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Domestic Religion in the Southern Levant: A Material Religion Approach*

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Abstract

The present study examines how a material religion approach might be applied meaningfully to the study of domestic religion in the southern Levant. Despite the abundant material evidence from the archaeological record, locating religion in the house continues to pose certain challenges, in terms of both definition and visibility. We see in past studies that much of the larger effort of studying the material culture rests in attempts to explain how materials reflect religious belief or to determine functional meanings. This is particularly the case in the study of those remains from domestic contexts, which are often interpreted as a way to understand how the beliefs and practices of non-official religion differed from that of the picture of belief in the textual evidence. A material religions approach, however, challenges this tendency by arguing that materials should not be interpreted primarily as reflections or expressions of beliefs or ideas. For this reason, the present study gives priority of focus to the many things of religion that have been uncovered in domestic spaces and spaces connected to the lifecycle of the household. This approach also challenges a picture of domestic religion that overemphasizes the walls as boundaries of the house since an emphasis upon food, drink, incense, etc. points to the house's relationship with and the household's dependence upon the family field, the natural landscape, and larger networks of sustenance and exchange.

Keywords: *Israelite religion; Israelite house; material religion; sensescape; smellscape; meal*

Introduction

Excavated domestic spaces dating to the Iron Age (c. 1200–539 BCE) provide some of the best glimpses that we have of domestic

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religion in the southern Levant.[2] The archaeological data from a variety of sites in this region complement the textual evidence from inscriptions as well as the literature preserved in the Hebrew Bible. While the biblical written evidence is largely representative of elite and Judah-centric perspectives on religion, it can elucidate the meaning of the archaeological data in certain cases. This evidence also addresses a broader issue in the study of the material culture of the southern Levant, a geo-political region at the crossroads of trade and empire. The commonalities in the spaces and things of domestic life all point to great fluidity in domestic religious practices between the peoples of Israel and Judah and the neighboring territories of Phoenicia, Aram, Philistia, Ammon, Moab, and Edom, and the larger region of Egypt to the southwest. This reminds us that those boundaries or borders highlighted in the textual data and reinforced in scholarship often obscure religious interaction, appropriation, and fluidity.

Archaeologists and text-focused scholars alike have therefore drawn upon both excavated and inscribed evidence in domestic spaces to fill in the gaps left by the biblical texts. One major advance over the past few decades has been the effort to correlate the structure and materials of the house (the "four room house" and other subtypes) with the kinship units described in the biblical literature, in particular that of the "house of the father" and the "house of the mother."[3] The classic expression of this type of dwelling was a domestic structure that included parallel long-room spaces divided by pillars at the front of the structure and a broad-room constructed at the rear

[2] Rainer Albertz and Rudiger Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012),

[3] Lawrence Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel," *BASOR* 260 (1985), 1–35; J. David Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001); Carol Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford, 2012), 112–113; Cynthia Chapman, *The House of the Mother: The Social Roles of Maternal Kin in Biblical Hebrew Narrative and Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

of the building.[4] This house-type therefore comprised a larger communal space for daily activities that involved all members of the household (and included animals) and several smaller rooms of about equal size, which were used for a variety of activities.

In examining such houses, we should also consider their construction materials, size, orientation, as well as their internal space syntax, and the multi-sensory aspects of religion.[5] The "four-room house" also included a variety of things—grinding slabs, pithoi, tools, jewelry, dishes and other objects—that shaped the human perception and ritual use of the space. These "things" worked together to render the house a sensescape of religion. To refer to the house as a sensescape is to emphasize the ways in which the sensory affordances of these things produced religion in this space. Archaeologists have worked to contextualize these things within the design and function of specific rooms in this domestic space, with an eye for which things may have had religious functions.[6] Now we can adopt a material religion approach and ask how the house formed a sensory envelope and how the multi-sensory aspects of both the natural and built environments of the dwelling lodged religion in the bodies of the

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[4] Yigal Shiloh, "The Four-Room House: Its Situation and Function in the Israelite City," *Israel Exploration Journal* 20 (1970), 180–190; Avraham Faust and Shlomo Bunimovitz, "The Four-room House: Embodying Israelite Society," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 66 (2003), 22–31; James W. Hardin, "Understanding Houses, Households, and the Levantine Archaeological Record," in *Household Archaeology in Ancient Israel and Beyond*, ed. Assaf Yasur-Landau, Jennie R. Ebeling, and Laura B. Mazow (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 9–25; Bruce Routledge, "Household Archaeology in the Levant," *BASOR* 370 (2013), 207–219.

[5] Avraham Faust, "Doorway Orientation, Settlement Planning and Cosmology in Ancient Israel during Iron Age II," *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 20 (2001), 129–155; Yuval Gadot, "Houses and Households in Settlements along the Yarkon River, Israel, during the Iron Age I: Society, Economy, and Identity," in *Household Archaeology in Ancient Israel and Beyond* (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 50; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 155–181.

[6] E. A. R. Willett, Women and Household Shrines in Ancient Israel (PhD diss.: The University of Arizona, 1999); P. M. Michèle Daviau, "Family Religion: Evidence for the Paraphernalia of the Domestic Cult," in *The World of the Arameans II: Studies in the History and Archaeology in Honour of Paul-Eugene Dion*, eds. P. M. Michèle Daviau, John W. Wevers, and Michael Weigl (Sheffield: Academic Press, 2001), 199–229; James W. Hardin, "Understanding Domestic Space: An Example from Tel Halif," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 67/2 (2004), 71–83; Aaron J. Brody, "'Those Who Add House to House': Household Archaeology and the Use of Domestic Space in an Iron II Residential Compound at Tell en-Naṣbeh," in *Exploring the Longue Durée: Essays in Honor of Lawrence E. Stager*, ed. J. David Schloen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 45–56; Anne Katrine Gudme, "Inside-Outside: Domestic Living Space in Biblical Memory," in *Memory and the City in Ancient Israel*, ed. Diana Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 61–78.

family. A material religion approach reminds us that the house was the place *par excellence* where the senses were most effectively integrated to produce and activate religion.

This approach has the benefit of highlighting the fluidity of the house, both in terms of how its members moved through the spaces of the house as well as the question of the types of relationships enacted between this structure and the spaces outside of it (tombs, local sanctuaries, gateways, temples, etc.).[7] It also highlights that while religion permeated all of the house, it was manifest in different ways across the various rooms of the dwelling and its different members. While many studies focus upon the dwelling's horizontal layout, we should also emphasize its vertical dimensions, especially given that both the archaeological and textual evidence point to the roof as a space of religious activity.[8]

The study of the "four-room" house and its subtypes in archaeology has also played a significant role in liberating the study of Israelite and Judean religions from the categorizations of "official" vs. "popular" religion. This binary classification is largely reflective of a face-value reading of the biblical text, where the ideology of biblical writers both drove the composition and framing of religion.[9] A focus upon the four-room house as a space of religion, however, offers a way beyond these more traditional conceptualizations of religion. Most notably, the house is no longer assumed to have been

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[7] Saul M. Olyan, "Family Religion in Israel and the Wider Levant of the First Millennium BCE," in *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity*, eds. John Bodel and Saul M. Olyan (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 113–126; Susan Niditch, "Experiencing the Divine: Heavenly Visits, Earthly Encounters and the Land of the Dead," in *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah*, 11–22; Christoph Uehlinger, "Distinctive or Diverse? Conceptualizing Ancient Israelite Religion in its Southern Levantine Setting," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 4 (2015), 17–22.

[8] Rainer Albertz, "Family Religion in Ancient Israel and Its Surroundings," in *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity*, 96; Jeff Cooley, "Astral Religion in Ugarit and Ancient Israel," *JNES* 70/2 (2011), 281–287.

