Hedjet* (white, skittle-shaped crown) represented Upper Egypt. The *Pshent* or Double Crown, combined both the *Deshret* and the *Hedjet* and represented a unified Egypt. *Narmer*, also known as *Menes*, is reputed to have been the first ruler to wear this combination crown as founder of the First Dynasty ca. 3100 B.C.E. When the pharaoh led his armies into battle, it was traditional that he wore the blue, ceremonial crown known as the *Khepresh*. Lastly, the *Atef* was a crown worn by the god *Osiris*. It was made up of the *Hedjet*, or White Crown of southern Egypt, the *Uraeus*, the royal serpent symbol, i.e., a hooded cobra poised to strike, and the red feathers that represent *Osiris*'s cultic center at *Busiris* in the Nile Delta region. Because of its location, this crown and its significance could easily have influenced nearby regions such as ancient Canaan. As one writer

³⁷ The Canaanite expression "*hamelech shelahem*", their king/monarch/sovereign, can be contracted to *malkam*. This same word appears in the 2 Samuel 12: 30 text as a proper noun and has consequently raised the suspicions of some biblical scholars as appearing in a "contrived text".

describes such a crown in one of the scenes concerning *Osiris* located in the Temple of Seti I: "Rearing up on either side of this [combined Hedjet-Khepresh] core were what seemed to be two thin leaves of metal, and at the front was an attached device, consisting of two wavy blades, which scholars normally describe as a pair of rams' horns."³⁸ It is said that *Ra* had presented *Osiris* with this crown which seemed to stand some two feet high from the paintings in *Seti's* Temple.

During his excavations of *Deir el-Bahri*, Egypt in 1906, Edouard Naville recovered a fragment/piece of relief sculpture belonging to the Temple of *Tuthmosis* III (18th Dynasty, ca. 1450 B.C.E.). It is now housed in the Australian Museum.³⁹ The sculpture fragment depicts a youthful Pharaoh *Tuthmosis* III wearing an 'atef' crown. "An ankh sign, representing the breath of life, is held to his nostrils by a deity, probably Atum or Mont. The 'atef' crown, usually worn by *Osiris*, god of the underworld, in this context identifies the king with this god."⁴⁰

As we've learned from 2 Samuel, and from *et-Tell*, however, the 'atef' crown was not only significant for the Egyptians, especially pharaohs for whom it had personal/theological/political significance, it had wider use by other monarchs or leaders in the region who borrowed Egyptian art and imagery and assimilated it to their local purposes. Among the fascinating pieces of sculpture at New York's Metropolitan Museum in its collection of Ancient Near Eastern Art is a piece entitled "Smiting god wearing an Egyptian atef crown, 15th-14th century B.C." It is bronze and has a height of some 8 and 1/4 inches (21 cm). It is described in part as follows. "This figure strides with one arm raised and the other held out, each having wielded a weapon such as a spear and mace or thunderbolt... The crown is the distinctive Egyptian 'atef' crown... worn by the pharaoh at his jubilee festival or in mortuary contexts. Here the figure represented is not the Egyptian king but rather an ancient Near Eastern depiction of a local deity of the Levant area." This may explain why a figurine wearing an 'atef' crown was unearthed at *et-Tell*.⁴¹

*2) The Female Figurine(s) with Headdress/Hair-style. A clay figurine of a goddess, found in Area B at the entrance to the *bit hilani* palace, is described as being made of clay and resembling a woman with the Egyptian *Hathor* (*Athyr*) hairstyle. <9> She is described further as having "very pronounced eyes that are emphasized by double lines" (Arav 1999, p. 95) wearing large double earrings and a necklace. In the legend of

³⁸ Cf. Hancock, <http://www.grahamhancock.com/library/fotg/c45~2.htm>.

³⁹ Viewed at http://www.usyd.edu.au/nicholson/collection/egypt_relief.html.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ This piece may be viewed at http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ho/03/wae/hod_1986.42.htm.

the "eye of Re", *Hathor* took this form to destroy humankind, but was distracted when *Re*, repenting of his actions, duped her into thinking beer, dyed red, was blood. *Hathor* paused to drink the "blood", became thereby intoxicated, and forgot about destroying humankind. "The style of the figurine together with pottery from the *locus* help to date it to Iron Age II", maintains Dr. Arav. (Arav 1999, p. 95)

As with the 'atef-crowned figurine discussed above, the *Hathor*-like figurine speaks volumes for Egyptian influence at *et-Tell*'s Iron Age city. She appealed to both genders. *Hathor* herself, worshipped throughout Egypt from her main center at *Denderah* (*Dandarah*) in Upper Egypt, was understood to have been a patron of, among others, the arts (music, dance), the sun, and the sky. Sharing the characteristic as "cosmic dancer" with the Hindu deity, *Shiva*, or Salome, stepdaughter of Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee, stories were told of how she danced before the god *Ra* in order to lift his spirits.

Hathor, dating to predynastic times, was originally the queen of *Horus*, and her name means "House of Horus", or "Mother of the Whole World", similar to that of *Isis* at a later time. Significantly, *Hathor* (*Het-Hert*, *Hethheru*) was often depicted as a cow (goddess), daughter of *Nut* and *Re*, who bore the sun-disk between her horns, <10> or as a woman, dressed as a queen, wearing the sun-disk and horns on her head. <11> Yet, even later, she is also depicted as a woman with a cow's head, worshipped for her fertility of women, and childbirth. <12> Yet, a temple devoted to her worship in the Timnah Valley of the ancient copper mines north of present-day *Eilat* in southern Israel venerates her as the goddess of mining. A faience plaque bearing her face there dates to Pharaoh Seti I (ca. 1318–1304 B.C.E.). Once again, the symbol of a solar disc nestled by horn/crescents presents itself as a thread common at *et-Tell/Tzer* also. So much for now.

*3) The *Ankh* (-like) Symbol/Sign. An *ankh*-like symbol, inscribed on one of the numerous shards from the "storage-room" known as Chamber 4, was recovered in 1998. <1> My colleagues Rami Arav and Carl Savage have essayed and lectured concerning its discovery and possible significance. (Arav, Savage) Heretofore it seemed unique among our finds. However, in light of the association of the *ankh* with the 'atef crown and now the Hathor-horns and disc, the former having been superimposed on the 'atef crown as viewable on the sculpture fragment of Tuthmosis III's crown, they need no longer be considered unassociated symbols to be found in the same place, i.e., at *et-Tell*. Accompanying the symbol were the letters *LS[H]M...* read to mean "In the name of...". In light of the foregoing discussion, one would expect the name of a given (specific and local) deity

to have followed this segment of the fragment. A local variation of the general Egyptian practice may thus be expected to have been in place.

