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Bulls on Parade: Metal Bovines, Pilgrimage Networks, and the Struggle for Israelite Identity in 1 Kings 12:25-33

Timothy Hogue¹

Abstract: *1 Kings 12:25-33 is composed of two significant layers – an earlier stratum that may be based on an Israelite royal inscription and a later, likely Judahite redaction. These can be disentangled based on a redaction critical approach rooted in studies of compilational and editorial practices attested in biblical and Cuneiform sources. Though the final text is often analyzed as an idol polemic, the Israelite strata suggest that Jeroboam is not depicted as constructing idols but rather pilgrimage outposts. This is borne out by the use of bovine iconography to direct ritual movement at other Levantine sites, as well as the broader Near Eastern practice of establishing pilgrimage networks in order to project political authority over multiple settlements, knitting them together into a kingdom. Accordingly, this article argues that the Israelite text depicted Jeroboam creating a pilgrimage network to performatively bring his Israel into being. Participating in this pilgrimage was a performance of Israelite identity. The Judahite redaction disavowed this by othering key aspects of the Israelite material culture depicted in the text. The final text is thus an example of identity politics rather than an idol polemic.*

Keywords: *Jeroboam; golden calves; pilgrimage network; identity performance; redaction criticism*

Introduction

1 Kings 12:25-33 narrates the founding of the northern kingdom of Israel and witnesses the beginning of a polemic against it that stretches

¹ Timothy Hogue, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA. E-mail: thogue@sas.upenn.edu



throughout much of the greater work. This polemic was aimed at the cultic practices of Israel, which are often summarily labeled “the sin of Jeroboam” (e.g., 1 Kgs 14:16; 15:30; 16:31) or “the way of Jeroboam” (e.g., 1 Kgs 15:34; 16:2, 19, 26). Modern scholarship has drawn special attention to Jeroboam’s golden calves, which are almost universally understood as idols. 1 Kgs 7:25, however, reveals that Solomon installed 12 bronze bulls in his temple, inviting no such polemic in the process. Worshipping the ancient Israelite god – whether legitimately or illegitimately – seemingly required metal bovines. This suggests that the calves themselves were not the problem, and 1 Kgs 12:25-33 may not constitute an idol polemic at all. Instead, this article argues that Jeroboam is depicted in 1 Kgs 12 as engaging in a set of ritual practices intended to configure Israelite identity. More specifically, Jeroboam is depicted as constructing a pilgrimage network that defined the political landscape of Israel and thus proposed a particular configuration of Israelite identity. This stood in stark contrast to the ideal of the redactor, who constructed a polemic against Jeroboam’s “Israel” and the ritual practices that brought it into being.

The point of departure for this study are recent approaches to the narratives of Jeroboam’s reign that regard their earliest strata as authentic Israelite productions. Later redactors modified these strata to construct their polemic, othering Israel in the process. Othering is “an identity negotiation strategy” that involves highlighting “differences in those identified as not like oneself...resulting in the foundation of a shared group identity that masks the fluidity and complexities of identity performance.”² The Israelite strata of 1 Kgs 12:25-33 present Jeroboam instituting a particular performance of Israelite identity, involving pilgrimage to strategically chosen cities

² Nadia Ben-Marzouk, “Othering the Alphabet: Rewriting the Social Context of a New Writing System in the Egyptian Expedition Community,” in *Ancient Egyptian Society*, ed. Danielle Candelora, Nadia Ben-Marzouk, and Kathryn M. Cooney (London: Routledge, 2022), 283.



and engagement with newly built cultic outposts on Israel's frontiers. The redactional insertions polemicize elements of this performance to other it, thus presenting an alternative identity configuration. To develop this further, I take an archaeological approach to the text. I begin by producing a stratigraphy of 1 Kgs 12:25-33, and then turn to the artifacts and practices depicted within that narrative. A comparison of this material culture to that of the surrounding region reveals the broader religious and political discourse the text was engaging with. I conclude with a discussion of the polemic inserted into the narrative and how it reframes the depicted material culture as illegitimate.

Excavating the Text of 1 Kings 12:25-33

In an article on 1 Kgs 9, William Schniedewind suggests approaching the text archaeologically by treating it as analogous to a tel.³ Like an archaeological tel, the text also contains strata that can be identified and separated. The notion of textual stratigraphy is nothing new, as the practice of separating sources and redactional layers has been a cornerstone of biblical studies since at least the 18th century. Of course, textual stratigraphy involves complications that archaeological stratigraphy does not, given that textual layers are not simply deposited one on top of another. Nevertheless, approaches to textual stratigraphy like Schniedewind's make it possible to both identify and relatively date textual layers.

Schniedewind identifies textual strata by paying attention to concrete scribal methods for marking editorial activity. The *Wiederaufnahme*, for example, is an attested scribal marker for inserting new material into

³ William M. Schniedewind, "Excavating the Text of 1 Kings 9: In Search of the Gates of Solomon," in *Historical Biblical Archaeology and the Future: The New Pragmatism*, ed. Thomas E. Levy (London: Equinox, 2010), 241-49.

a text both in the Hebrew Bible and in Cuneiform literature.⁴ Other techniques attested both within and outside of the Hebrew Bible, such as chiasmic insertion, glossing, and the use of exegetical markers, provide additional empirical criteria by which to distinguish textual layers.⁵ Most importantly, this approach recognizes that literary production and redaction are examples of material culture. Texts are physical things, and there are accepted cultural practices for engaging them. An archaeological approach to the text thus necessitates using these reconstructed practices to delineate strata within the text.

In a recent study of 1 Kgs 11:26-40 and 12:1-20, Kristin Weingart makes a methodological proposal that can be used to expand the approach above. She argues that the material culture present in textual strata can be analyzed on the basis of comparison to contemporary material remains in the archaeological record. More specifically, Weingart suggests that textual attestations of sites or specific architectural features – both of which are subject to periodic change – may indicate the period during which a text was produced.⁶ She concludes on this and other bases that the narratives concerning Jeroboam were originally produced in the Northern Kingdom with a pro-Jeroboam outlook.⁷ Here I build on these conclusions, adding 1 Kgs 12:25-33 to the pro-Jeroboam account in Kings on the basis of the methodology

⁴ This technique is attested in the Epic of Gilgamesh and in the Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon, for example. Bernard M. Levinson, “The Birth of the Lemma: The Restrictive Reinterpretation of the Covenant Code’s Manumission Law by the Holiness Code (Leviticus 25:44-46),” *JBL* 124, no. 4 (2005): 634.

⁵ Bernard M. Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1997), 17–20, 34–38, 47–48, 97.

⁶ Kristin Weingart, “Jeroboam and Benjamin: Pragmatics and Date of 1 Kings 11:26–40; 12:1–20,” in *Saul, Benjamin, and the Emergence of Monarchy in Israel*, ed. Kristin Weingart, Joachim J. Krause, and Omer Sergi, *Biblical and Archaeological Perspectives* (The Society of Biblical Literature, 2020), 144.