[9] Ziony Zevit, "False Dichotomies in Descriptions of Israelite Religion: A Problem, Its Origin, and a Proposed Solution," in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestinae*, ed. William G. Dever and Seymour Gitin (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 223–235; Anne Katrine Gudme, "Modes of Religion: An Alternative to 'popular/official' Religion," in *Anthropology and the Bible: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Emmanuel Pfoh (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2010), 77–104; Francesca Stavrakopoulou, "'Popular' Religion and 'Official' Religion: Practice, Perception, Portrayal," in *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah*, 37–58.

necessarily in tension with larger communal and state-sponsored ritual practices, but rather to have opened out to and held reciprocal relationships with other spaces and practices.[10]

An approach to the house which begins by building a portrait of religion through the archaeology of the space that these communities liveD in, experienced, and used on a daily basis, also opens up the study of Israelite religion to new and underemphasized avenues (identity, gender, adornment, sensory studies, etc.). The house was not merely the stage for social and religious engagement, but was an actor in religion. Like the members of the family, it was a "living being" with a "life" that may be measured materially and reconstructed archaeologically.[11] This approach allows us to recognize—as Julia Hendon stresses—that houses, "are not merely containers for everyday life…they are a background that actively but nonconceptually contributes to people's understanding of their identities and their relations to others."[12] This means that houses were not only built and destroyed but they entered into dialectical relationships and were entangled with their inhabitants as they participated in the building of families and the lives and lifecycles of the household.[13] As Catherine P. Foster and Bradley J. Parker emphasize, "Houses are not static entities but dynamic extensions of people that both serve as the primary socializing agent (in the Bourdieuan sense of *habitus*) and share similar cycles of birth, aging, and dying."[14] The dialectical relationship that they shared with their inhabitants is also reflected in the wide variety of ways that they

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[10] Michael D. Press, "A Problem of Definition: "Cultic" and "Domestic" Contexts in Philistia," in *Household Archaeology in Ancient Israel and Beyond*, 361–390.

[11] Avraham Faust et al., "The Birth, Life and Death of an Iron Age House at Tel 'Eton, Israel," *Levant* 49/2 (2017), 136–173.

[12] Julia A. Hendon, *Houses in a Landscape: Memory and Everyday Life in Mesoamerica* (Material Worlds; Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2010), 96.

[13] Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationship between Humans and Things* (Malden, MA: John Wiley and Sons, 2012); R. R. Wilk and L. R. Rathje, "Household Archaeology," *American Behavioral Scientist* 25 (1982), 617–640.

[14] "Household Archaeology in the Near East and Beyond," in *New Perspectives on Household Archaeology*, ed. Bradley J. Parker and Catherine P. Foster (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 5.

became the object of curses against human labor and livelihood in the biblical texts (Deut. 28:30; Amos 5:11; Zeph. 1:13).[15]

More recent studies of domestic religion examine how practices of sustenance and protection infused religion within the house and its members, with a particular focus upon the ritual knowledge and expertise of women.[16] Such studies also emphasize the significance of studying the house as a gendered space, both in the sense that it was experienced differently by women and men, and also in the sense that its spaces were gendered based upon the distribution of labor, expertise, and practice.[17] This is an important step in approaching the topic of domestic religion as it places emphasis upon how religious experience related to the distribution of labor and the use of spaces by the specific members of the household.

Susan Ackerman, Carol Meyers, and Beth Alpert Nakhai in particular have also highlighted that the religious expertise and activities of women served as a template for rituals in larger, public, and communal settings in the ancient southern Levant.[18] The expertise of

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[15] Jeremy D. Smoak, "Building Houses and Planting Vineyards: The Inner-biblical Discourse on an Ancient Israelite Wartime Curse," *JBL* 127 (2008), 19–35.

[16] Susan Ackerman, "Household Religion, Family Religion, and Women's Religion in Ancient Israel," in *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity*, ed. John Bodel and Saul Olyan (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), 127–158; Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988; idem, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Jennie R. Ebeling, *Women's Lives in Biblical Times* (London: T & T Clark, 2010); Beth Alpert Nakhai, "Varieties of Religious Expression in the Domestic Setting," Household Archaeology in Ancient Israel and Beyond," 347–360.

[17] Susan Ackerman, "'And the Women Knead Dough': The Worship of the Queen of Heaven in Sixth-Century Judah," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 109–124; Carol Meyers, "From Field Crops to Food: Attributing Gender and Meaning to Bread Production in Iron Age Israel," in *The Archaeology of Difference: Gender, Ethnicity, Class, and the "Other" in Antiquity: Studies in Honor of Eric M. Meyers*, ed. Douglas R. Edwards and C. Thomas McCullough (Boston, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2007) 67-84.; Jennie R. Ebeling and Michael M. Homan, "Baking and Brewing Beer in the Israelite Household: A Study of Women's Cooking Technology," in *The World of Women in the Ancient and Classical Near East*, ed. Beth Alpert Nakhai (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), 45–62; Chapman, *The House of the Mother*, 36–37.

[18] Susan Ackerman, "Women and the Worship of Yahweh in Ancient Israel," in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever*, ed. Seymour Gitin, J. P. Dessel, and J. Edward Wright (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbruans, 2003), 189–197; Carol Meyers, *Household and Holiness: The Religious Culture of Israelite Women* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005); idem, "Household

women over technology and space contributed to their social power in the household and in the wider community.[19] For these and other reasons, Carol Meyers argues that the terminology *heterarchy*, which recognizes that multiple power structures exist within a society and within specific social spaces, serves as a more appropriate lens for analyzing gender dynamics in domestic religion.[20] Such emphases mitigate the tendency to elevate temple-based rituals or to center reconstructions of Israelite religion upon priestly theology (that is, the biblical descriptions of temple ritual), which also tended to diminish the contributions of women to religious practice.[21] In this way, these more recent approaches rehabilitate the house as the place *par excellence* of religion by drawing attention to the ways in which its members, practices, and things opened up to, complemented, and mapped religion in larger communal spaces.

A Material Religion Approach

The present study builds upon these recent studies by asking how a *material religion* approach might be applied meaningfully to the study of domestic religion in the southern Levant. Despite the abundant material evidence from the archaeological record, locating religion in the house continues to pose certain challenges, in terms of both definition and visibility. We see in past studies that much of the larger effort of studying the material culture rests in attempts to explain how materials *reflect* religious belief or to determine functional

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Religion," in *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah*, ed. Francesca Stavrakopoulou and John Barton (T & T Clark International, 2010), 118–134; idem, "Material Remains and Social Relations: Women's Culture in Agrarian Households of the Iron Age," in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past:* 425–443; Beth Alpert Nakhai, "Women in Israelite Religion: The State of the Research Is All New Research," *Religions* 10 (2019) doi:10.3390/rel10020122; idem, "The Household as Sacred Space."

[19] Carol Meyers, "Having Their Space and Eating There Too: Bread Production and Female Power in Ancient Israelite Households," *Nashim* 5 (Fall, 5763/2022), 30; see also Meyers, "Contributing to Continuity: Women and Sacrifice in Ancient Israel," in *Women, Religion, and the Gift: An Abundance of Riches (Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures*, ed. Morny Joy (Cham: Spring, 2017), 1–19; idem, "Feast Days and Food Ways: Religious dimensions of household life," in *Family and household religion: Toward a synthesis of Old Testament studies, archaeology, epigraphy, and cultural studies*, ed. Rainer Albertz, Beth Alpert Nakhai, Saul. M. Olyan, and Rudiger Schmitt (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 225–250.

[20] "Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133/1 (2014), 8–27.

[21] Nakhai, "The Household as Sacred Space," 186.

meanings. This is particularly the case in the study of those remains from domestic contexts, which are often interpreted as a way to understand how the beliefs and practices of non-official religion differed from that of the picture of belief in the textual evidence. A material religions approach, however, challenges this tendency by arguing that materials should not be interpreted primarily as reflections or expressions of beliefs or ideas.[22] Instead, as Birgit Meyer, David Morgan, Chris Paine, and Brent Plate stress, "A materialized study of religion begins with the assumption that things, their use, their valuation, and their appeal are not something *added* to a religion, but rather inextricable from it."[23] While archaeologists have long led the way in developing these theoretical observations, students of religion and biblical studies have often lagged behind in developing approaches that integrate questions of materiality fully into the study of religion.