The *ankh* was a most potent symbol. Because the word refers to both the symbol for life, and the word for sandal, numerous scholars have tried to effect an association between the two. To date they have had no success. (Above in b.1), we showed that the *ankh* could be a prominent symbol on the pharaoh's 'atef' crown, thus combining an already combined symbol, death with (everlasting) life.

What has been overlooked, however, in the numerous examples of the appearance of the *ankh* in iconography, is its obvious similarity to the symbol of the sun or moon (=the *ankh*'s loop) and the so-called "cross-bar" below this loop (=stylized horns or "crescent"! The accompanying pole/standard/stick which extends below this "cross" is anchored in some "source" and recalls the standards and the pole extending from beneath the horned/crescented, inscribed image on the *stela* at *et-Tell* (and its variants) as discussed in 2.d. above.

Moreover, the loop of the *ankh* symbol, as seen in an Osiris Pillar of Pharaoh Senusret I (12th Dynasty) and from the coffin of Queen Ahmose Nefertari (18th Dynasty), where each holds two *ankhs* with arms crossed at their breasts, suggests a similarity with the unexplained, large double circles accompanying the other symbols on the standards of King *Ithi-Teshup* of *Arrapha*=*Nuzi* (cf. 2.d. above), the large circles of the Stein seal interpretation (above, 2.a.), and the oversized ears on both the iconic *stela* in the Damascus Museum and the *et-Tell* iconic *stela*.

Additionally, and we shall return to this, one notices we refer to an *ankh*-like figure and not an *ankh*. Why? When one views the *ankh*, the loop is always depicted as being round or nearly round. <13> The image on the shard from *et-Tell* is not round, but is rather nearly oval in shape. This difference in shape suggests a variation on the disc and horns/crescent theme that permeates the imagery we've recovered at *et-Tell*, and gives this *ankh*-like symbol a local and allied significance to that of the horns/crescent, astral symbol(s)/standard/chthonic realm.

*4) The *Pataikos*/*Patekos* Figurine. The god *Pataikos* appears in Egyptian iconography in numerous forms from as early as the 6th Dynasty. Not until the New Kingdom, however, may investigators date the "open-backed mold" cast amulets such as that discovered at *et-Tell*.

From the New Kingdom's 20th Dynasty (1185–1070 B.C.E.), for example, a faience statue/amulet some 2.7" high from Memphis depicts him as a composite god, *Ptah-Sokar*, i.e., 'protective *Pataikos*'. One of the most popular amulets, the *Pataikos* amulet was worn on the person who believed it to confer benefit(s) on the wearer, like all *mana* was expected to do. In

appearance, this amulet is closest to the one discovered at *et-Tell*. The god wears a tight skullcap and a narrow necklace; otherwise he is nude and dwarfed. <14>

A smaller *Pataikos* amulet (2.7"), of green faience, also comes from the New Kingdom period at Memphis. <15> From the end of this kingdom (1150–985 B.C.E.), the same composite god, *Ptah-Sokar*, wears both headgear and a large necklace that reaches the shoulders.

From the Late Period's 26th Dynasty (664–525 B.C.E.) comes yet another protective *Pataikos* amulet of faience. <16> A mere 0.5" in height, this tiny, protective amulet presents the dwarfed, naked deity with cropped hair, holding a knife in each hand.⁴² All three of these amulets are displayed in the Virtual Egyptian Museum.

Part two: Analysis: What Mean these Horns, Crescents, Feathers, Amulets, Astral Symbols and Stelae?

One point the present study stresses is a distinction between the so-called "gate-cult" (Bernett and Keel, and Blomquist) and evidence of a "state religion". State religions were far more complex and comprehensive, for they tended of necessity to be far more broad-ranged and inclusive. Stated differently, "cults" tended to be exclusive, restricting and rigorist-attracting, while "state religions" appealed to the majority of a population, i.e., were liberal, yet had a "solid" core of either a cathenotheistic deity or such deity and a variegated pantheon of other deities – some major and some minor, but all receiving unfettered veneration to varying degrees. Given the number and type of religious images discovered at *Tzer*, the latter pattern appears to have been in vogue there.

The artifacts from *et-Tell* have been described and studied above in the context of a specific number of artifacts from other *loci* in the general ancient Near East that provide similar imagery, design, type, analogy, function, and perhaps significance. One fact becomes clear immediately: Egyptian religious symbols (directly or indirectly), regional religious symbols (general Canaanite, general Aramean), (neo-) Hittite, Hurrian-Hittite and Assyrian symbols as well as names vestigial from the Hurrian warrior class [viz. *Amihur/d*, *Talmai*, *Maachah*] may be all associated with *et-Tell*'s 10th (if not indeed earlier!) through 8th century B.C.E. ruins. By considering the presence of (1) a horned and armed deity connected to the base of the stela

⁴² Available at <http://www.virtual-egyptian-museum.org/Collection/Content/FAI.VS.00259.html>.

on which he appears by a type of stake or standard or pole, (2) a figurine wearing an 'atef' crown, (3) a figurine with oversize eyes wearing a *Hathor*-like headdress or wig, (4) an inscribed *ostracon* (part of a restored jar) bearing the letters *LS[H]M* followed by an *ankh*-like symbol/sign in gate Chamber 4 – a storage room for the gate cult appurtenances, (5) at least two *bamot* ("high places"), (6) two tripedal (incense burners?) – discovered inside of the offering-altar at the stepped *bamah* of the inner city-gate, (7) five uninscribed *stelae* at the inner city-gate, (8) a figurine of the dwarf god, *Patekos*, and (9) two gate chambers that were grain silos at *Tzer*, *suggestions that a form of state religion* may well have evolved locally there in a manner similar today to Sindhi religion practiced in India since November 1947 impress themselves on the researcher.⁴³ Concerning the latter, the historian of religions in general would tend to want to distinguish between Sikh, Muslim, Hindu and Jain characteristics the observer may be able to identify as distinctly separate traditions, systems, or faiths to the utter dismay of the sincere Sindhi worshipper for whom what the observer would have tended to identify as distinctly separate traditions would be understood and practiced as one holistic faith/system/tradition. The reader should understand a Sindhi-similar paradigm (which will become increasingly clear) underlying this analysis. These nine *et-Tell*-yielded features (6 *stelae*; 3 figurines; 2 *bamot* (h); 2 tripedal ceremonial vessels; 2 gate-chamber silos, and 1 inscribed [and illustrated] *ostracon*) are what exist to suggest/invite a preliminary outline of a possible state religion that goes beyond more than just the gate cult that was practiced at *Tzer*.