⁷ Weingart, 153.



just outlined as well as expanding that methodology to account for textual attestations of artifacts and ritual practices.

Identifying the Possible Source of 1 Kings 12:25-33

Many previous studies have suggested that royal inscriptions may have served as the original sources for the annalistic compositions that make up the book of Kings. Comparative evidence from Assyria bears this model out. The Assyrian Synchronistic History, for example, drew upon royal inscriptions (among other sources) to compile a history of the kings of both Assyria and Babylon.⁸ The procedure involved more or less copying the relevant portions of royal inscriptions while changing the verbs from third-person to first-person. This is especially indicated by cases in which the scribe forget to make the change, as in column iv line 12 of the Assyrian Synchronistic History where the first-person verb *amḥur* has erroneously been left in the otherwise third-person narrative.⁹ Similarly, the Book of Kings cites separate annalistic sources from Israel and Judah as its sources, and these may have

⁸ Keiko Yamada and Shigeo Yamada, "Synchronistic History Writing in Mesopotamia and the Biblical Historiography," in *Festschrift for David Tsumura*, Ancient Near Eastern Studies (Peeters, Forthcoming); Mario Liverani, *Prestige and Interest: International Relations in the Near East ca. 1600-1100 B.C.*, History of Ancient Near Eastern Studies 1 (Padova: Sargon, 1990), 80; Hannes Galter, "Die Synchronistische Geschichte Und Die Assyrische Grenzpolitik," in *Landscapes. Territories, Frontiers and Horizons in the Ancient Near East. Papers Presented to the XLIV Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Venezia, 7-11 July 1997.*, ed. Stefano De Martino et al., vol. 2, History of the Ancient Near East 3 (Padova: Sargon, 2000), 35; Simonetta Ponchia, "Assyrian Chronicles and Their Meaning Within the First Millennium BC Conceptualization of History," in *Conceptualizing Past, Present and Future: Proceedings of the Ninth Symposium of the Melammu Project Held in Helsinki/Tartu, May 18-24, 2015*, ed. Sebastian Fink and Robert Rollinger (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2018), 108-12.

⁹ Albert Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, Texts from Cuneiform Sources 5 (Locust Valley, NY: J. J. Augustin, 1975), 245; A. Kirk Grayson, "Assyria and Babylonia," *Orientalia* 49, no. 2 (1980): 164-70. For another example, albeit a more complicated one, see the unusual alternation of first- and third-person in the Tell al-Rimāḥ Stele. Hayim Tadmor, "The Historical Inscriptions of Adad-Nirari III," *Iraq* 35 (1973): 141-42; Shuichi Hasegawa, "Clumsy or Talented?," *Orient* 49 (2014): 19-29.

themselves been composites drawing upon royal inscriptions.¹⁰ In the case of 1 Kgs 12:25-33, the content and structure of the text suggests that it is a building account based on known models from Levantine royal inscriptions.

The account of Jeroboam's building activities begins in v. 25 with a *waw*-consecutive ויבן "and he built," which suggests that it is the continuation of the preceding narrative. This is not the case, however. The verses preceding this relate an episode from the reign of the Judahite king Rehoboam, and the Masoretic text accordingly marks a disjunction between v. 24 and v. 25. Weingart also excludes this episode from the pro-Jeroboam account she identified, which ended with v. 20.¹¹ The use of a *waw*-consecutive to open a new paragraph, as it were, is attested in Levantine royal inscriptions, however. We see the same use of a *waw*-consecutive to begin a new historical section in the Tel Dan Stele (KAI 310). After narrating the death of the speaker's father, the inscription begins a narrative of the current king's reign in line 3 with *wy^l.mlky[š]r^l.qdm.b^rq.^yby* "Now, the king of Israel had formerly gone up into my father's land."¹² Similarly, the Mesha Stele (KAI 181) initiates the narrative of Mesha's reign with the line *w²š² hbmt z^t lkmš bqr^hh* "then I made this shrine for Kemosh in Qarḥoh"

¹⁰ Mario Liverani, "The Book of Kings and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography," in *The Books of Kings: Sources, Composition, Historiography and Reception*, ed. André Lemaire, Baruch Halpern, and Matthew J. Adams, Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum*, Formation and Interpretation of Old Testament Literature 129 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 163–84; Yamada and Yamada, "Synchronistic History Writing in Mesopotamia and the Biblical Historiography"; Cf. Nadav Na'aman, "The Contribution of Royal Inscriptions for a Re-Evaluation of the Book of Kings as a Historical Source," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 24, (1999): 3–17; Simon Parker, "DID THE AUTHORS OF THE BOOKS OF KINGS MAKE USE OF ROYAL INSCRIPTIONS?," *Vetus Testamentum* 50 (2000): 357–78; Omer Sergi, "The Alleged Judahite King List: Its Historical Setting and Possible Date," *Semitica* 56 (2014): 233–47.

¹¹ Weingart, "Jeroboam and Benjamin."

¹² William M. Schniedewind, "Tel Dan Stela: New Light on Aramaic and Jehu's Revolt," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 302 (1996): 81.



immediately following that king's introduction. 1 Kgs 12:25 similarly launches into an episode from Jeroboam's reign with a *waw*-consecutive narrating his building activities, particularly in cult centers.

Based on comparison to southern Levantine royal inscriptions and the Assyrian Synchronistic History, it seems that the compilers of the Israelite strata in 1 Kgs 12:25-33 used a procedure like the Assyrian one. They seem to have been using a royal inscription as a source. This will become more apparent through the analysis of editorial markers below, which will reveal a coherent narrative about Jeroboam's building activities. Moreover, these activities center on establishing a pilgrimage network using attested practices for doing so, known both from other Levantine royal inscriptions and the archaeological record. In the process of copying the episode describing these activities, the scribe likely changed the verbs from the first-person expected of royal inscriptions to the third-person expected of annalistic compilations. This connection between 1 Kgs 12:25-33 and royal inscriptions will become more apparent when we examine the material culture depicted within it. Before that, I turn to the later redaction of this text to better delineate which portions of it are Israelite.