For this reason, the present study gives priority of focus to the many *things* of religion that have been uncovered in domestic spaces and spaces connected to the lifecycle of the household. This includes a focus upon not only figurines, amulets, lamps, cult stands, model shrines, beads, shells, clothing, astragali, etc., but also the many things related to the family's sustenance (dishes, storejars, food, drink, etc.).[24] A focus upon the many things of the house draws attention to religion's deep embeddedness within the daily lives of the household. The past few decades have seen important work in cataloguing and describing a variety things that come from various contexts in the archaeological record of Syria-Palestine, including amulets, cult stands, figurines, and a variety of additional cultic objects related to the house.[25]

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[22] Raja and Rüpke, "Archaeology of Religion, Material Religion, and the Ancient World," in *A Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World*, eds. Rubina Raja and Jörg Rüpke (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 3–4.
[23] "The Origin and Mission of Material Religion," *Religion* 40/3 (2010), 210.
[24] See Sonia Hazard, "The Material Turn in the Study of Religion," *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 4 (2013), 58–78; see also Susan Niditch, *The Responsive Self: Personal Religion of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian Periods* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), 90–105.
[25] It is beyond the scope of the present study to cite all of the relevant studies. For a description and bibliography, see Albertz and Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion*, 57–219.

An emphasis upon the things of religion, however, means not only to consider their typology but also the affordances inherent to their physicality, or how their physical properties affected and guided human action (e.g., the clay and breakable nature of a clay vessel, or cultic stand, or figurine, vs. a heavy stone altar.)[26] Drawing upon the work of Bill Brown and others, I employ the terminology of *thing* here in this study to create more room for a rethinking of the agency of objects and by extension the dialectic of people and things.[27] As Nicole Boivin stresses, "…the material world acts on the social world in a real way, not just because of its ability to act as a carrier for ideas and concepts, but also because its very materiality exerts a force that in human hands becomes a social force."[28] This involves moving beyond a concern with understanding the function of a thing to a consideration of how its sensory affordances influenced human action. We can ask, for example, how the chemical composition and sensory affordances of amulets played a role in their ritual power.

While we are often drawn to the impressive size and durability of large altars and temple complexes associated with state or civic religion, we should remember that it is those rituals that are so easily deployable across space and time and those small portable objects and fragile organic materials that most effectively lodge religion in the house. As Timothy Carroll reminds us, "While fragile materials may last only a short time, the gestured thing is fleeting. It is not just ephemeral; it is fugacious, gone even as it is made. It is even less durable than fabric and ribbon relics; as such it is also even more deployable. It may be used to bless everything."[29] This is where the textual evidence is especially helpful as a complement to the picture of those durable materials turned up in the archaeological record. The biblical texts are replete with prayers, blessings, songs, name-

[26] Sonia Hazard, "Thing," *Early American Studies* 16/4 (2018), 792–800.
[27] Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28/1 (2001), 1–22.
[28] *Material Cultures, Material Minds: The Impact of Things on Human Thought, Society, and Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 6.
[29] Timothy Carroll, "Im/material Objects: Relics, Gestured Signs, and the Substance of the Immaterial," in *Materiality and the Study of Religion: The Stuff of the Sacred*, ed. T. Hutchings and J. McKenzie (London: Routledge, 2016), 129.

giving rituals, oaths, and other readily deployable rituals that were used to mark moments in the human lifecycle and moments in the life of the physical structure of the domestic dwelling.[30]

Therefore, in order to balance an investigation into the importance that the physicality and design of the dwelling and its more durable installations and things played in mediating religion, a material religion approach would also ask how those organic and ephemeral materials that do not leave much trace in archaeology—food, drink, incense, hallucinogens, *materia medica*, etc.—contributed to religion in the house.[31] It is these very ephemeral materials that leave such small traces in the archaeological record that might have had the most important role in producing and lodging religion in the bodies of the household. This approach also challenges a picture of domestic religion that overemphasizes the walls as boundaries of the house since an emphasis upon food, drink, incense, etc. points to the house's relationship with and the household's dependence upon the family field, the natural landscape, and larger networks of sustenance and exchange. For this reason, it is fruitful to consider the dynamic relationship between "house" and "household," as recent studies have highlighted.[32] At the same time, a focus upon both the physical dwelling and the ephemeral materials of religion also pushes us to consider how the compacted space of the dwelling amplified the effects of such organic materials and focused sensory experience around the family's sustenance and celebration of divine blessings.

A material religion approach also reminds us that we might have a difficult time locating religion in the house because we do not ask how *all* the senses—the *taste and smell* of a meal or the *sight* and *feel* of jewelry—mediated religion. Most of our focus in the study of religion in the house tends to proceed from an analysis of textual evidence or from the study of the possible religious function of certain objects

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[30] Albertz and Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion*, 271–273–387–427; Patrick Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 71–75.
[31] Erhard Gerstenberger, "Healing Rituals at the Intersection of Family and Society," in *Family and Household Religion*, 165–181.
[32] Wilk and Rathje, "Household Archaeology," 617–640; Foster and Parker, "Household Archaeology in the Near East and Beyond," 1–15.

without asking how such evidence reflects the way that religion engaged the senses. We are quick to say that nothing *feels* like home, but our approach to religion in this space often does not help us *sense* the house as the place where the somatic landscape of the body was most activated for and attuned to religious experience. For this reason, we might broaden our focus to ask how the house functioned as a *smellscape* and *soundscape*, or more broadly, as I suggest below, a *sensescape*, that is, a place where the senses converged to produce religious experience.[33] Focusing upon the sensory aspects of religion challenges Otto's "idea of the holy" as something "Other" as the meal's flavor and taste internalized religion within the body and rendered the divine "hyperpalatable."[34] Indeed, the great variety of ways that religion infuses diet in the biblical texts illustrates the great role that food plays in shaping identity.[35] A focus upon the senses also challenges the tendency to define religion in the house *within* the walls of the house as such sensory stimuli have the ability to permeate the walls of the structure and bring the smell of the first fruits of the harvest and the light of daybreak into the space of the dwelling.

Understanding how the house functioned as a "sensescape," then, requires us to think beyond economics and production in order to consider how *taste* and *smell* and *sound*—or perhaps better, the intersensoriality of materials—generated religion in the house.[36] Recent studies by Cynthia Schafer-Elliot, Nathan MacDonald, and Rebekah Welton on foodstuffs have already pave the way for gaining a clearer sense of how the taste and smell mediated religion in this

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[33] On the terminology of sensescape and closely related terminologies, see Alison K. Thomason, "The Sense-scapes of Neo-Assyrian Capital Cities: Royal Authority and Bodily Experience," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 26/2 (2016), 243–264; Kiersten Neumann, "Reading the Temple of Nabu as a Coded Sensory Experience," *Iraq* 80 (2018), 181–211.

[34] Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, "'Truly the Ear Tests Words and the Palette Tests Foods" (Job 12:11): Synaesthetic Food Metaphors for the Experience of the Divine in Jewish Tradition," in *Food and Language: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2009*, ed. Richard Hosking (Devon: Prospect Books, 2010), 42–51.

[35] See Nathan MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone: The Uses of Food in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[36] Yannis Hamilakis, "Archaeologies of the Senses," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Ritual and Religion*, ed. Timothy Insoll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 208–225.

space.[37] By focusing upon the house as a sensescape, I hope to avoid the tendency to reduce religion in the house to the "ordinary" or "everyday" and instead use Jane Bennett's notion of enchantment, which draws attention to the affective experiences of things and spaces.[38] To be enchanted, according to Bennett, "is to be struck and shaken by the extraordinary *that lives amid the familiar and the everyday*…to be simultaneously transfixed in wonder and transported by sense, to be caught up and carried away—enchantment is marked by this odd combination of somatic effects."[39] When we include the *flavor* of a festival meal and the *sound* of family reciting memories and the *smell* of clothing and the *absence* of family, religion in the house becomes more readily palpable *because* the transporting to another space happens in a familiar space. This approach also reminds us that while we may be tempted to look for a "space" or a "type" of religion in the house, the most characteristic features of domestic religion are its deep integration within the space of the house and the bodies of its members, its infusion with the daily activities and lifecycles of the household, and its ephemerality and immateriality.[40]

Religion's Infusion in Rituals of Protection

The larger purpose of this section is to demonstrate several points about religion in this space: 1) material evidence for religious activity is diffused throughout the space of the house; 2) this suggests that there is no "fixed" space for religion in these rooms; rather, the material things of religion are blended and infused in scope and in location and in many cases travel with the members of the house. We might say that ritual space in these houses is defined by architectural structures or fixtures but also by things and activities that were part