A. Rams, Oxes, Bulls and Beyond: Tzer's Horned Deity and "Horned Deities"

The preponderance of the images discovered there (a horned deity; figurine with 'atef' crown; Hathor-similar figurine; and inscribed *ostracon*), and material culture associated with them point to a focus on a horned deity as the state, cathenotheistic deity that was venerated at *Tzer*. Let us consider this horned deity and his associated "horned court".

When the artifacts of an ostensible religious significance from *et-Tell/Tzer* are placed together, one notices a particular fact: *Tzer*'s inhabitants could be said to have been "obsessed" with both horned deities (and the powers they represented) and crescent – i.e., stylized horn – imagery as were, and

⁴³ This according to a paper delivered before the faculty of Religious Studies at Michigan State University by position candidate Dr. Steven Ramey, Department of Religion, Furman University, entitled "We are Hindu, We are Sufi: Sindhi Religious Practices and Their Contested Identities" on April 30, 2004.

had been for millennia, the majority of their ancient Near Eastern neighbors. In this they were not unique. The unobservant, but enthusiastic, observer would be tempted to conclude this simply on the basis of the impressive "horned deity *stela*" alone. After all, it has been the largest and most impressive of all the non-structural artifacts discovered there to date, especially the numerous *stelae*. If so, however, the late actor Bruce Lee would have accused the observer of focusing only on "a finger pointing at the moon and thus missing all of that heavenly glory" that the moon itself provides,⁴⁴ or s/he would have missed the iconic *stela*'s connection to other relevant *et-Tell* artifacts such as

1. the figurine wearing an 'atef' crown,
2. the *Hathor*-like figurine, and
3. the *ostrakon* bearing an *ankh*-like sign/symbol

all of which reflect the same or similar "bovine" or horned imagery. Allow me to make this readily apparent.

1. Male Bovine Deities

The preponderant image throughout the ANE – and at *Tzer* also – is that of a horned, male deity. The deity is depicted as having either (1) a bovine head with horns, (2) a bovine-headed deity holding either a moon, a sun, or stars and other "orbs" between its horns – themselves oftentimes presented in stylized form as a crescent, (3) a bovine deity girded with a weapon, (4) a deity described in literature with bovine features, (5) a bovine deity with a stake or pole extending from its abdomen (or crotch!) into the ground, or (6) suggesting all of these "attributes" of a bovine deity simply by or as an *ankh*-like sign/symbol.

The horned, armed deity depicted on the *et-Tell stela* is by description and morphology similar but not identical to other iconic *stelae* known to exist elsewhere in the general region.⁴⁵ Its presence there suggests that the

⁴⁴ Dialogue from the martial arts movie *Enter the Dragon*.

⁴⁵ For instance, a *stela* of uncanny similarity housed in the National Museum of Damascus, Syria has a similar figure. What is different, however, is perhaps quite noteworthy and thus significant. The Damascus figure has prominent eyes (absent at *et-Tell*), and wears his dagger or sword in front of his body (at *et-Tell* the figure's weapon hangs behind his back). At *et-Tell* the four, unidentified, small "orbs" are located to the right of the figure's torso (at Damascus they are on the right side of the torso). The Damascus figure nestles an orb divided into eight parts (resembling slices) between its horns (whereas *et-Tell*'s figure has only empty space between its horns). Finally, the Damascus figure wears ear ornaments divided into three "strips" (*et-Tell*'s figure is without ear ornaments).

image of the horned deity was indeed all but pervasive in the ancient Near East and thus also important to the citizens of *Tzer* – both to those who ruled it and to those who were ruled; beneficiaries of a state religion.⁴⁶

As examples of this bovine pervasiveness and veneration I cite:

1. The bull-god, Yahweh, at *Kuntillet-Ajrud*. His *Asherah* or wife/queen was worshiped as the Mother of the gods and of the Earth. As such, she, too, would have been understood in one of her aspects as a cow deity.
2. The Yahweh-as-bull imagery of King Jeroboam I of Israel-the-Kingdom, and his successors at the cultic centers of *Bethel* and *Dan*. Biblical literature has all but successfully expunged the female counterpart of this “Bull of Israel”.
3. References to a “Bull El” in some Canaanite texts and imagery (such as the *Ba'al* and *Anat* Cycle of texts from *Ugarit*).
4. Descriptions and depictions of the chief Aramean deity, *Hadad*.
5. The Aramean/Hittite/Hurrian deity/deities *Reshef* and *Teshub*.
6. *Moloch*, meaning king, and referring to a number of Canaanite and Aramean deities (also known as the Bull of the Sun) was the god of bounty for the Phoenicians. He had the head of a bull and the body of a man, but was conceived also as having the form of a calf or an ox. The pedestal of his statue served as a furnace where all sacrifices offered to him were burned.
7. The *Apis* Bull deity of Egypt that embraced a sun disc between its horns.
8. The fact that the Egyptian Pharaoh *Narmer* wore a bull’s tail as part of his royal regalia, a practice that was later abandoned in favor of the later kings merely retaining the titles “Strong Bull” and “Mighty Bull.”⁴⁷
9. Numerous pharaohs who wore the ‘*atef*’ crown: a combination of numerous political/religious statements among which was a restatement of the “Mighty/Strong Bull” symbology. The ‘*atef*’ was the most beautiful, artistic and ornate form of displaying the two horns associated – and associating the pharaoh – with a bovine deity.

These were deities depicted as males and were represented by imagery associated with masculinity and potential for procreating bull, ox, or ram power. *Tzer*’s inhabitants apparently revered such a deity who participated

⁴⁶ It appears that the Judahite deity, Yahweh, was not depicted in this way by the Deuteronomistic mentality, but that seems to be a main exception to an otherwise area-wide, all-pervasive practice.

⁴⁷ Cf. <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/reg.htm>, p. 2.

in bovine-significant characteristics. In this, they were mainstream participants in the general religious practice of the region. But which bovine deity was worshipped at *Tzer*?

For now I merely enumerate the possible male deity candidates.