Editorial Markers in 1 Kgs 12:25-33

While the larger text boundary at v. 25 can be determined by reference to annalistic compilation practices in evidence in Mesopotamia, identifying authentic Israelite material in the verses that follow requires an analysis based on smaller-scale editorial practices. Extracting these marked insertions makes it possible to reconstruct an earlier version of the text. Verse 27 contains the first indication of such editing. A later redactor inserted material using a *Wiederaufnahme* formed by the repetition of יהודה מלך ירהבום אל-רהבום “to Rehoboam, king of

Judah.” This bracket and its enclosed material (והרגוני ושב) “they will kill me and return) form an ideologically motivated editorial expansion in this part of the narrative.¹³ The phrase preceding this (ושב לב העם הזה אל-אדנייהם) “and the heart of this people will return to their lord”) is probably also part of a later redaction and was marked using an exegetical marker – the *waw-explicativum*.¹⁴ The lateness of this material is also indicated by the use of the name יהודה “Judah” for the southern kingdom, as opposed בית דוד “House of David” elsewhere in the text.¹⁵ בית דוד appears to have been the standard appellation for the southern kingdom in 9th century royal inscriptions, and it indicates the antiquity of the earlier strata in the present text.¹⁶

The next editorial addition comes in v. 30. Besides betraying a later attitude towards Jeroboam’s cultic installations by labeling them a sin, Jonathan Greer suggests that this verse “is an addition from a later hand flagged by the disruptive use of ויהי that breaks an otherwise

¹³ Jonathan S. Greer, “Recasting the Sin of the Calf: The Deference of Jeroboam in 1 Kings 12 and the Formation of the Earliest History of Israel and Judah,” in *The Formation of Biblical Texts: Chronicling the Legacy of Gary Knoppers*, ed. Deirdre N. Fulton et al., *Forschungen Zum Alten Testament 1* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023), 42.

¹⁴ Eduard Nielsen, *Shechem. A Traditio-Historical Investigation* (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad, 1959), 207–8.

¹⁵ Weingart argues on the basis of its apologetic stance towards the foundation of the Northern Kingdom – and its favorable perspective on Jeroboam in particular – that earlier strata in 1 Kgs 11–12 are unlikely to have originated in Judah. Instead, they were most likely composed in the north prior to the fall of Samaria around 720 BCE. These potentially northern strata similarly use the older name for the Southern Kingdom (בית דוד “house of David”). For an example, see the closing sentence of the pro-Jeroboam account isolated by Weingart (1 Kgs 12:20). Weingart, “Jeroboam and Benjamin,” 148–49.

¹⁶ See line 9 of the Tel Dan Stele (KAI 310) and potentially line 31 of the Mesha Stele (KAI 181). The reading in the Mesha Stele is disputed, however. Émile Puech, “La Stèle Araméenne De Dan: Bar Hadad Ii Et La Coalition Des Omrides Et De La Maison De David,” *Revue Biblique* (1946-) 101, no. 2 (1994): 227; Andr Lemaire, “‘House of David’ Restored in Moabite Inscription,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 20, no. 3 (1994): 30–37; Schniedewind, “Tel Dan Stela,” 80. Cf. Israel Finkelstein, Nadav Na’aman, and Thomas Römer, “Restoring Line 31 in the Mesha Stele: The ‘House of David’ or Biblical Balak?,” *Tel Aviv* 46 (2019): 3–11.



consistent use of *waw*-consecutives.”¹⁷ Furthermore, this comment may be marked as commentary by an additional *Wiederaufnahme*. The reference to Jeroboam’s erection of a calf in Dan at the end of v. 29 (-ואת- וילכו העם “and one he erected in Dan”) is echoed in v. 30’s לפני האחד עד-דן “and the people went unto each even until Dan.”¹⁸ In this case, however, Greer is likely correct in arguing that the close of the *Wiederaufnahme* should be retained as part of the earlier text as well as expanded using the variant present in the Lucianic Greek text of 1 Kgs 12.¹⁹ Furthermore, Gary Rendsburg has argued that the repetition of the numeral 1 to express reciprocation or iteration, as in the expanded לפני האחד בבית-אל ולפני האחד עד-דן “before the one in Bethel and before the other unto Dan,” is a feature peculiar to Israelite dialects of Hebrew in contradistinction to Judahite.²⁰ In this case, a pre-existing parallel clause was used by a later scribe to enclose an editorial addition.²¹

Verse 31 contains an example of a scribal gloss inserted by a later editor. The insertion of the scribal gloss can be confirmed by comparison to its parallel text in 1 Kgs 13:33. The verse in 1 Kgs 13 reports ויעש מקצות העם כהני במות “then he made priests for the shrines

¹⁷ Greer, “Recasting the Sin of the Calf: The Deference of Jeroboam in 1 Kings 12 and the Formation of the Earliest History of Israel and Judah,” 43.

¹⁸ For another use of נתן ב- “to erect in (some place)” see Lev 26:1. ואבן משכית לא תתנו בארצכם “and a sculpted stone you shall not erect in your land” is there parallel with ופסל ומצבה לא-תקימו לכם “and an image or a standing stone you shall not raise for yourselves,” along with other proscriptions on monument erection.

¹⁹ Greer, “Recasting the Sin of the Calf: The Deference of Jeroboam in 1 Kings 12 and the Formation of the Earliest History of Israel and Judah,” 42.

²⁰ Gary Rendsburg, “Israelian Hebrew, Inscriptions from the North of Israel, and Samaritan Hebrew: A Complex of Northern Dialects,” *Journal for Semitics* 30 (2021): 1-19, 13.

²¹ Cf. David Toshio Tsumura, “Vertical Grammar of Biblical Hebrew Parallelism: The AXX’B Pattern in Tetracolons,” *Vetus Testamentum* 69 (2019): 447-59; Bernard M. Levinson, “At the Intersection of Scribal Training and Theological Profundity: Chiasm as an Editorial Technique in the Primeval History and Deuteronomy,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 59 (2020): 85-106.

from the full extent of the people.”²² 1 Kgs 12:31 similarly reports ייעש כהנים מקצות העם “then he made priests from the full extent of the people.” Accordingly, D. W. Van Winkle suggests understanding these verses (or at least portions of them) as part of the same literary unit, based on the shared expression מקצות העם “from the full extent of the people.”²³ This was originally a positive expression of the “priesthood of everyman” that characterized early Israel.²⁴ In 1 Kgs 12:31, however, מקצות העם is glossed by the appositional phrase אשר לא-היו מבני לוי “these were not of the sons of Levi.” אשר functions here as a stand-alone nominalizer rather than as a relativizer. The editorial comment is thus grammatically a noun phrase inserted in apposition to the earlier text.²⁵ In this way, אשר is functioning in the same way an asyndetic pronoun could be used to introduce an exegetical comment.²⁶ While he does not use the same terminology, Fishbane also notes the use of nominalizers – specifically אשר and כי – as potential epexegetical markers based on their demonstrative function.²⁷ He notes that the same practice existed in Akkadian literature, which used the relative

²² On the procedure for identifying scribal glosses, see the proposal by Michael Fishbane in his seminal work on innerbiblical interpretation. Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 41–43.

²³ D. W. Van Winkle, “1 Kings XII 25-XIII 34: Jeroboam’s Cultic Innovations and the Man of God from Judah,” *Vetus Testamentum* 46, no. 1 (1996): 102–3.

²⁴ Jonathan S. Greer, “Dinner at Dan: Biblical and Archaeological Evidence for Sacred Feasts at Iron Age II Tel Dan and Their Significance,” in *Dinner at Dan* (Brill, 2013), 36–39, <https://brill.com/display/title/20842>.

²⁵ Grace J. Park, “אשר from Light Noun to Nominalizer: Toward a Broader Typology of Clausal Nominalization in Biblical Hebrew,” *Hebrew Studies* 56 (2015): 23–48.