[37] Cynthia Shafer-Elliot, *Food in Ancient Judah: Domestic Cooking in the Time of the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2012); Rebekah Welton, *'He is a Glutton and a Drunkard': Deviant Consumption in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); idem, "Ritual and the Agency of Food in Ancient Israel and Judah: Food Features in Biblical Studies," *Biblical Interpretation* 25 (2017), 609–624; Nathan MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone*; idem, *What Did The Ancient Israelites Eat? Diet in Biblical Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).
[38] Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
[39] Ibid, 4–5 (italics mine).
[40] Emily Harris, "At Home with Religion in Renaissance Italy," *Material Religion* 13/4 (2017), 547–548.

of the domestic tasks of the house;[41] and 3) the tasks and activities done in the house and the objects used for such purposes served multiple functions related to the physical wellbeing and protection of the household. This suggests that the rituals of wellbeing were activities embedded into the day-to-day work of the household.[42]

What is perhaps most characteristic about religion in the house is the absence of a fixed space for religious activity. By fixed space, I mean a spatially bounded architectural fixture that was built into the interior of a dwelling or room. To be sure, several early Iron Age sites exhibit evidence of spaces designated as "cult corners" or "domestic shrines," including et-Tell (Ai), Megiddo, Lachish, and several others.[43] The presence of such cult corners is usually indicated by a bench-like structure within a room that also contains the remains of several objects that served ritual functions. In certain contexts, there is also evidence that a room may have been designed as a specific area for religious practice within a neighborhood or clustering of houses. In these cases, such a space may have served as a type of neighborhood shrine officiated by a village elder or ritual specialist.[44]

In the majority of houses, however, there is no clear evidence for a built-up area that marks the differentiation between "sacred" and "profane" activities. Instead, the affordances of the Israelite common area in a house were blurred.[45] Religion in the house was formed by spatial proximity between religious and utilitarian vessels—and indeed, the flexibility of objects to take on different personalities—and the ways in which the members of the household coordinated such objects.[46] Activities for domestic production and consumption and family life were blurred with activities that we

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[41] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (trans. R. Nice; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
[42] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Here, There, and Anywhere," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*, ed. Jonathan Z. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004), 323–339; Stavrakopoulou, "Religion at Home," 346.
[43] See Willett, *Women and Household Shrines*, 158–164; Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 652–655; Nakhai, "Varieties of Religious Expression," 190–191; "The Household as Sacred Space," 57–58.
[44] Nakhai, "The Household as Sacred Space," 66.
[45] Stavrakopoulou, "Religion at Home," 346.
[46] Albertz and Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion*, 225.

would consider "ritual" or "cultic."[47] The house was a multipurpose space and religion was embedded in all aspects of Israelite life. As Zevit stresses, "To be an Israelite meant to share the Israelite way of life, to consider the world through its worldview, to be woven into the fabric of its coherent socio-religio-cultic world…"[48] To put it another way, the most characteristic feature of domestic religion was its integration into the space of the house and the various activities that the household enacted to provide sustenance, health, and protection for the family.[49]

Excavations demonstrate that the household employed a variety of technologies to protect the space of the house and its inhabitants. Such objects included a variety of figurines, amulets of many different types, lamps, beads, shells, clothing, and a number of other objects and materials. A house from the early Iron Age at Tel Masos offers a starting point for exploring the great variety of ways that concerns over protection were expressed in the house.[50] Located in the Beersheba Valley, the site of Tel Masos sits about 10 km to the east of the town of Beersheba. Stratum II, which dates to the 12th and 11th centuries B.C.E., represents the main period of occupation at the site. House 314 at the site, which dates to the eleventh or tenth centuries, preserved the remains of a number of cultic artifacts. In addition to ovens, loom weights, and many examples of cooking ware, excavations of the house also turned up four figurines that the excavators connected to the worship of the Egyptian goddess Hathor.[51] Another room in House 314 contained an assemblage of cultic objects. In Room 331, excavators discovered several objects, including three offering bowls with pedestals, three lamps, numerous shells from the Red Sea, and an ivory lion head made in the Canaanite-Phoenician style. Scholars have interpreted the use of these specific objects, particularly incense burners, shells, beads, and

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[47] Smith, "Here, There, and Anywhere," 323–339.

[48] "The Textual and Sociological Embeddedness of Israelite Family Religion. Who are the Players? Where Were the Stages?" in *Family and Household Religion*, 290.

[49] Albertz and Schmitt, *Family Religion and Household Religion*, 227.

[50] Volkmar Fritz and Aharon Kempinski, *Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen auf der Hirbet El-Msas (Tel Masos), 1972–1975* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983).

[51] Willett, *Women and Household Shrines*, 108.

lamps, to reflect concerns over protecting members of the house from various threats.[52]

The houses discovered in Lachish III along Road 1087 provide another glimpse into the types of religious objects associated with domestic dwellings.[53] Although there were few remains of cult stands or similar objects, the dwellings preserved a rich array of micro-artifacts related to religious activity, such as amulets, beads, figurines, and shells. These objects were discovered together with a variety of cooking vessels such as storage jars, jugs, strainer spouts, bowls, and cooking pots. In House 1032, the excavators discovered a variety of objects related to apotropaic concerns including beads, shells, a faience Nefertum amulet, and a carnelian spacer. In another group of houses along Road 1087, excavators discovered an array of religious objects associated with concerns for protection of the house and its members. Among such objects were pendants, beads, shells, a green faience quadruple Horus eye amulet, and a bone disk that was punctured for suspension.

A major concern of all of the apotropaic items found in these contexts is the protection of the space of the house and the members of the household.[54] Comparative evidence suggests that the focus of many such strategies was the health of women and children, and a concern with the uncertainties and dangers of reproduction. Due to such dangers, women lived about ten years less than men on average and about thirty percent of children did not survive to the age of

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[52] Ibid, 109.

[53] Olga Tufnell, *Lachish III: The Iron Age* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953; Willett, *Women and Household Shrines*, 335.

[54] Willett, *Women and Household Shrines*, 292–388; Meyers, "From Household to House of Yahweh," 281–289; Abigail Limmer, *The Social Functions and Ritual Significance of Jewelry in the Iron Age II Southern Levant* (PhD diss., The University of Arizona, 2007); Nakhai, "The Household as Sacred Space," 57–58; Kristine Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel: Children in Material Culture and Biblical Texts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2018), 111–136. For a helpful discussion of the term "apotropaic" as a category for the study of these objects, see Erin Darby, *Interpreting Judean Pillar Figurines: Gender and Empire in Judean Apotropaic Ritual* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 5–13.

three.[55] Evidence suggests that Bes was employed more directly to the protection of women and children during childbirth.[56] Excavations of houses at other sites in the southern Levant also reflect the wide appeal that Egyptian gods and their powers had in the domestic sphere. Common types of amulets found at these other sites include Bes amulets and amulets bearing the Memphite triad Sekhmet, Nefertum, and Pataikos.[57] The *wedjat*-eye amulet held an especially important place in the mythology of protection in Egypt and surrounding regions. Egyptian texts connect the setting of the *wedjat*-eye amulet upon the body to notions of protection against evil.[58]

A material religion approach to the various apotropaic materials used in the house would emphasize the materiality of the objects and the way that their materiality engaged the senses. Recent studies on amulets and ritual objects have increasingly turned their attention to a focus upon the physical properties of such objects, with a focus upon how such properties played a part in guiding their ritual meaning and application.[59] As David Frankfurter emphasizes regarding the materiality of magical gemstones, "…the stones were

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55 Beth Alpert Nakhai, "When Considering Infants and Jar Burials in the Middle Bronze Age Southern Levant," in *Tell It in Gath: Studies in the History and Archaeology of Israel. Essays in Honor of Aren M. Maier on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Itzhaq Shai, Jeffrey R. Chadwick, Louise Hitchcock, Amit Dagan, Chris McKinney, and Joe Uzziel (Münster: Zaphon, 2018), 109.

56 Geraldine Pinch, "Childbirth and Female Figurines at Deir el-Medina and el-'Amarna," *Orientalia* 52/3 (1983), 405–414; Carol Andrews, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum Press, 1994), 40; Ebeling, *Women's Lives in Biblical Times*, 106; Willett, *Women and Household Shrines*, 399; Lesko, "Household and Domestic Religion in Egypt," 199.