1. *Teshub/p* (Hurrian-Hittite)
2. *Telipinu(s)* (Hurrian-Hittite)
3. *Reshef* (Hurrian-Aramean-Canaanite)
4. *Hadad* (Aramean-Canaanite)
5. *Ba'al* (Canaanite)
6. *Moloch-Ba'al* (Phoenician)
7. *Bull Yahweh-of-Kuntillet Ajrud* (Israelite)
8. *Apis* (both local Egyptian and international)

Beside these chief male candidates there are female candidates also.

2. Female Bovine Deities

Since the *et-Tell stele* can be described in one sense as unisex – depending on how one views the extension from the abdomen of the *et-Tell* and Damascus Museum images – some female deities deserve consideration also.

a. *Hathor*. Bovine imagery associated with the feminine is also well represented in ancient Near Eastern iconography – albeit at *et-Tell/Tzer* in a less obvious form. Depicted as a cow, the heifer deity complements the imagery of the bull, ox or ram and provides the idea for the means for complete fertility and (pro) creation. Astral/bovine pairs in turn became viewed as the parents/progenitors of many of the members of the various pantheons of the ANE. Chief among the cow deities, the Egyptian goddess, *Hathor*, forerunner of the goddess *Isis*, often depicted as a beautiful woman wearing a recognizably familiar headdress <9> & <17>, is/was just as commonly depicted as

1. a beautiful, shapely woman wearing a horned headdress with a sun disc nestled between those horns.
2. having a woman's shapely body with a bovine head and horns holding a sun disc.
3. a cow cradling a sun disc between her horns.
4. a woman with recognizable headdress and bovine ears!

In this role she was the “Mother of All Living” and the “Sustainer of all Life”. Accordingly, her association with the *ankh* symbol which is often

depicted with her <12> & <17>, becomes clearer. But *Hathor* was not alone in the ANE bovine-figured pantheon. She had significant company.

b. *Ashtart of the Two Horns*. East of *et-Tell* by some 25 miles, in what was ancient *Bashan*, are located the ruins of two/(twin?) cities that were famous during the Iron Age II period: *Ashtaroth* (*Astartu*) and *Karnaim*. As one might expect, *Astartu/Ashtaroth* was named in honor of and where the goddess *Ashtart/Ishtar* was worshiped. *Karnaim*, an allied city, was located nearby. Sometimes these cities are understood to be separate; at other times they are referenced together. *Ashtaroth-Karnaim* means "*Ashtart of the two horns*." She, like *Hathor*, was a cow divinity worshipped all over large portions of the ANE outside of Egypt.⁴⁸ *Ashtaroth-Karnaim* was one of her chief cultic centers and close enough to have either influenced or sustained (from Hurrian influence) cow veneration at *Tzer*. "*Hebat*"/"*Hathor*"/"*Ashtart*" at *Tzer* were to be as much expected as the steer divinity discovered there. They were a natural complement. We should rather be surprised were she not there in some depicted form. Accordingly, the "*Hathor-like*" imagery discovered at *et-Tell* may represent at least *Hathor*, *Astartu*, and/or *Hebat*. These observations were grounded in earlier practices.

B. Bovine Powers of Earlier ANE Civilizations

1. Anatolia

Bovine-oriented imagery connected with figures themselves associated with the *mysterium tremendum*, the realm of the totally other, the realm of Ultimate Reality – i.e., gods – is indeed much older than the time of the specific deities alluded to above from Upper Mesopotamia, Hatti, Canaan, Egypt or/and *Ashtarot-Karnaim*. From *Catal Huyuk* in south central Anatolia (Turkey today), for example, and datable to ca. 6150 B.C.E., a full three millennia earlier! than the date of anything we've discussed thus far, a (now-reconstructed) funerary rite features human skulls found in baskets below large bull's heads located on both the west and east walls of a shrine (Level VII) there. <5>⁴⁹ Here bovine power was expected to either resurrect or protect the dead in the chthonic realm.

⁴⁸ Cf. Patton quoted in Elmer K. Mould, *Essentials of Bible History* (The Ronald Press Company, New York 1951 c. 1933), p. 175.

⁴⁹ James Mellaart, *Earliest Civilizations of the Near East* (McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York), p. 101, Fig. 86.

Also from Anatolia, supplied also by Mellaart, is the description of a bench in a shrine from Level VI at *Catal Huyuk*. The bench incorporates, as he describes it, "the horn cores of seven aurochs (wild bulls) and [he provides] a reconstruction drawing of the complete shrine showing the bench and typical *bucrania*, pillars of brick with horn cores of the aurochs, symbol of the bull god". <18>⁵⁰

In this same shrine at Level VI there was a "cut-out figure of a bull on the north wall and a bull and ram's head on the east wall." <5>⁵¹ Whether bulls and rams performed the same or specifically different supernatural functions here is unknown. Under these three heads were painted handprints, perhaps raised in mass adoration of the bovine deities and what they were expected to do for the suppliant(s).

What is thus clear is that one must differentiate between rams, bulls, and cows in the bovine images available from the ANE. This distinction in turn may be helpful in identifying specific bovine deities and specific functions (powers they controlled!) they were believed to have had. That having been stated, it is also clear that some three millennia before bovine imagery, associated with ultimate power(s) of the cosmos, and able to influence human life at centers in Egypt, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Aram, and Canaan became well-known, bovine imagery, associated with the supernatural realm and representing many powers located there, had already been wide-spread throughout these regions. Bovine-associated worship at *et-Tell*, therefore, mirrored in some ways a tradition with roots some seven millennia earlier, yet had more immediate-in-time antecedents in the image's gradual progress to importance during and after the third millennium B.C.E. In Anatolia, bovine power in one important respect, was obviously connected with the realm of the dead, yet apparently having the power to restore (or produce!) life. The much later Egyptian deity *Osiris* can thus be associated both with the chthonic realm (cf. *Anubis* and *Ereskigal*), and like his counterparts elsewhere in the ANE – *Ba'al*, *Hadad*, *Tammuz*, and *Marduk*,⁵² for example – and also be acknowledged as a deity who becomes resurrected from that chthonic realm. [Christians, for instance, have no difficulty understanding both associations with one deity.] We will search for such heady signs of religious proclivities in our ongoing research at *et-Tell/Tzer*.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, Figs. 84, 85, p. 99.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 97.