²⁶ Bernard M. Levinson, “The Birth of the Lemma: The Restrictive Reinterpretation of the Covenant Code’s Manumission Law by the Holiness Code (Leviticus 25:44–46),” *JBL* 124 (2005): 617–39.

²⁷ Fishbane cites examples of כי as an epexegetical marker in Exod 22:26, 34:23; Deut 17:8, and an example of אשר in Neh 8:14. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 103 n. 262, 172.



pronouns *ša* and *aššu* to mark exegetical comments.²⁸ This is essentially an extension of Fishbane’s observation that deictic elements – especially demonstrative pronouns – often serve as epexegetical markers.²⁹ As such, I argue that this is a later insertion condemning the practice of Jeroboam, which was originally presented positively.

Verses 32-33 show the most signs of later transformation. First, v. 32 uses *-כ* as an epexegetical marker to insert the comment *כהג אשר ביהודה* “like the festival in Judah.”³⁰ The lateness of this material is again indicated by the use of the name Judah rather than House of David. Subsequently, the phrase *ויעל על-המזבח* “then he went up to the altar” is repeated three times to create two *Wiederaufnahme* enclosing later insertions.³¹

Removing the later insertions identified above allows us to reconstruct the following hypothetical text of 1 Kgs 12:25-33*.

וַיִּבֶן יִרְבֵּעַם אֶת-שֹׁכֵם בְּהַר אֶפְרַיִם וַיֵּשֶׁב בָּהּ וַיֵּצֵא מִשָּׁם וַיִּבֶן אֶת-פְּנוּאֵל²⁵

וַיֹּאמֶר יִרְבֵּעַם בְּלִבּוֹ עֵתָה תָּשׁוּב הַמַּמְלָכָה לְבֵית דָּוִד²⁶

אִם-יַעֲלֶה הָעָם הַזֶּה לַעֲשׂוֹת זִבְחִים בְּבֵית-יְהוָה בִּירוּשָׁלַם^{27*}

וַיֹּעֵץ הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיַּעַשׂ שְׁנֵי עֲגָלֵי זָהָב וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים רַב-לָכֶם מֵעֲלוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם הִנֵּה²⁸

אֱלֹהֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הָעֵלְוֹךְ מֵאַרְצֵךְ מִצְרַיִם

וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת-הָאֶחָד בְּבֵית-אֵל וְאֶת-הָאֶחָד נָתַן בְּדָן²⁹

²⁸ See, for example, the interpretation of Gilgamesh’s dream in Tablet I of the Gilgamesh Epic (v. 27 – vi. 23). The relative pronoun *ša* is also utilized by commentaries on the *Maqlû* incantation series, which Melissa Ramos has recently demonstrated may have had significant impact on Deuteronomy in particular. Fishbane, 453–54; Melissa D. Ramos, *Ritual in Deuteronomy: The Performance of Doom* (London: Routledge, 2021).

²⁹ Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 44–48.

³⁰ Fishbane, 298, 362.

³¹ Gary N. Knoppers, *Two Nations under God: The Deuteronomistic History of Solomon and the Dual Monarchies. Volume 2: The Reign of Jeroboam, the Fall of Israel, and the Reign of Josiah*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 53 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 30–33 with references.

30* ויילכו העם לפני האחד בבית-אל ולפני האחד עד-דן

31* ויעש את-בית במות ויעש כהנים מקצות העם

32-33* ויעש ירבעם חג בחדש השמיני בחמשה-עשר יום לחדש ויעל על-המזבח להקטיר

25 Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the highlands of Ephraim and dwelt there. Then he went out from there and built Penuel.

26 And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom will return to the House of David

27* if this people goes up to offer sacrifices in the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem.

28 So the king took counsel. Then he made two golden calves and said to them: "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Behold your God, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."

29 Then he set one up in Bethel, and the other he erected in Dan.

30* And the people walked before the one *in Bethel and the other*, even unto Dan.

31* Then he built Beth-Bamot. Then he made priests from the full extent of the people.

32-33* And Jeroboam established a festival in the eighth month on the 15th day of the month. Then he went up to the altar to offer incense.

Other redaction critical methods could be used to restore material to these strata or to excise more. But this material is what can be isolated based on the method proposed above, and it provides a useful starting point for my analysis.



Aside from the coherence of the resultant narrative, the plausibility of this reconstruction is also suggested by its many parallels to attested royal inscriptions. For example, Jeroboam's construction of a dwelling place as well as multiple cities to act as cult-places in vv. 25 and 29 is closely paralleled by lines 18-19 and 29-30 of the Mesha Stele (KAI 181):

^{18b-19a} *wmlk . yśr'l . bnh . ʔt . yḥṣ . wyšb . bh*

“And the king of Israel built Jahaz and dwelt there.”

^{29b-30a} *wʔnk . bnty . [bt . mhd]bʔ . wbt . dbltn . wbt . bʿlmʿn*

“And I built the temple of Madaba and the temple of Diblaten and the temple of Baʿal-Maʿon.”³²

Also notable is Mesha's direct address to his people in lines 24-25 of his inscription, which parallels Jeroboam's speech to Israel in v. 28 above.³³ The establishment of a festival in response to the construction of cult-places is also attested in Levantine royal inscriptions. For example, multiple Karkamišean inscriptions institute annual sacrifices in tandem with the reconstruction of temples and installation of divine images.³⁴ Further parallels between royal inscriptions – in particular those of Moab and Carchemish – will be explored below in connection to two aspects of material culture highlighted by Jeroboam's narrative: the construction of cultic outposts centered on golden calves, and the development of multiple pilgrimage sites in concert to create a pilgrimage network.

³² This translation is based on Bruce Routledge's interpretation of these lines. I have restored *bt* in the lacuna before Madaba based on the rest of the line. Bruce Routledge, “The Politics of Mesha: Segmented Identities and State Formation in Iron Age Moab,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 43 (2000): 221-56, 249.

³³ The relevant portion of the Mesha Stele reads *wʔmr . lkl . hʿm . ʿšw . lkm . ʿš . br . bbyth* “And I said to all the people: ‘Make for yourselves each man a cistern in his house.’”

³⁴ See, for example, KARKAMIŠ A4d, which establishes an annual sacrifice to a divine image, and KARKAMIŠ A11b+c §18, which establishes an annual sacrifice for images progressed through a temple complex.