57 Christian Herrmann, *Ägyptische Amulette aus Palästina/Israel. Mit einem Ausblick auf ihre Rezeption durch das Alte Testament* (Freiburg Schweiz—Göttingen: Universitätsverglag—Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 406–408; Thomas Staubli, "Cultural and Religious Impacts of Long-Term Cross-Cultural Migration between Egypt and the Levant," *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 12 (2016), 51–88.

58 John Darnell, "The Apotropaic Goddess in the Eye," *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 24 (1997), 35–48.

59 Christopher Faraone, "Text, Image, and Medium: The Evolution of Graeco-Roman Magical Gemstones," in *'Gems of Heaven': Recent Research on Engraved Gemstones in Late Antiquity*, ed. C. Entwistle and N. Adams (London: British Museum Press, 2011), 50–61; Jacco Dieleman, "The Materiality of Textual Amulets in Ancient Egypt," in *The Materiality of Magic*, ed. Dietrich Boschung and Jan N. Bremmer (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2015), 23–58; Natalías, "The Medium Matters: Materiality and Metaphor in Some Latin Curse Tablets," in *Material Approaches to Roman Magic: Occult Objects and Supernatural Substances*, ed. Adam Parker and Stuart McKie (Oxford: Oxbow, 2018), 9–16; David Frankfurter, "Magic and the Forces of Materiality," in *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic*, ed. David Frankfurter (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 659–677.

no decorative backdrops or vehicles for the complex iconographies with which they were inscribed. Rather, the images, phrases, and signs that craftsmen carved into them served as interpretations of—even strategies to guide—the powers in the stones themselves."[60] Such studies push us to reconsider our approach to the various ritual objects associated with domestic religion, moving us from a sole focus upon their human-made features to more of a focus upon their properties and qualities.

One way to illustrate these points would be to reexamine the ritual function of the two silver amulets discovered at Ketef Hinnom in Jerusalem.[61] Although discovered in a burial setting, they offer an important window into domestic religion in late Iron Age Judah as they were very likely used by the deceased as protective jewelry in daily life.[62] While most studies have focused upon their inscribed content and relationship to the biblical text, a material religion approach would encourage us to ask how their chemical composition as highly refined silver contributed to their ritual logic. For instance, one might consider how their silver materiality influenced or guided the semantic content that was inscribed on their interior surfaces. Both amulets contain several lines of blessings and other formula evoking the ritual power of the god Yahweh, most notably blessings with striking parallels to the biblical priestly blessing of Numbers 6:24–26. A material religion approach would argue that the inscribing of blessings invoking the shining face of Yahweh was an act that interacted with or gave verbal expression to what the chemical composition and shiny quality of the metal conveyed materially. That is, verbal allusions to the Yahweh's covenant loyalty and blessings

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[60] "Magic and the Forces of Materiality," 662–663.

[61] Gabriel Barkay, "The Priestly Benediction on Silver Plaques from Ketef Hinnom in Jerusalem," *Tel Aviv* 19 (1992), 139–191; Gabriel Barkay, Marilyn Lundberg, Andrew Vaughn, and Bruce Zuckerman," "The Amulets from Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 334 (2004), 41–71; Jeremy D. Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture: The Early History of Numbers 6:24–26* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 41–71.

[62] Matthew J. Suriano, *A History of Death in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Jeremy D. Smoak, "Wearing Divine Words: In Life and Death," *Material Religion* 15/4 (2019), 433–455; Theodore Lewis, *The Origin and Character of God: Ancient Israelite Religion through the Lens of Divinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 43.

invoking his shining face complemented silver's chemical purity and shine. This approach would also emphasize the different sensory affordances of the objects and how their design as tiny scrolls allowed the their wearers to feel the shine of Yahweh face upon the body.[63]

The variety of expression represented in these various ritual objects described above also reflects the house's deep entanglement with diverse historical, cultural, political, and religious forces, intersecting cultural identities, and shifting power dynamics. Houses not only express religion but they also store it as they become the spaces *par excellence* for the wedding of local family histories and individual biographies with larger political and cultural forces and histories. One example of this is the way that the biblical texts recall how local harvest festivals came to be connected to cultural memories of national deliverance (Deut. 16:1–17).[64] The variety of expression that we find in the material remains of domestic dwellings like Tel Masos and Tell el-Farah (N) point to the great religious bricolage of the house, or the way that the house gave coherence to a range of diverse things, traditions, lives, and experiences of the household across time and space. This may also point to the complexity of the cultural environment of the southern Levant and the possibility that such objects do not reflect cultural appropriation but rather the multi-cultural character of these domestic settings.[65]

The lamp is one of the most common objects discovered in domestic dwellings. While this object's functional purpose is obvious, understanding its religious import is more difficult to elucidate.

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[63] Smoak, "Wearing Divine Words," 440. See also Smoak, "'You Have Refined Us Like Silver is Refined' (Ps 66:10): Yahweh's Metallurgical Powers in Ancient Judah," *AABNER* 1, no. 3 (2021), 81–115.

[64] MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone*, 70–99.

[65] Norma Franklin, "The Kushite Connection: The Destruction of Lachish and the Salvation of Jerusalem," in *Tell it in Gath: Studies in the History and Archaeology of Israel. Essays in Honor of Aren M. Maier on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Itzhaq Shai, Jeffrey R. Chadwick, Louise Hitchcock, Amit Dagan, Chris McKinney, and Joe Uzziel (Münster: Zaphon, 2018), 680; Kristine Garroway, "(Un)dressing Children in the Lachish Reliefs: Questions of Gender, Status, and Ethnicity," *NEA* 83/1 (2020), 46–55; Aaron A. Burke, "Left Behind: New Kingdom Specialists at the End of the Egyptian Empire and the Emergence of Israelite Scribalism," in *"An Excellent Fortress for his Armies, a Refuge for the People": Egyptological, Archaeological, and Biblical Studies in Honor of James K. Hoffmeier*, ed. Richard E. Averbeck and K. Lawson Younger (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2020), 50–66.

Lamps have been found near doorways, suggesting their use in relation to movement from the courtyard spaces of houses to darker interior rooms or the upper floor.[66] Lamps are frequently found together in such settings with figurines, model furniture, incense burners, beads, shells, and other religious objects. Several studies have argued that the wide presence of lamps together with incense burners and other objects in Israelite houses points to their function in protective rituals. The lighting of a lamp may have been a ritual act that sought to attract the presence of a god or to rid a room of malevolent forces.[67] Other studies connect the use of lamps in rituals of lychnomancy, or divination by light.[68]

There is ample evidence in the biblical texts that the flame of a lamp was thought to mediate Yahweh's presence in the house. This is not surprising given that the term "lamp" appears as an epithet of gods, especially sun-deities in ancient near eastern texts.[69] According to several biblical texts, the light of a lamp mediates Yahweh's presence and guides individuals through life. Perhaps the strongest reflex of this appears in 2 Samuel 22:29, which states that Yahweh *is* a lamp and that the god illumines darkness. That the verse reflects the role that lamps played in personal religion is indicated by the repetition of personal pronouns: "You are *my* lamp, O Yahweh; and Yahweh illumines *my* darkness." In other literary contexts, the lamp is associated more directly with divine words and teaching. The biblical texts emphasize the role that Yahweh's lamp and light play in guiding the steps of an individual: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a

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[66] Avraham Faust et al., "The Birth, Life and Death of an Iron Age House," 157–158.

[67] Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 398.

[68] Athanassia Zografou, "Magic Lamps, Luminous Dreams: Lamps in *PGM Recipes*," in *Light and Darkness in Ancient Greek Myth and Religion*, ed. Menelaos Christopoulos, Efimia D. Karakantza, and Olga Levaniouk (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 269–294; R. Gordon, "Reporting the Marvellous: Private Divination in the Greek Magical Papyri," in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, ed. P. Schäfer and H. G. Kippenberg (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 83–84; J. Gee, "The Structure of Lamp Divination," in *Acts of the Seventh International Conference of Demotic Studies*, ed. K. Ryolt (Copenhagen, 2002), 207–218.