⁵² What is unusual in this scheme is that unlike *Osiris*, *Ba'al*, *Hadad*, and *Tammuz* being rescued/resurrected by females (i.e., their sisters, lovers, wives, consorts), *Marduk* is rescued/resurrected from "the Mountain" (where he is kept seasonally) by a male deity: *Nebo*!

2. Crescent/Sun/Moon/Star(s) Iconography

A significant amount of iconography involving a crescent (stylized horns) cupping a sun disc (*Damascus*), a moon disc (*Hazor*), or a multi-pointed star (*Ur*), described in PART ONE as well as discussed immediately above presents another form of bovine deity veneration and the supernatural powers it represented. We may understand these newer symbols as a later phase in artistic representation of the older ones viewed in *Anatolia* (huge horns, ram's, bull's and cow's heads) and at *Hazor* (crude *stela* containing huge arms and hands raised in veneration of a "square" set of horns containing a disc – from the Late Bronze Age), for instance. In other words, crescents and horns are two sides of the same image "coin". A brief reference to such items at *Ur*, *Nuzi* and *Hazor* will substantiate this point.

a. Mesopotamia

1) The Third Dynasty of Ur Period. One of the earliest examples of stylized horns=crescents from Mesopotamia is found on an iconic *stela* of King *Ur-Nammu* (2112–2095 B.C.E.). In the legal history of the ANE he is credited with having promulgated the oldest known code of laws, and as such, with being the first lawgiver. While the *stela* is divided into four registers (sections/*strata*), in the uppermost register the king stands (reminiscent of the later Amorite King *Hammurabi* of Babylon standing before the god *Shamash*) before the image of a damaged deity (presumably receiving the laws from him). Above the head of the king is a huge symbol of a crescent inside of which is a six-pointed star, superimposed upon a six-barred cross. At the center of both is a circular, smaller symbol such as a moon <19>.⁵³ The imagery is so strong and powerful that one is tempted to imagine that the bovine deity is all but invisible, with but only the horns remaining. And it is both effective and convincing.

2) *Nuzi*. The Seal of the Hurrian King *Ar-Shali* <4> and the two Seals of King *Ithi-Teshup* <4> – along with that of King *Ur-Nammu* – demonstrate that this disc/star and crescent imagery existed at both extremes of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley and thus influenced – and in turn were influenced by – both Hittite and Aramean iconography of the same type.

b. Hazor's Iconic *Stela*. Hazor's Late Bronze Age iconic *stela* <2> depicting large arms and hands raised toward a crudely-shaped crescent/set

⁵³ James B. Pritchard, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Princeton University Press, Princeton 1958), p. 220, Fig. 73.

of horns cupping a disc (of either the sun or moon) is probably the crudest of such images discovered throughout the Middle East to date, but it inspires no less an amount of reverential awe than do the more refined examples from Mesopotamia. Bovine power, here in the heart of Canaanite country, was associated also with power from the realm of the astral/supernatural and was entreated as such.

c. The Dominant Image of Deity. The dominant image, as gleaned from the iconography examined and discussed thus far, then, is that of an astral symbol (sun, star and/or moon) either surrounded or nestled by imagery resembling bovine horns or a crescent, all associated with divinity or its powerful life-giving and death-causing aspects; aspects which were understood to be cyclical (based on either moon phases or sun cycles) or time-negating (having to start all over again after a specific time lapse).

C. The Cat henotheistic State God at Tzer

The variations on this motif at Tzer (*et-Tell*) are subtly manifold, but after our analysis may be related to each other without great difficulty. Although political changes (from independent Geshurites [*Talmai* and *Amihud/r*] to occupied-by-Aram-Damascus [*Hazael* and *Ben-Hadad*] rulers to perhaps, for a brief time, under the rule of some Israelite kings [?]) definitely occurred at Tzer, we have nothing to suggest that a ruling class, descended from the earlier Hurrian ruling class, did not continue at the capital city, Tzer. Thus we advance an argument here that suggests that the horned figure on the iconic *stela* at *et-Tell/Tzer* is most probably that of the god *Teshub*. To be sure, there could not have been *Teshub* worship in as "pristine" a form as may have been practiced or observed, say, at *Nuzi* during the time of either *Ar-Shali*, *Ithi-Teshup* or his father *Kipi-Teshup* or in earlier Hurrian history. Strong ties among members of this class with their Hurrian roots in onomastic practice (i.e., keeping their Hurrian names) at Tzer suggests strongly, however, that they may have clung tenaciously to their native gods as well. Yet, one overlordship group's horned deity could be a *Teshub/p*, while that over those whom they ruled may have been a *Reshef*, a *Hadad*, a *Moloch*, a *Ba'al*, and so on – and these just in the geographical corner of reality in which the Geshurites located themselves. Yet to the outside observer, just as those observing the *Sindh*s, there may have been no appreciable difference. We are tempted to ask, then, "If this may have been the case, why would the Assyrian conquerors of the final third of the seventh century B.C.E. (or even that someone who beheaded the *stela* used in a secondary position in the east wall of Chamber 2 at an

earlier time, and from Stratum 6!) have been so zealous in “beheading” every *stela* we’ve uncovered at the city-gate complex, especially the iconic one?” As an analogous example, I would say that two rival gangs both adopted the Volkswagen Beetle as their “gangmobile” but each festooned their “symbol” with the colors of the gang and listened to only specific CD tunes on their in car stereo systems. When one VW-admiring gang invaded the turf of a rival group to commit mayhem and perhaps even murder, one of their objects of destruction would be their rivals’ VWs. What would have been the difference? Simple. Wrong colors on the cars and located in a specific neighborhood: that of their rivals. Thus a VW is not simply just a VW, and analogously a horned deity is not just another (copy of a) horned deity (nor an uniconic stele) when they are located in a rival “neighborhood.” VWs get burned, and stelae become beheaded even if the iconography (or the morphology) is almost identical! Location, not similarity of image or stele morphology, was the dictating and deciding factor.

D. “World-Building”: State Religion at Tzer

The citizens of Tzer, in venerating (probably) *Teshub/Reshef* (the bovine-headed deity of *et-Tell*’s iconic *stela*), and powers represented by allied iconography such as (1) the *ankh* (a possible stylization of an astral symbol, accompanied by a cross supporting that symbol), (2) the goddess (*Ashtar(t)*) *Hathor* (both as the Eye of *Ra* and understood to be depicted as a woman with horns (or horned crown!) nestling/cupping an astral symbol [sun or moon], or even as a cow deity), and (3) the ‘*atef*-crowned figurine suggesting veneration of a/the god [*Osiris*] of the underworld, as well as a god of fertility wearing a crown of stylized horns consisting of plumes of feathers, co-opted the ancient Near East-wide importance of venerating certain astral powers and applying them to ancestral as well as local deities.