Jeroboam's Golden Calves: Manifesting Divine Presence

The connection between the golden calves and deities, Yahweh in particular, is well established in the secondary literature.³⁵ My focus here is instead on the function of the calves. Previous studies have debated over whether they are to be understood as pedestals for Yahweh to stand on or as god(s) themselves.³⁶ Both views rely upon a static understanding of how such artifacts worked, and the latter view essentially derives from the traditional interpretation of the calves as idols. Recent scholarship, however, demands that we seriously reconsider whether the category of “idol” even applies to anything described in the Hebrew Bible. Nathaniel Levtow argues most forcefully that “idolatry” appears nowhere in the Hebrew Bible itself, and is instead a vestige of Western interpretive traditions largely based on an assumed dualist ontology. In this view, an “idol” represents a deity; it may further be mistaken for the real thing. From an ancient

³⁵ Daniel E. Fleming, “If El Is a Bull, Who Is a Calf? Reflections on Religion in Second-Millennium Syria-Palestine,” *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies / ארץ-ישראל: עתקרים* 26 (1999): 27–23; Tallay Ornan, “The Bull and Its Two Masters: Moon and Storm Deities in Relation to the Bull in Ancient Near Eastern Art,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 51, no. 1 (2001): 1–26; Aren M. Wilson-Wright, “Bethel and the Persistence of El: Evidence for the Survival of El as an Independent Deity in the Jacob Cycle and 1 Kings 12:25–30,” *JBL* 138 (2019): 705–20; Cf. Reinhard Müller, *Jahwe Als Wettergott: Studien Zur Althebräischen Kultlyrik Anhand Ausgewählter Psalmen*, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 387 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011). There is concrete evidence for the connection between Yahweh and bovines in ancient Israel. Karel van der Toorn has argued that Papyrus Amherst 63 is witness to a small collection of psalms originating in the northern kingdom of Israel, including an earlier tradition of what would become Ps 20. The Israelite version of Ps 20 notably includes the line *yhw trn' 'mnn* “Yaho/Yahweh our bull is with us.” The same relationship is attested in the Samaria Ostraca (*Sam* 41), which solidly locates this tradition with Israel during the pre-exilic period. The connection is attested in the eighth century personal name *'glyw* “a young bull is Yahweh,” in which the term *'gl* is used rather than *twr*. Karel van der Toorn, “Celebrating the New Year with the Israelites: Three Extrabiblical Psalms from Papyrus Amherst 63,” *JBL* 136 (2017): 633–49; Mark S. Smith, *Where the Gods Are: Spatial Dimensions of Anthropomorphism in the Biblical World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 62; Matthieu Richelle, “Old and New Readings in the Samaria Ostraca,” *Bulletin de l'Académie Belge Pour l'Étude Des Langues Anciennes et Orientales* 10–11 (2022): 402.

³⁶ Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 67; Wilson-Wright, “Bethel and the Persistence of El,” 715.



Near Eastern perspective, this is a fundamental category mistake. The binary opposition of representation and entity represented did not exist.³⁷ Broader studies of image ontology in the ancient Near East have found that it was nondualist. Cultic artifacts – even images – did not *represent* things. Rather, they had the power to make them present in manifold ways via ritual engagement. An image could extend or participate in the presence, agency, or being of a deity, but it did not necessarily point to a reality outside itself. Moreover, such images did not function this way consistently, but only in specific ritual contexts.³⁸ Furthermore, as we shall see below, cultic artifacts need not manifest a deity at all to allow engagement with the divine.

I instead argue that such artifacts were dynamic ritual instruments. Comparative evidence from the surrounding region suggests that divine presence was not permanently anchored in artifacts like the calves. Instead, divine presence had to be activated and semi-regularly reactivated via ritual engagement with such artifacts.³⁹ When properly activated, the calves manifested the presence of Yahweh for ritual participants.

The first indication that the calves are to be understood as manifesting Yahweh's presence is not their form at all but rather their material. The fact that the calves were made of gold and not some other material is an essential component of their depicted function. Precious metals occupied a unique position in ancient Near Eastern ritual discourse. Jeremy Smoak argues that gold as well as silver were “signifiers of

³⁷ Nathaniel Levtow, *Images of Others: Iconic Politics in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 1–12.

³⁸ Zainab Bahrani, *The Graven Image: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 121–48; Zainab Bahrani, *The Infinite Image: Art, Time and the Aesthetic Dimension in Antiquity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 24–29, 77–84.

³⁹ Michael B. Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings: Temples and Divine Presence in the Ancient Near East*, *Writings from the Ancient World Supplements 3* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2013), 364–66.

divine power” in the ancient Near East. Due to the unique properties of these metals, particularly the longevity of their lustrousness, they “denoted the availability of divine presence to manifest in the human realm.”⁴⁰ Gold indicated that divine presence was available through the medium of the calves. The use of gold for Jeroboam’s calves was thus one of the most significant differences used by the redactor for othering Israel. This will become apparent through a brief comparison of Jeroboam’s calves to Solomon’s bulls.

Solomon’s bulls in 1 Kgs 7:25 were cast of bronze rather than gold. While bronze was used elsewhere in the Levant to fashion statuettes of deities, it did not carry the same ritual value as gold.⁴¹ This is because pure gold occurs in nature, while bronze is an alloy that must be artificially produced.⁴² In Solomon’s temple, gold was notably restricted to the inner sanctum surrounding the Ark of the Covenant (e.g., 1 Kgs 6:19-22). In the Judahite temple, Yahweh’s presence was thus made available only in the innermost part of the temple and via the Ark there. Jeroboam, however, made Yahweh’s presence available via public ritual engagements. In 1 Kgs 12:25-33*, these ritual engagements consisted of inscriptional practices and proper ritual motion.

⁴⁰ Jeremy D. Smoak, “‘You Have Refined Us Like Silver Is Refined’ (Ps 66:10): Yahweh’s Metallurgical Powers in Ancient Judah,” *Advances in Ancient, Biblical, and Near Eastern Research* 1 (2021): 92–93; Cf. Kim Benzel, “‘What Goes In Is What Comes Out’ - But What Was Already There? Divine Materials and Materiality in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *The Materiality of Divine Agency*, ed. Beate Pongratz-Leisten and Karen Sonik (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 98; Shiyanthi Thavapalan, “Radiant Things for Gods and Men: Lightness and Darkness in Mesopotamian Language and Thought,” *Colour Turn* 1 (2018): 1–36, 13.

⁴¹ Nicolò Marchetti, “Bronze Statuettes from the Temples of Karkemish,” *Orientalia* 83, no. 3 (2014): 305–20.

⁴² Smoak, “‘You Have Refined Us Like Silver Is Refined’ (Ps 66),” 93.



Manifesting Divine Presence through Inscriptural Practice

When Jeroboam activates the golden calves in 1 Kgs 12:28, he does so through a speech act directed at the Israelites. The content of this speech is consistent with a particular formula attested regularly in Levantine royal inscriptions, which implies that such inscriptions were to be performed aloud as in this instance.⁴³ This was the so-called “I am” formula identified by Timothy Hogue as the defining feature of Levantine monumental inscriptions, at least of a particular type. This formula rendered the speaker present in the imagination of the inscription’s audience and imbued the text with authority.⁴⁴ In other words, the opening formula of many Levantine royal inscriptions manifested royal presence, performing a function similar to what I am proposing for the golden calves.