[69] Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life* (Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East 7; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 129.

light to my path" (Ps. 119:105); "When his lamp shone over my head; and by his light I walked through darkness" (Job 29:3).

A material religion approach would draw attention to the sensory affordances of the lamp in order to emphasize the way that it engaged the somatic landscape of the body. The lamp's significance as a mediator of religion rested in its ability to produce intersensorial experience. The feel of light in the hand produced a warmth to the eye that put Yahweh's presence within arm's reach. Beyond serving as metaphors for divine light, the texts described above reflect the role that lamps played in illuminating consciousness of the divine in personal space. As a lamp casts a sharp contrast between light and dark in the immediate space of the body its power lies in its ability to mediate divine presence in close proximity to the body, or what Bille and Sørensen describe as a type of lightscape that creates "intimate spaces."[70]

The heat produced by the small flame in the lamp would have also produced a sensation of warmth to the hand. In this way, the references to body parts in these biblical texts (my *head* and my *feet*) conveys the lamp's role in producing personal religion. The light that the lamp casts over the feet and the path of the individual creates a safe space in which there is heightened awareness of the proximity of the divine against the background of a room's darkness. As Katherine Sorrell stresses, light "reveals, and delineates space: the better the light the better our sense and appreciation of a space."[71] By this I mean that the flickering of the lamp's light would have illuminated and animated the religious objects available in a room of a house. Egyptian and classical sources associate the light of lamps with the practice of illuminating divine statues and animating religious figurines.[72]

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[70] Mikkel Bille and Tim Sørensen, "An Anthropology of Luminosity: The Agency of Light," *Journal of Material Culture* 12/3 (2007), 275.

[71] K. Sorrell, *Space and Light: how to Maximize the Potential of Your Home* (Markham: Octopus Publishing Group, 2005), 58.

[72] Zografou, "Magic Lamps, Luminous Dreams," 283.

We end this section by drawing attention to great variety of expression of religion in the house. The description of the things of religion offered above not only points to the value of protective technologies in this space, but also to the religious bricolage of the house. Rather than viewing the many things of religion in this space through a binary lens of "official" vs. "domestic" religion, we might view them as offering a rich picture of how the varieties of religious expression reflected intersecting histories, relationships, identities, and power dynamics across time and space. An amulet could be both a protective thing and an heirloom that had value because it mediated family history and the way that the family's history infused the gods. The abundance of Egyptianizing amulets found in domestic contexts attests to the practice of appropriating traditions and imbuing them with local and hybrid identities.

The House as Sensescape

To this point, the present analysis has addressed the ways in which religion was diffused through the space of Iron Age family dwellings in the southern Levant, focusing on the things used to protect the house. This picture of religion is reflected both in the textual descriptions of house spaces and family-centered practices carried out in the dwelling and adjacent spaces. The archaeological evidence for domestic spaces and practices also speaks to how religion was enacted throughout the house. In the following section, we can now put together the various pieces of textual and material evidence and reconstruct the experience of religion in the house. The following description of the material remains from two Iron Age dwellings—store jars, juglets, cooking pots, kraters, standing stones, figurines, fenestrated stands, charcoal, cereal, fish bones, shells, etc.—illustrates the variety of ways in which religion infused daily life in the house, with an emphasis upon the rituals of sustenance that stood at the heart of the household's daily activities. The ways in which these things are integrated in the material remains of these houses points to the way that religion was deeply embedded within the family meal and the seasonal festivals.

First, I will draw upon the biblical text to illustrate some of the uses of these things in activities of food preparation, storages, and consumption but also in ritual. Thereafter, I will describe two domestic spaces and the evidence for such. The main aim of this case study is to demonstrate that religion was not only infused with the various objects that the house used for protection, but also with the labor, expertise, and produce of the family's work to sustain the household. By drawing attention to the way that ritual integrated the foodstuffs, drinks, etc. in the house, we can reconstruct the ways in which bodies would have experienced the house as a *sensescape* and the way that the family meal served as a sensory envelope for the members of the household.

Before describing two Iron Age houses, we can look to the biblical text for an understanding of how the things used in food preparation and consumption mediated religion. One of the best illustrations that we have of the way that the meal mediated religion appears in the description of the *tĕrûmāh* offering in Numbers 15:17–21:[73]

> [17] The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: [18] Speak to the Israelites and say to them: After you come into the land to which I am bringing you, [19] whenever you eat of the bread of the land, you shall present a donation to the LORD. [20] From your first batch of dough you shall present a loaf as a donation; you shall present it just as you present a donation from the threshing floor. [21] Throughout your generations you shall give to the LORD a donation from the first of your batch of dough.

In stipulating the offering, the text focuses upon the land upon which the food will be produced and harvested (v. 18), the use of a threshing floor space to prepare food (v. 20), the consumption of the food (v. 19), and the ritual offering of food to Yahweh (vv. 19–21). The text constructs an ancient Israelite version of the "slow food movement" whereby the *tĕrûmāh* renders the daily meal a ritual act

[73] For discussion of this text, see Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (vol. 4A; New York: Anchor Yale Bible, 1993), 394–395.

that celebrates the connection between the land, food production and preparation, and the enjoyment of Yahweh's blessings in the family's consumption of the meal. Psalm 128 reflects a similar perspective of the way that the meal draws together the agricultural labor of the family and the enjoyment of this labor in the meal. The psalm defines blessing as a wife who is like a fruitful vine and the children who are like olive shoots around the table. In this way, these texts construct a view of the meal as a ritual act that located the house and its members at the center of the family's experience of divine blessing.

Women were the primary specialists of the rituals of sustenance described in these texts. This specialization extended beyond the preparation of meals and the walls of the dwelling to include economic management roles, religious performance, and material production (see Prov. 31:10–31).[74] Women planted, gathered, harvested, processed, and distributed food and were the primary specialists in the use of tools and technologies related to food production, including grinding stones, kneading implements, and baking installations (see Lev. 26:26; 1 Sam. 8:13; 28:24; 2 Sam. 13:8; 1 Kgs. 17:12–13).[75] These activities culminated around the altar of the house—the table—where the senses would have been most effectively attuned to mediate the meal as a sensory experience. The offering of sacrificial meals was also carried out by women in certain cases, pointing to the way that the house opened up to other spaces beyond it and the way that women's religious expertise influenced wider streams of religious practice (Lev 10:12–15, 23).[76]

In order to demonstrate how a material religion approach might be used to understand the space of a house as a dynamic and fluid religious space, the following describes two houses from the Iron Age southern Levant. Rather than focusing on the built structure, or

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[74] Christine Yoder, "The Woman of Substance (...): A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 31:10–31," *JBL* 122/3 (2003), 427–447.
[75] Ebeling, *Daily Lives of Women*, 186–194; Meyers, "From Field Crops to Food," 186–194; Nakhai, "The Household as Sacred Space," 65–66.
[76] Meyers, "From Household to House of Yahweh," 277–303.

the connections between the rituals enacted in such contexts and in larger, institutional contexts (a temple, for example), the analysis here focuses upon the many things of religion with an emphasis upon rituals of protection. We can start with a description of an eighth-century house at the site of Tel Halif. James Hardin's description of the space of an Iron Age dwelling found at the site offers a helpful picture of the organization of space and objects within the structure.[77] Tel Halif is located in a border region between the southwestern foothills of Judah and the Negev region. The structure described here was discovered in the northern part of the mount in Field IV and offers a glimpse into a "four-room house' style typical of Iron II dwellings. Room 1, which exhibits a square shape and is the smallest of the building's rooms, served as a storage space within the dwelling.[78] Excavation of the room revealed the remains of an oven, a cobbled floor, and a variety of ceramic vessels. The ceramic vessels discovered in the room included large storage jars, juglets, cooking jugs, and other smaller cooking vessels. The presence of remains of an oven in the room indicate that the space also functioned as a place for food preparation. Evidence that the room served purposes related to food preparation was also indicated by the presence of numerous animal bones, cereal, and traces of charcoal on the floor.