Concerning their “world-building and world-maintaining” activities,⁵⁴ Tzer’s citizens attempted through rituals to maintain (1) fertility (as evidenced by two huge grain silos at the city-gate, the bovine male deity and the Hathor-like deity figurine), (2) immortality (perhaps on a limited basis through a cycle of resurrections as evidenced by the presence of the *ankh* and ‘*atef* symbols), (3) victory in war (as seen in the iconography of the armed (probably) *Reshef/Teshub stela*) and hegemony over one’s enemies, (4) security – to depend on the good offices of the heavenly lights, both the greater(sun) and the lesser(moon) to ensure the orderly change of seasons

⁵⁴ That is, religion according to Peter Berger’s working definition of religion in *The Sacred Canopy*.

and cycles – evidenced by whatever astral symbol may have been understood as having been between the horns, and (5) to solicit/expect the protection of the composite, guardian-god *Patekos* from what was understood or feared as life's "wild cards": caprice and the nonsensical, unexplainable negative occurrence(s).

Oddly, the (probable) *Reshef/Teshub* (*p*) iconic stela discovered at *et-Tell* (with similar iconic *stelae*, elsewhere),⁵⁵ the *ankh* symbol, the 'atef-crowned' figurine and the *Hathor* (*/Ashtart*) figurine all have in common the horn/crescent-cupped sun, star or moon imagery. This symbol, presented in various forms (as bovine-headed deity [ANE-wide], as stylized *ankh*-symbol [Egypt, Tzer], as sometimes-depicted cow-headed goddess [Egypt, Bashan], as bovine-headed standard [Nuzi], and as standard with astral symbol, horns/crescent, and "astral loops" all separate [Nuzi]) is the "silver thread" of commonality that connects diverse Egyptian, Aramean, Upper and Lower Mesopotamian, and vestigial Hittite/Hurrian strands that stream into the material-cultural remains of a religious nature and significance at *et-Tell* (*Tzer*). A priesthood and sacerdotal supporting network would have been necessary to make sense of why such a seeming diverse group of religious symbols were indeed related and worthy of being venerated by the citizens of/at *Tzer*.

E. "World-Maintaining": A Venerating Priest (ess)hood/Sacerdotal Apparatus?: A Speculation

As we may imagine them, the state sacerdotal functionaries/priest (ess)hood and support personnel of *Tzer* would have made and supervised offerings to the state deity and titular god of the city (probably an aspect of either *Reshef/Teshub/Telepinu(s)* at the altar discovered at the entrance to the inner city-gate on its northern side, just in front of the northern, inner tower. Prominent there had been the iconic *stela* of the horned, girded deity. They maintained another "high place" just beyond the four chambers as one approached the inner, "upper" city (One sacrifice/offering for leaving the city and one for entering the city?). Uniconic *stelae* flanked the entrance to the inner gate as well as the western exit of the chamber section (two of which served as silos). By virtue of its relative greater size and adornment,

⁵⁵ Especially the iconic stela from Hazor, a *stela* of King *Ur-Nammu* of Ur [He promulgated the oldest law we have in written form.] The *stela* is divided into four registers. In the upper register the king stands before a deity. Directly above the king's head are the crescent and star symbols combined (Cf. fig. 73 in James B. Pritchard, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Princeton University Press, Princeton 1958), p. 220, and similar *stelae* on display in Turkish and Syrian museums claiming to be of either the god(s) *Reshef* or *Teshub*).

the iconic *stèle*'s figure (with bovine-head, astral symbol [perhaps obliterated], stylized anthropomorphic-appearing body, standard, prominent ears) that stood behind the offering basin/altar, approached by a series of three steps at the city-gate, was the representation of the chief deity worshipped at *Tzer* in general, and not necessarily just at this gate section of the city. Until future discoveries, we cannot limit the significance of the artifacts discovered thus far to just a gate cult observance.

The *Hathor*-like figure with the oversize eyes reflected the belief in the importance of a chief deity able to work through a female deputy to affect human life. Priestesses would have definitely supervised cultic veneration of "her". Production of the figurine discovered there was probably one of their responsibilities; revenues could have also been derived from their sale. Her presence at *Tzer* suggests that its inhabitants accepted this possibility. Along with her obvious female attributes and duties as "Mother of Life", etc., and "Eye of the dominant horned deity," she would have satisfied the need for the "logic" of a primordial pair (such as *Apsu* and *Tiamat*, *El* and *Athirat*, *Teshub* and *Hebat* – *Zeus* and *Hera*) as progenitors of members of an obvious pantheon there. In this role, however, she would have been understood as a bovine deity – as evidenced elsewhere – although no such imagery has yet been discovered at *et-Tell*. And at specific times during the "liturgical cycle" priestesses would have acted out relevant-to-life episodes from the life of the goddess in dramatic fashion. Sagacity dictates, therefore, that we not rule out such a future discovery. Learning from the arrangement of incense stand/uniconic stelae at *Tel Arad*, however, it is not outlandish to suggest that the two uniconic stelae flanking the entrance to the inner city-gate and those two just beyond the "chamber street" represented male and female aspects of the city's and city-state's horned deity veneration.

F. Concerning the Chthonic Realm

Tzer's citizens also associated the symbols of bovine male and female imagery, in addition to their cosmic significance, with their concern for what happened when nature appeared to (and when humans indeed) died. Accordingly, we notice concerns about the chthonic realm and attempts to both understand and propitiate its power(s), also associated with bovine power over that realm, as we've learned from observations concerning *Catal Huyuk* in Anatolia. Nature's advancements and setbacks (and thus those of humans) were charted in the successes and vicissitudes of specific deities associated with vegetation and the underworld as told in specific myths about them. Evidence of this concern is represented by the figurine wearing an 'atef' crown. The crown, another stylized presentation of bovine imagery

and power, is often associated with *Osiris* – like *Telipinu(s)*, *Marduk* and *Ba'al/Hadad*, for instance – who both reflected bovine power and who was understood to languish or rule in the underworld of the dead for a specified period of time each cyclical year. At *Tzer*, the two grain silos (the *foci* of either cyclical vegetation/renewal/fertility = life/fertile fields and bountiful harvests or/vs. periods of fallow fields = death/sterility/drought and no planting) and the 'atef' crowned figurine provide the important connections for this concern. Both the male and female sacerdotal functionaries would have played a joint important role in annual observances of periods of "fructification", harvest, and time/life renewal, i.e., union of male and female/rescuer deities for purposes of world and time renewal. Their outlook would therefore have been cyclical. The silos are a powerful indicator of a society engaged in concerns about the life/death/resurrection cycle for humans and gods as well as an indicator of a city's wealth. Theodore H. Gaster would remind the reader that these annual cyclical observances would have been acted out dramatically by priest and priestess thespians and the city/state head – as chief priest – would have had the lead "role" in this religious drama.