There is one problem with this connection, however. The first-person pronoun is not used in Jeroboam’s speech, so there is no “I am” formula as such. Nevertheless, הנה may be serving the same purpose here. הנה is fundamentally a proximal deictic particle. It focuses attention on the utterances origo – or the speakers current position in space and time – much like the deictic function of the first-person pronoun.⁴⁵ Moreover, הנה is also frequently used to mark direct speech.⁴⁶ This is also one of the functions of the first-person pronoun in “I Am” inscriptions.⁴⁷

⁴³ Timothy Hogue, *The Ten Commandments: Monuments of Memory, Belief, and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 112.

⁴⁴ Timothy Hogue, “‘I Am’: The Function, History, and Diffusion of the Fronted First-Person Pronoun in Syro-Anatolian Monumental Discourse,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 78 (2019): 323–39.

⁴⁵ Eran Cohen, “Presentatives in a Comparative View: Biblical Hebrew and Neo-Aramaic,” in *From Tur Abdin to Hadramawt: Semitic Studies Festschrift in Honour of Bo Isaksson on the Occasion of His Retirement*, ed. Tal Davidovich, Ablahad Lahdo, and Torkel Lindquist (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014), 23–38.

⁴⁶ Cynthia L. Miller-Naudé, “Direct and Indirect Speech: Biblical Hebrew,” in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, ed. Geoffrey Khan, 2013.

⁴⁷ Hogue, “‘I Am,’” 324.

Finally, Cynthia Miller-Naudé and C. H. J. van der Merwe argue that הנה may more specifically function to indicate something for which the addressee is unprepared.⁴⁸ This makes sense if the calf is offering the addressee access to divine presence. It also accords well with Hogue’s argument that the use of the first-person pronoun to open Levantine monumental inscriptions “creates a short-lived tension in which the users are given an empty discursive space that must be filled.”⁴⁹ אנכי and הנה thus accomplish the same function: they create a tension in the addressees that is resolved by revealing the figure being indicated.⁵⁰ This was a key strategy for provoking audiences to imagine the presence of that figure, and I would suggest that is what is intended by Jeroboam’s speech.

There is another reason to make this connection between Levantine “I Am” inscriptions and Jeroboam’s calves. Jeroboam’s speech in 1 Kgs 12:28 alludes to the opening line of the Decalogue. Compare the recounting of the Exodus in 1 Kgs 12:28 and Exod 20:2 below:

הנה אלהיך ישראל אשר העלוך מארץ מצרים	אנכי יהוה אשר הוציאתיך מארץ מצרים
Behold your God, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.	I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt.

This allusion to the Decalogue may be part of a broader literary strategy that involved depicting Jeroboam as a sort of new Moses, who

⁴⁸ Cynthia L. Miller-Naudé and C. H. J. van der Merwe, “הנה and Mirativity in Biblical Hebrew,” *Hebrew Studies* 52 (2011): 53–81.

⁴⁹ Hogue, “I Am,” 339.

⁵⁰ In this regard, it may be worth noting that one of the Moabite royal inscriptions (KAI 306) may be using the Moabite equivalent of הנה in a similar fashion. Line 3 of that inscription reads *whn . śty . ʾ* “and behold I made the...” Though the rest of the inscription is lost, what remains of the earlier lines primarily concern an altar in the newly built temple of Kemosh, suggesting that the particle is here drawing attention to some cultic artifact in this same installation.



more generally served as a prototype for northern monarchs.⁵¹ The opening line of the Decalogue to which Jeroboam alludes was also an adaptation of the “I am” formula. The use of the formula in Exod 20:2 – like Jeroboam’s calves and speech in 1 Kgs 12:28 – was intended to manifest Yahweh’s presence for the addressees at Sinai.⁵² The only difference is that 1 Kgs 12:28 replaces the first-person pronoun אֲנִי with the deictic particle הִנֵּה. This replacement makes sense in light of the tendency to replace first-person forms with third-person forms in transposing royal inscriptions into annalistic compositions, however. This inscriptional practice was thus another means by which Yahweh’s presence was manifested at Jeroboam’s cultic outpost.

The “I am” formula also shared a special relationship with theriomorphic images. A brief look at two such theriomorphic monuments with “I Am” inscriptions will further illustrate the function of Jeroboam’s calves. First, the ÇINEKÖY inscription is inscribed on a statue of the storm-god Tarhunza/Ba‘al standing on top of two bulls. While the statue depicts the storm-god, the inscription on the bulls opens with the line “I am Warikas.” As discussed above, this “I am” formula manifested the presence of the identified speaker – in this case, king Warikas. Notably, there is a mismatch here between the anthropomorphic image and the presence generated by the inscription on the theriomorphic one. While the bovine figures acted as a pedestal for the deity, they generated the presence of the king. In short, acting as pedestals and generating presence are not mutually exclusive functions for bovine iconography. ÇINEKÖY demonstrates

⁵¹ David Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 477–79; Mark Leuchter, “The Royal Background of Deut 18,15–18,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 130 (2018): 364–83; Mark Leuchter, “Hosea 6:5 and the Decalogue,” *Vetus Testamentum* 71 (2020): 76–88; J. Jona Schellekens, “To What Extent Is the Moses Story Modelled on Other Biblical Stories?,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 46 (2022): 495–515, 504.

⁵² Timothy Hogue, “The Monumentality of the Sinaitic Decalogue: Reading Exodus 20 in Light of Northwest Semitic Monument-Making Practices,” *JBL* 138 (2019): 79–99.

this in sharp contrast due to the mismatch between statue and inscription.⁵³ Jeroboam's calves thus may have functioned both as pedestals and as manifestations of the deity. This can be further established by the portal lion MARAŞ 1.

Though not a bovine figure, MARAŞ 1 provides essential evidence for the function of theriomorphic iconography more broadly. MARAŞ 1 is a portal orthostat carved with a lion; it was originally paired with an uninscribed lion to form the left and right jambs of a gateway to the citadel at Maraş (ancient Marqas, capital of Gurgum).⁵⁴ As in the case above, the inscription on the lion utilizes the "I am" formula to generate the presence of a king – here Halparuntiyas king of Gurgum. Though MARAŞ 1 is not the only portal beast to bear an "I Am" inscription nor the only "I Am" monument to include animal iconography, it is unique in one respect. The pronoun "I" that opens the inscription is rendered with a unique realization of the Anatolian Hieroglyph EGO₂. EGO₂ is typically a full-length portrait of the implied speaker of the inscription who is depicted in the pose of the hieroglyph EGO "I," thus allowing EGO₂ to act both as a portrait of the speaker and the first hieroglyph in the inscription.⁵⁵ The development of this hieroglyph may be related to the carving of "I Am" inscriptions on statues, with EGO₂ originating as a miniaturization of the statue it was carved on. However, on MARAŞ 1 EGO₂ is realized as a full-length image of the speaker standing on top of a lion.⁵⁶ While the lion may have

⁵³ Hogue, "I Am," 333–37.

⁵⁴ John David Hawkins, *Corpus of Hieroglyphic Luwian Inscriptions. Vol 1, Inscriptions of Hte Iron Age* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 261.