Room 2 is located toward the back of the house and measures 16.2 square meters. The room has a rectangular shape and could be accessed from two separate doors from Rooms 3 and 5 of the house. Objects discovered in this room suggest that it served a dual function related to both food consumption and perhaps also a type of cultic activity.[79] The objects included two "standing stones" (*massebot*), the head of a pillar figurine, fragments of two grinding stones, three storage jars, three pitchers, four bowls, a fenestrated stand, and two cooking pots. Analysis of micro-artifacts found in the room also indicate that the room served as a space for food consumption.[80]

[77] Hardin, "Understanding Domestic Space," 71–83.
[78] Ibid, 74–75.
[79] Ibid, 76.
[80] Ibid, 77.

Beyond the objects mentioned here, the room also contained several additional ceramic vessels, including a pithos and two store jars.

Room 3 was a narrow rectangular room located on the southern part of the house. The room contained the remains of loom weights and a bone for weaving, indicating that the room served as a space for textile production. Objects also discovered in this room included a figurine fragment, two grinding stones, four storage jars, two jugs, a weight, a seashell bead, a basalt maul, and a fragment of a mother of pearl.[81] Room 4 sits in the center of the house and likely provided entry into the space from the outside. Flagstones and packed earth served as the floor of the room. Few artifacts were discovered in this particular room, only a medium-sized bowl, a small holemouth jar, a krater and small bowl. In the southwest corner of the room, excavators also discovered a large jar that resembles the types of jars with the famous "LMLK" stamps. Micro-artifact analysis of the room also revealed the presence of fish bones, cereals, and egg shells. These finds led the excavators to suggest that the room may have served as a stable in the enclosure as well as a place for food preparation.[82]

The excavations of several domestic structures at Tall Jawa in the Transjordan provide further glimpses of domestic religion's integration within the space of a house.[83] Three domestic structures dating to the Iron IIB period (8th c.) contained numerous objects that may be interpreted as having a cultic function (B102, B113, and B200). The finds from these domestic structures come from several different rooms within the domestic structures, including storage areas, kitchens, and upper stories. Building 102 preserved evidence of several different types of objects used in the domestic cult, including ceramic figurines and miniature cultic vessels. The figurines associated with the upper stories of the structure included a ceramic male head with an *atef* crown, a stone male figure, and a baetyl made from granite. Daviau also emphasizes that the fill in several of the

81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 P. M. Michèle Daviau, *Excavations at Tall Jawa, Jordan: Volume 1: The Iron Age Town* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

rooms of the building contained the remains of numerous objects that had a cultic function, including pieces from model shrines and ceramic figurines, small bowls, a miniature lamp, a miniature mortar, and a perforated tripod cup.[84]

This house also reminds us of the vertical interconnectivity of spaces in the domestic dwelling.[85] The interconnectivity of house space extended not just to the things in one room, but also an awareness of what was taking place all around the body, next door, and also above on the second floor. Upper stories and rooftops are associated with ritual activity in several biblical texts.[86] Zephaniah 1:4–6, for instance, condemns "those who bow down on their roofs to the Host of Heaven…" Jeremiah 19:13 provides a more detailed picture of such ritual activity on rooftops, including in its description a reference to offering incense and pouring libations.

Building 300 at Tall Jawa, which also dates to the Iron IIB, also preserved an especially rich array of cultic objects with affordances that extend to ritual use.[87] Such objects included several female figurines, an animal figurine, miniature bowls, miniature cooking pots, two tiny kraters, and several additional small ceramic vessels. Daviau also notes the presence of two vessels that contain a checkerboard design incised upon their exterior surfaces.[88] One of the vessels is a juglet with a tall neck and the other is a saucer bearing a yellow slip. The wide presence of miniature and small vessels in these domestic contexts at Tell Jawa point to religion's close integration within the daily activities of food preparation and food consumption.

A material religion approach encourages us to flesh out the typology of the many cooking vessels in archaeological contexts described above and the many references to the meal in the textual evidence with a consideration for how the house was sensed as a place of

84 "Family Religion," 111.
85 For a description of the evidence for a second floor, see Daviau, *Excavations at Tall Jawa*, 149–150.
86 Cooley, "Astral Religion," 285.
87 Daviau, "Family Religion," 112.
88 Ibid.

religion. While most of our activity as scholars lies in the realm of visual analysis, we should also attend to the ways that all of the senses lodged religion in the house and the bodies of the household. It was not just the labor of producing the meal that mediated experience of divine blessing for the family, but also the smell and texture of the dough, the taste and smell of wine, and the feel of pruning the vine and the olive shoot. The references to food in these texts are not only metaphors but reflections of the power of sensory experiences to create and store cultural memory.

The repetition of these activities and the ways in which they coordinated sensory experience activated and tuned the somatic landscape of the body so that the house could be internalized by its members. It is, after all, the senses of taste and smell, in particular, that so deeply store place in the body's memory. As Birgit Meyer, David Morgan, Chris Paine, and Brent Plate emphasize, "The body enters integrally into every feeling, thought, emotion, and perception that human beings have…And bodies are the medium of social experience, the gateway to the social bodies to which individuals belong, with which they identify, through which they feel and perceive themselves, others, and the divine."[89] Indeed, the material remains from Tel Halif and Tall Jawa and the references to foodstuffs and smells in the texts described here would suggest that the house was the space where the senses were most effectively attuned and integrated to activate religion and store ritual memory. The *smell* of incense from the fenestrated stands and the *flavor* of the food from the cooking pots lodged and internalized religion in the body and stored the experience of the house in the body.

Recent studies on olfactory experience emphasize the great importance that smell plays in generating notions and memories of space. Douglas Porteous refers to the way that smells are "spatially-ordered" and "place-related" through the terminology of *smellscape*.[90] Similar to visual auditory impressions and memories, smells create

[89] "The Origin and Mission of Material Religion," 209.
[90] "Smellscape," *Progress in Physical Geography: Earth and Environment* 9/3 (1985), 356–378.

strong attachments to place and play active roles in the construction of memory.[91] This is not surprising given the role that the olfactory bulb plays in mediating and connecting the brain to the limbic system, which forms and stores memories and emotions. The limbic system functions as the most effective trigger of memory, which means that it functions to mediate past feelings and emotions in a place.[92]

While smell might not be the first sense that scholars attend to in the study of religion, recent studies have begun to emphasize the important role that it plays in mediating religious experience.[93] Beyond the way in which smells activate or trigger memory in the body, they function as one of the most effective ways to transform a space into a *religious* place, or perhaps better, smell functions to transport the body into a particular space. As Margaret Kenna explains, "Smells cross the boundaries or place and time…smells are both part of what they convey (the smell of food comes from real food) but in addition, they also convey the *idea* of what they come from, the idea of eating, of a meal, of commensality."[94] The smell of incense, for instance, often generates the first feeling of having been transported into a holy space even when the body has not yet encountered or even seen the physical walls of a structure.

The story of Isaac's blessing of Jacob offers an instructive window into the way that olfactory experience infused religion in the house (Gen. 27).[95] (Avrahami 2012:103). That the narrative locates the story in the setting of a domestic enclosure is clear from the context and the references to the house in v. 15: "Then Rebekah took the best

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[91] B. Beer, "Smell, person, space and memory," in *Experiencing New Worlds*, ed. J. Wassman and K. Stockhaus (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 187–200; L. A. Roubin, "Fragrant signals and festive spaces in Eurasia," in *The Smell Culture Reader*, ed. J. Drobnick (New York: Berg, 2006), 128–136.

[92] John McHugh, "Seeing Scents: Methodological Reflections on the Intersensory Perception of Aromatics in South Asian Religions," *History of Religions* 51/2 (2011), 156–177.

[93] Margaret E. Kenna, "Whey Does Incense Smell Religious? Greek Orthodoxy and the Anthropology of Smell," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 15/1 (2005), 50–69; S. Arthur, "Wafting Incense and Heavenly Foods: the Importance of Smell in Chinese Religion," *Body and Religion* 2/2 (2018), 144–166.

[94] "Why Does Incense Smell Religious?" 64.