Conclusion

A paucity of material-culture (9 types of items) discovered at *et-Tell* has provided grist for the mill of a preliminary stab at hazarding a discussion of the religious sensibilities of the inhabitants of *Tzer*. Arguably the capital city of the Geshurite Kingdom, *Tzer's* religious practices reflected the religion of the entire kingdom, i.e., *Tzer's* religious practices constituted Geshurite state religion and not just a city-gate cult.

As an *addendum* to studies of *Tzer's* city-gate cult (Bennett, Keel, Blomquist), this study drew significant connections between material-culture at the city-gate and elsewhere at *et-Tell* in what is Area A, Level 5: the Iron II *stratum* (and sub *strata*).

Admittedly much I've suggested is quite speculative; after all, it is well nigh impossible to provide even the most meager outline of what I argue was the center of the state religion of the Geshurites who resided at *Tzer*. Yet the very eclectic nature of the 9 categories of religious-significant artifacts unearthed demanded some type of preliminary analysis that was not just limited to the gate cult there. Employing the prominent horned deity as the center around which elements of a pantheon worshipped at *Tzer* could be studied, I hypothesized a world-building and world-maintaining system modeled along the lines of already well known ancient Middle Eastern systems from Mesopotamia, Canaan and Egypt.

“World-Building”

The preponderant symbol representing the titular and state (cathenotheistic) deity at *Tzer* was the bovine-headed, anthropomorphic bodied, sword-girded, perched-on-a-stake figure of the only iconic stele discovered to date at *et-Tell*. This deity crystallized for the “world-building” efforts of *Tzer*’s architects of religion the union of astral powers (cosmic concern), procreation (steer/ox), security (girded sword) and societal leadership (city/state rulership). This understanding was shared with most of *Tzer*’s ancient Near Eastern neighbors as seen from the significance of such male bovine deities in their pantheons and mythologies. This deity’s iconography at *Tzer* was thus the norm and not an exception.

A closer look at other items discovered in *et-Tell*’s Iron II B *stratum* and their significance elsewhere suggested that *Tzer*’s horned deity was not the exclusive bovine deity of its inhabitants or of its pantheon. Direct as well as indirect bovine imagery was also suggested there by (1) the Hathor-like deity, (2) the ‘atef-crowned deity, and (3) the *ankh*-like sign/symbol etched on a shard belonging to a large jug.

The presence of (1) five other *stelae*, although uninscribed/uniconic, (2) ceramic vessels found in Chamber 4 of the city-gate complex, (3) two grain silos in two other chambers (2 and 3) of the city-gate complex, (4) two high places (East and West of the inner city-gate), and (5) a figurine of the dwarf composite deity, Patekos, provided additional data to suggest a wider range of religious activity and practice at *Tzer* heretofore not discussed and which had remained virtually unexplored.

When combined these 9 categories of data revealed that the three major concerns of the ancient Middle Easterner – including the inhabitants of *Tzer* – had been adequately addressed: (1) the Sky/Heavenly Realm and its powers, (2) the earthly plane and major concerns there, and (3) the chthonic realm and its relation to (especially) the earthly plane.

The leadership of *Tzer* engaged in the “world-building” of venerating a creator deity who had the (demonstrated) power to bring order out of cosmic chaos – as represented by the various astral signs/symbols. Bringing order to the cosmos was a power worthy of veneration, and its veneration was inculcated into the citizens of both city/-state and realm who probably tried to emulate it on an earthly plane. It inculcated also a trust in the city-state’s and state’s leader, his progeny/successors and “court” to have had the ability to do the same for *Tzer* as well as for the kingdom. *Tzer*’s inhabitants thus understood that political/religious order was “built” by the city’s (hereditary) Hurrian-descended leaders and those who assisted them in this duty.

The *Tzer*-specific "court" alluded to above was populated and demonstrated by the attending and allied symbols discovered thus far at *et-Tell*: viz., (1) the 'ankh-like symbol (and what it represented); (2) the *Hathor*-like figurine (and what it represented); and (3) the 'atef-crown wearing symbol/figurine (and what it represented). All three "court members" mirrored aspects of the same bovine power that was represented by the chief bovine, girded deity of the iconic *stele*. Recourse to Egyptian models helped in clarifying the specific duties performed by each "member" and "aspect" of the bovine-imaged pantheon at *Tzer* and references to further bovine images and their significance(s) from *Nuzi* and environs, Upper and Lower Mesopotamia, and "greater Canaan". Yet all of the symbols could be said – in a Sindhi-like sense – to have been "local" and indigenous to *Tzer*.

"Court members" were believed to function within the "court" as female counterparts and complements to the male, chief, (pro-) creating deity ([1] a *Hathor* +-like goddess); [2] as males in the form of an *Osiris*-like deity in charge of both seasonal vegetation and the underworld (here the *ankh*-like power symbolized on the shard would also be relevant); and [3] as the male protective power against the unknown or the "sudden" symbolized by the *Patekos* figurine. They had covered all of their major bases.

"World-Maintaining"

Through what would have been a priest- and priestesshood, "world-maintaining" activities would have taken on a seasonal character. In a manner similar to the Babylonian 'Akitu Festival in honor of the New Year (or the reunion of *Inanna* and *Dummuzi*, *Ishtar* and *Tammuz*, *Ba'al* and 'Anat and *Isis* and *Osiris*) the grain stored in the two silos at *Tzer* signaled one of the most important religious observances: the virtual giving of life and time. Because of proximity to these silos, a threshing-floor would have been located near the entrance to the inner city-gate, probably in the plaza between the outer and inner gate complexes. We know that at Samaria and Jerusalem, threshing-floors had state religious significance. This threshing-floor was one of the holiest *loci* of the entire city, and the chief deity's aspect as "Lord of Grain and Time" was celebrated dramatically by both sexes of sacerdotal staff. Here also the good offices of the god *Pataikos* would have been invoked concerning the fates of city, state and citizens for the coming year. Both priest-prophets and priestess-prophetesses would have been consulted in a manner similar to that contained in the highly edited 1 Kings 22 of the Bible.