⁵⁵ Annick Payne, "The Hieroglyphic Sign Ego(2)," in *Audias Fabulas Veteres: Anatolian Studies in Honor of Jana Souckova-Siegelova*, ed. Annick Payne and Šárka Velhartická, Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 79 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 282–95, <https://upenn.alma.exlibrisgroup.com>.

⁵⁶ Sanna Aro, "Art and Architecture," in *The Luwians*, ed. H. Craig Melchert, vol. 68, Handbook of Oriental Studies (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003), 308–9; Sanna Aro, "Carchemish Before and After 1200 BC," in *Luwian Identities* (Brill, 2013), 233–76.



served as the pedestal for a statue, no statue has been found. Rather, this example implies that the lion in tandem with this inscriptional practice generated the presence of the speaker. The speaker was to be imagined standing on top of the beast, much as deities were often depicted elsewhere in the ancient Near East.

MARAŞ 1 and ÇINEKÖY disambiguate some of the apparent function of Jeroboam's calves. These artifacts demonstrate that such theriomorphic images functioned by manifesting presence. In these cases, this was accomplished by a combination of theriomorphic image and inscriptional practice – specifically, the “I am” formula. The same combination is attested in 1 Kgs 12:25-33, and thus Jeroboam's calves may be understood as both pedestals and manifestations of divine presence. From an ancient perspective, there was no contradiction between using them as pedestals and calling them god(s). This was far from their only function, however. Such artifacts also played important roles in ritual motion. MARAŞ 1, for instance, might imply that such theriomorphic pedestals were to be utilized with mobile statues. This usage is made explicit at Carchemish.

Manifesting Divine Presence through Ritual Motion

While previous scholarship has paid much attention to the relationship between bovine iconography and divine presence, almost no attention has been drawn to the connection between such images and ritual mobility. Bovine images were also dynamic supports for rituals, and served as waypoints for ritual motion on the part of both divine images and human participants in ceremonial processions. This was an essential function of such iconography that should be considered in connection with Jeroboam's calves. This function is best illustrated by the many examples of bovine iconography found at Carchemish.

The first example of bovine iconography from Carchemish was a pedestal like those discussed above. However, the neighboring inscription reveals that this pedestal was not a permanent base for statues, but instead used for the public display of mobile images in ritual processions. This statue base – labeled Carchemish 29 by Alessandra Gilibert – consisted of two bulls supporting a platform, and it stood at the base of the Great Staircase immediately east of the Storm-god Temple in Carchemish’s primary ceremonial district – the Lower Palace Area.⁵⁷ The neighboring inscription – KARKAMIŞ A1a – seems to describe the function of this statue base in §§16-20 and 24-27, which David Hawkins translates as follows:

§§16-20 and Tarhunza of the [...]NA- I seated up in front. And when I came forth, all these gods came forth with me, and sometimes I *worshipped* the one before his podium, and I *worshipped* the other before his podium.

§§24-27 When I came forth, I myself made this *assemblage* of the gods, and this potent Tarhunza I made stand, and with him I made these gods stand.⁵⁸

KARKAMIŞ A1a contains a nearly exact parallel to the description of Jeroboam’s creation of cultic outposts in 1 Kgs 12:29-30. It describes a large-scale ceremonial procession as was typical of Carchemish during this period. This procession is depicted in relief in the so-called Long Wall of Sculpture that forms a temenos around the Storm-God Temple, the same temenos that includes this inscription. That procession is

⁵⁷ Alessandra Gilibert, *Syro-Hittite Monumental Art and the Archaeology of Performance: The Stone Reliefs at Carchemish and Zincirli in the Earlier First Millennium BCE*, Topoi - Berlin Studies of the Ancient World 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 34–35.

⁵⁸ Hawkins, *Corpus of Hieroglyphic Luwian Inscriptions. Vol 1, Inscriptions of Hte Iron Age*, 88–89. The translation here is actually based on Hawkins’ forthcoming third volume of his *Corpus of Hieroglyphic Luwian*. It is identical to the translation in vol. 1, apart from the translation of a previously unknown verb as “worship.”



notably led by the storm-god Tarhunza and the divine pair Kubaba and Karhuha.⁵⁹ The above lines reveal that the relief images of these deities were not the only medium by which they were present in the procession. The speaker – the Country Lord Suhi II – claims to have brought forth the deities and to have placed them on podiums, likely including Carchemish 29. This implies that divine statues were carried to and through the Lower Palace Area as a part of the ceremonial procession. Once installed on their respective podiums, these statues were the recipients of worship. In the case of Carchemish 29, this was facilitated by a cup-mark in the statue base used for making libations – an action explicitly commanded in §33 of this inscription.⁶⁰ The bovine pedestal thus functioned as a target and waypoint for various ritual activities at Carchemish: the movement of divine statues, the procession of worshippers, and the offering of libations.

Another sculpted base of two bulls – Carchemish 93 – stood within the courtyard of the Storm-God Temple itself. Unlike the other base, however, the indentation on top of this one matches no known examples of statue bases. Instead, it has been proposed that this may have originally held a metal basin filled with water. A similar laver is known from the temple at Ain Dara, and it is presumed that these may have been used for ritual ablutions).⁶¹ Carchemish’s bull laver has also been compared to the Bronze Sea on Solomon’s bulls in the Jerusalem Temple.⁶² Carchemish thus attests bull statues serving the same

⁵⁹ Gilibert, *Syro-Hittite Monumental Art and the Archaeology of Performance: The Stone Reliefs at Carchemish and Zincirli in the Earlier First Millennium BCE*, 31–34.

⁶⁰ David Ussishkin, “Hollows, ‘Cup-Marks’, and Hittite Stone Monuments,” *Anatolian Studies* 25 (1975): 85–103.

⁶¹ Mirko Novák, “The Temple of ‘Ain Dārā in the Context of Imperial and Neo-Hittite Architecture and Art,” in *Temple Building and Temple Cult. Architecture and Cultic Paraphernalia of Temples in the Levant (2. - 1. Mill. B.C.E. Proceedings of a Conference on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Institute of Biblical Archaeology at the University of Tübingen, 28-30 May 2010*, ed. Jens Kamlah, *Abhandlungen Des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 41 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), 46.

⁶² Gilibert, *Syro-Hittite Monumental Art and the Archaeology of Performance: The Stone Reliefs at Carchemish and Zincirli in the Earlier First Millennium BCE*, 51–52.

purposes as both Solomon's and Jeroboam's bovine images – that is, holding lavers and facilitating offerings to deities. Both uses rely on an implicit function of the bulls marking special areas for ritual activity.

Though Jeroboam's calves were not explicitly used for libations or ablutions, they were the target of ritual activities as were the bulls at Carchemish. Hos 13:2 reports that the people kissed the calf of Samaria – a ritual act which required it to be publicly accessible. The same practice is ascribed to the calf of Bethel in Papyrus Amherst 63 column V line 12, which may describe an authentic Israelite ritual practice.⁶³ Most significantly, the act of kissing the calf first requires the worshipper to appear before the calf. These passages thus imagine the calves functioning as waypoints marking ritual motion, as was the case at Carchemish.