[95] Yael Avrahami, *The Sense of Scripture: Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: T & T Clark, 2012), 103.

clothes of Esau her older son, *which she had in the house*, and put them on her younger son Jacob"). The passage is also instructive about how the house as a religious space opened out to and related to other spaces used by the household, in this case the family's field. In this passage, it is not the visual of his son but rather Jacob's odor that activates Isaac's memory of his son: "When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said, 'Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that Yahweh has blessed" (v. 27). What makes this statement by Isaac especially relevant here is the way that it conveys the ability of smell not only to activate Isaac's memory of his son but the way that it associates Jacob's smell with the family field, which is characterized by Isaac as Yahweh's blessing. The blessing of Isaac is then connected to his consumption of some of the game from his son's hunt and his imbibing of some of the family wine. The narrative centers upon the ritual of blessing, but it describes blessing as something that is sensed—it is smelled, tasted, drank, and felt, and it mediated intergenerational identity.[96]

The role that aromatics such as incense and other organic materials played in temple space have long been the focus of studies on Israelite religion. For instance, several past studies have taken up the role that incense played in ritual performance in the ancient Israelite cult.[97] Recent archaeological work in domestic contexts is increasingly showing that the use of incense also found a significant place in household rites. Chemical analysis of absorbed organic residues found in several chalices from houses at Tell es-Ṣafi not only provide new insight in the function of such objects, but also the way that religion in that space was mediating by inhaling and digesting hallucinogens.[98] Chalices are known from several other domestic contexts in the southern Levant, indicating that they may have functioned as part of the ritual objects associated with cult corners

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[96] For further on enculturation as an element of religion in ancient Israel, see Kristine Garroway, "Children and Religion in the Archaeological Record of Ancient Israel," *JANER* 17 (2017), 116–139.

[97] Menahem Haran, "The Uses of Incense in Ancient Israelite Ritual," *VT* 10 (1960), 113–129; K. Nielsen, *Incense in Ancient Israel* (VT Supplements 38; Leiden: Brill, 1986).

[98] Yuval Gadot, et al., "Tracking Down Cult: Production, Function and Content of Chalices in Iron Age Philistia," *TA* 41/1 (2014), 55–56.

in domestic settings.[99] The chalices from the site showed evidence of mild burning along the rims of the objects, clarifying that they functioned as incense burners. Analysis of the chemicals preserved in the bowls at the top of the chalices showed traces of the parent-compound trimyristin. This compound is highly abundant in plants that are known to cause hallucinogenic effects with inhaled or digested. The discovery of small incense altars in close proximity to cultic objects such as figurines, lamps, and standings stones at several other sites points to their cultic function in domestic contexts.[100] The locations where such altars appear at the site of Tel Halif may also point to their use in association with food preparation and textile production.[101]

Religion was also tasted, chewed, and ingested in the house. Rather than looking at a variety of places where the textual evidence uses food as a metaphor for divine words, we might see such metaphors as reflections of the way that taste infused religion. Recent studies on food emphasize the way that food—or perhaps better, the synesthetic experience of food—can evoke in a unique way the sensory landscape of home.[102] Food is religion *par excellence* in the house. One does not have to go far to find connections between food and religion in the textual sources. Specific foods were associated with religious festivals, ceremonies, and other religious rites. Nathan MacDonald has detailed the specific ways in which the biblical texts connect the memory of Yahweh's benevolent deeds to Israel with rituals of eating during specific festivals both at a sanctuary and in the home.[103] For MacDonald, the eating of certain

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[99] Seymour Gitin, "Seventh Century B.C.E. Cultic Elements at Ekron," in *Biblical Archaeology Today, 1990: Proceedings of the Second International Congress on Biblical Archaeology, Jerusalem, June–July 1990*, ed. Avraham Biran and Joseph Aviram (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993), 248–258; Louise A. Hitchcock, "Cult Corners in the Aegean and the Levant," in *Household Archaeology in Ancient Israel and Beyond*, 321–346.

[100] Albertz and Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion*, 70–71.

[101] S. H. Bang, O. Borowski, K. Y. Yoon, and Y. Goren, "Local Production and Domestic Ritual Use of Small Rectangular Incense Altars: A Petrographic Provenience Analysis Examination of Craftsmanship of the Tell Halif Incense Altars," in *Gods, Objects, and Ritual Practice*, ed. Sandra Blakely (Atlanta: Lockwood, 2017), 171–192.

[102] C. N. Seremetakis, *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[103] *Not Bread Alone*, 79–81.

foods at such celebrations became a powerful way in which the family and community "inscribed" and "incorporated" the memory of Yahweh's blessings upon Israel.[104] Certain foods were viewed as the manifestation of divine blessings, while others—or the lack of food—mediated divine cursing. The dietary regulations found in the legal materials of the biblical literature establish a coherence of eating practices around Israelite conceptions of creation.

When we put all of this together, we can imagine the way in which the house during a meal served as a sensory envelope for the body. Religion in this space was most fully anchored around the table and most full activated by the meal. In this familiar space, smelling and seeing the food just before tasting and consuming it while gathered with family and the family gods merged the senses so that the meal could render the divine "hyperpalatable." Although the biblical texts cannot reconstruct the sensory stimuli associated with this experience, they provide small glimpses of how the meal mediated religion. We can turn to Deuteronomy 4:28 in order to imagine how the meal and its setting in the house produced an intersensorial experience. The verse alludes to gods made of wood and stone—perhaps the biblical *teraphim*—who do not *see*, *hear*, *eat*, or *smell*. While here in Deuteronomy the verse has a polemical tone, it preserves an important glimpse of the role that the meal as an intersensorial experience played in mediating religion. The verse likely alludes to the presence of the household gods (i.e., "gods made of wood and stone) gathered around the family meal with the family as the members of the household feed themselves *and them*. We can use the allusion to the family gods here in the verse to imagine the setting of the family and their gods in the domestic enclosure saturated with the smell of the meal mingling with incense, seeing each other in the space of the room, hearing each other talk, and tasting the sweetness of the blessings of the gods. In this way, the verse complements the picture of the close integration of cooking vessels and cultic objects in the houses from Tel Halif and Tall Jawa.

[104] Ibid, 97.

Psalm 34:9 also alludes to the intersensoriality of the meal by stating, "*Taste* and *see* that Yahweh *is* sweet" (34:9; see also Ps. 119:103). The psalm appeals to intersensorial activity—tasting and seeing—in order to express a person's ability to experience Yahweh's goodness. According to this verse, Yahweh's benevolence to his righteous may be tasted in order to experience its sweetness. The point is not to evoke a comparison between Yahweh's faithfulness to his people but to infuse the covenant with the acts of tasting and eating sweet foods. More than a metaphor, this verse reflects that eating was not a passive but rather active performance by the family to ingest and incorporate Yahweh's blessing to the house and household. It is for this reason that Psalm 34:9 can say "taste and see" as a way to evoke notions of a person's anticipation of Yahweh's benevolence.

Conclusion

The present study has outlined several ways that a material religion approach offers a broader conceptualization of domestic religion in the Iron Age southern Levant. A major emphasis of this study has been a rethinking of the very way that we might approach analyses of the things of religion as an integral part of this space. This approach has the benefit of highlighting the ways in which the human body functioned to integrate objects and materials into the physical space of the house and within the daily routines of the household. This also reminds us that while we may be tempted to look for a space or type of religion in the house, the most characteristic features of domestic religion are its diffusion, variety of expression, and fluidity in the space of the house, which provide an excellent witness to the individual character of different households. This approach is also a productive framework to study the different and important roles of members of the household because it draws attention to the ways in which the material and textual evidence gathers together the family's shared labor in the development of the land, harvest, and food preparation and consumption.

I have also argued here that an approach that fronts the body's role paves the way for greater sensitivity to the way that the senses mediated religion. Focusing upon the role that smell and taste played in religious experience challenges the tendency to prioritize the visual in the study of ancient religion. While the monumental architecture of temple-based and state-sponsored religion offers impressive glimpses into religion's infusion with projects of power, locating and reconstructing domestic religion involves an appreciation of how the house functioned as a sensory envelope for its members in order to integrate religion into the daily life and memory of its inhabitants. This approach also challenges the tendency to see the walls of the family dwelling only through the lens of their function as boundaries and defenses. An approach to religion that highlights the senses reminds us that religion's fluidity not only expressed itself in the portability and adaptability of objects but also in the ways in which the scent of the harvest or the sound of a family member returning home permeated the space of the family dwelling. It is, after all, the ability of the senses to lodge the house in the body that produces the sensation of arriving home.