Having demonstrated plausibly both world-building and world-maintaining concerns and activities we could also speak plausibly of religion at

Tzer. Moreover, we could speak of state religion there as well. And far from the seemingly eclectic nature of the artifacts speaking against systematizing that religion or limiting it to a gate cult, *Tzer's* location as a capital city on the very fringes of its kingdom – and not centrally-located as is normally the case – lent itself to a different analysis that I termed a Sindhi-similar model. Similar to the function of the calculus, these objects allowed us to combine and analyze several dissimilar types of/and artifacts of a religious nature. I think that the core of the religion evident at *Tzer* is vestigial Hurrian – the deity of the iconic *stele* suggests this strongly [and I propose that this deity is *Teshub/Reshef* and not one of the various incarnations of the regional *Hadad-Ba'al*]. With that core being consistent and “steady” due to a Hurrian leadership stratum of government it served to attract a number of “obvious” developments that are the result of associations the Geshurite leaders and people had with their neighbors in the region. In addition to a Hurrian/Hittite (core) strand flowing through Geshurite/*Tzer* religious veneration and practice, a demonstrated Egyptian strand is explained easily from a time when Egyptian influence was all but pervasive in the region, especially east of the Jordan. Coupled with the pervasive Canaanite regional influence it is not surprising that Canaan, Egypt and Nuzi (Hurria-Mittani) shared some of the same conceptions of deity/pantheon as well as imagery.

The pervasiveness of the bovine imagery in connection with deity and powers and functions of deity within the world-building systems of the “*Tzerites*” encouraged the thesis that a greater connection existed between several finds at *et-Tell* that would otherwise not have been associated *prima facie* with each other – the ‘*atef*-crowned figurine, the *Hathor*-like figurine, and the ‘*ankh*-like sign on a shard. This people, located on and sharing borders with Aram-Damascus, Canaan and Israel, reflected religious imagery similar to or in common with these neighbors while cemented to a very strong non-Semitic sense of chief/state deity. The result was the seemingly “common theology” of the ancient Near East argued some decades ago by the scholar Morton Smith, but with what still remains a unique mixture of observation with a solid bovine-oriented core.

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List of Illustrations

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- ⟨2⟩ Illustration: Crescent and Moon Stela from Late Bronze Hazor, Area C Access either: <http://www.bible.ca/islam-photos-moon-worship-archaeology.htm>, or <http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Sources/Allah/moongod.html>
- ⟨3⟩ Three illustrations: Arad Temple with Holy of Holies (1); Incense Altar with Uninscribed Stelae (2), and Two Incense Altars and Uniconic Stelae (3) are all available at http://www.ebibletools.com/israel/arad/DCP_/332.html
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- ⟨5⟩ Two illustrations: Bovine Imagery in Cultic Contexts from Anatolia See the crescent horns of the bull from *Civilization of the Goddess* by Marija Gimbutas at http://www.awakenedwoman.com/goddess_in_Anatolia2.htm, and see the images in Mellaart 1965. Image 1 is seen as Illustration 80, p. 97, and Image 2 is seen as Illustration 86, p. 101 in Mellaart.
- ⟨6⟩ Two illustrations: Iconic Stela Discovered at et-Tell and Illustration of Details from et-Tell (Bethsaida) <http://www.bibleorigins.net/YahwehsBovineFormsImages.html>
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- <8> Five illustrations: The Atef Crown (What is available on the Internet is somewhat different from what is illustrated on this page). <http://www.myegyptology.net/file/id73.htm> <http://nefertiti.iwebland.com/religion/osiris.htm>, and http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hi/hi_fidei.htm. (Scroll down to the "Smiting God wearing an Egyptian Atef Crown".)
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- <10> Illustration: Hathor Depicted as Bovine Deity with Sun <http://www.crystalinks.com/hathor.html> and <http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/religion/hathor.htm>
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- <14> Illustration: Pataikos of et-Tell <http://www.jewismag.com/69mag/bethsaida/bethsaida.htm>. Other illustrations are at <http://www.unomaha.edu/bethsaida/articles/pataikos.htm>
- <15> <http://virtual-egyptian-museum.org/Collection/FullVisit/Collection.FullVisit-JFR.html?..Content/FAI.00259.html&0>. Concerns Cat. FAI SS 00313.
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Cer w okresie żelaza

Wstępne studia z zakresu historii religii Geszuritów

Streszczenie

Wybitny badacz judaizmu Jacob Neusner twierdzi, że religię najlepiej jest studiować na tle porównawczym (Neusner 1988, 155 ff.). Znaczy to, że należy porównywać zjawiska religijne bliżej nam nieznanymi religii z formami pokrewnymi zauważalnymi w religiach lepiej nam znanych. Metodę tę należy odnieść szczególnie do studiów religii dziś wymarłych.

The Bethsaida Excavation Project – konsorcjum odpowiedzialne za badania archeologiczne na et-Tell – w swojej dziewiętnastoletniej już działalności wykopaliskowej zarejestrowało ilości materiału archeologicznego pozwalające na dokonanie wstępnych badań dotyczących kwestii religii w okresie żelaza IIB. Materiały te autor wykorzystał w swojej pracy.

Punktem wyjściowym rozważań jest sformułowana przez Petera Bergera funkcjonalistyczna definicja religii jako systemu państwowotwórczego i jednocześnie systemu, który to państwo utrzymuje. Obecne studium łączy tezy profesorów Neusnera i Bergera w celu stworzenia podstaw

teoretycznych do poznania religii Ceru, który był poprzednikiem Betsaidy w okresie żelaza. Tym się różni od istniejących już rozważań, że traktuje praktyki religijne całościowo, nie ograniczając się do opisu założenia kultowego przy bramie miejskiej.

Rozważania teoretyczne i epigraficzne znalezisk archeologicznych na et-Tell, prowadzone na tle znanych zjawisk na terenie państw Bliskiego Wschodu i Egiptu, wspomagane też są analogiami zaczerpniętymi z analizy zachowań współczesnych. Pozwalają one autorowi zaproponować koncepcję istnienia lokalnej odmiany kultów bliskowschodnich – odmiany kultu najbardziej zbliżonego do występującego w religii Hurytów.