The final artifact from Carchemish is an orthostat depicting a ritual procession into the Country Lord Katuwa's Palace also located in the Lower Palace Area. A procession of women into the palace is led by a figure carrying a calf figurine. While we can only speculate about the material of this figurine, perhaps the depiction is of a bronze artifact similar to the bronze statuette of the storm-god discovered in the neighboring temple.⁶⁴ The neighboring inscriptions do not mention this figurine, but they do describe a ritual procession to be headed by the major deities of Carchemish (KARKAMIŞ A11b+c §§16-17). Perhaps this calf figurine was a means of manifesting divine presence in this procession. Like the hieroglyph EGO₂ on MARAŞ 1, it may have served as a miniaturization of the larger theriomorphic and anthropomorphic representations of deities elsewhere in the Lower Palace Area. Regardless of its precise function, however, this calf figurine played a

⁶³ Richard C. Steiner, "The Aramaic Text in Demotic Script," in *The Context of Scripture: Volume I - Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, ed. William W. Hallo (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 310, 313; Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 61–63.

⁶⁴ Marchetti, "Bronze Statuettes from the Temples of Karkemish," 310–15.



significant role in ritual processions in Carchemish's ceremonial precinct. Together, the bovine figures from Carchemish reveal one of the essential functions of Israelite bovine iconography. They directed ritual motion. This function is especially important when we consider its connection to cities and landscape in 1 Kgs 12:25-33*.

Jeroboam's Pilgrimage Network: Distributing Divine Presence

Beyond promoting ritual motion in the immediate vicinity of the golden calves, Jeroboam's cultic outposts are presented in 1 Kgs 12:25-33* as targets for pilgrimage. This is implied by the variant of the exodus formula in v. 27, for example. In the calves, the Israelites witness the god אשר העלוך מארץ מצרים "who brought you up from Egypt." When used to describe the Exodus, the root עלה consistently refers to movement into the land (namely, Israel).⁶⁵ That is, the use of the verb עלה implies motion towards a particular destination, as opposed to the motion away from a place implied by יצא. Alongside Jeroboam's proscription of pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the same verse (רב לכם מעלות ירושלים) using the same root, the verb here implies a pilgrimage to the calves. This pilgrimage is made explicit in v. 30, which narrates the people traveling to each of Jeroboam's outposts. The same root is then used to describe Jeroboam's ritual motion towards the altar in vv. 31-33, thus tying small-scale ritual motion to a large-scale religious journey.

Jeroboam's pilgrimage was a spectacle aimed at configuring Israelite identity. Following Ian Hodder, Hogue argues that such spectacles and

⁶⁵ Thomas B. Dozeman, "Hosea and the Wilderness Wandering Tradition," in *Rethinking the Foundations: Historiography in the Ancient World and in the Bible: Essays in Honor of John Van Seters*, ed. Steven McKenzie and Thomas Römer, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 294 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000), 62; Stephen C. Russell, *Images of Egypt in Early Biblical Literature: Cisjordan-Israelite, Transjordan-Israelite, and Judahite Portrayals*, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 403 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 48-50.

their accompanying artwork “directed the movement of the viewer” and “disciplined the body of the viewer or processor and molded them into particular social roles and rules.”⁶⁶ Referring to pilgrimage in particular as a form of spectacle, Lauren Ristvet argues that “polities may have used religious journeys to construct different political identities.”⁶⁷ This was accomplished through the royal appropriation of sites of pilgrimage or the royal construction of new pilgrimage sites. This allowed elites to cultivate influence in these areas by establishing their own activity as a part of the pilgrimage rites. Apart from instituting pilgrimage practices, Jeroboam is first implied to have traveled to five places of pilgrimage to engage in refurbishment activities. He is thus presented as engaging in identity negotiation in various locales, but more importantly he is constructing a larger political landscape by enacting this negotiation at multiple sites in tandem with one another.

Pilgrimage networks function as instruments of political organization by “underscoring the shared religious experience of diverse places.”⁶⁸ In cases like Mesha’s Moab, Urhilina’s Hamath, and Jeroboam’s Israel, this involved distributing the presence of the king and his tutelary deity to multiple settlements.⁶⁹ Jeroboam’s cultic outposts – especially the golden calves – made Yahweh’s presence available at multiple locations simultaneously. Viewed in this light, the calves might be understood as pedestals that allowed Yahweh to travel. The ritual

⁶⁶ Timothy Hogue, “With Apologies to Hazael: The Counter-Monumentality of the Tel Dan Stele,” *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 10, no. 3 (2021): 248; Ian Hodder, “The Spectacle of Daily Performance at Çatalhöyük,” in *Archaeology of Performance: Theatres of Power, Community, and Politics*, ed. Takeshi Inomata and Lawrence S. Coben (Oxford: Rowman Altamira, 2006), 82, 96–99.

⁶⁷ Lauren Ristvet, *Ritual, Performance, and Politics in the Ancient Near East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 74.

⁶⁸ Ristvet, 69.

⁶⁹ Timothy Hogue, “For God, King and Country: Cult and Territoriality in the Iron Age Levant,” *Levant* 54 (2022): 347–58, 356.



travel of divine images or other powerful icons is well-attested in the ancient Near East, and Daniel Fleming has argued that such a tradition may even lie behind the motion of the Ark of the Covenant in Yahwistic festivals.⁷⁰ In this connection, it is worth noting some key iconographic examples of bovine images associated with deities from ancient Israel. Three scaraboids (two from Samaria and one from Lachish) depict a deity walking on top of a bovine figure.⁷¹ The deity is depicted as walking rather than standing, emphasizing the function of bovine pedestals of facilitating the motion of divine statues or other icons rather than permanently holding static deities. Jeroboam's calves thus allowed Yahweh to travel around Israel with Jeroboam, participating in the pilgrimage alongside his people, further delineating their shared religious experience in Jeroboam's political landscape.

Establishing pilgrimage networks was a significant means of projecting sovereignty over territories in the ancient Near East. By creating new cult sites or by making themselves into the chief participants in pre-existing pilgrimages, ancient elites projected their power over otherwise disparate settlements.⁷² Ristvet has analyzed this strategy in multiple cases from Mesopotamia, concluding that "the royal procession to cult centers in the countryside was part of the construction of a new form of political landscape, one of kingdoms, not

⁷⁰ Beate Pongratz-Leisten, "The Interplay of Military Strategy and Cultic Practice in Assyrian Politics," in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the Tenth Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project Helsinki, September 7-11, 1995*, ed. Simo Parpola and Robert Whiting (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), 245-52; Daniel E. Fleming, "David and the Ark: A Jerusalem Festival Reflected in Royal Narrative," in *Literature as Politics, Politics as Literature: Essays on the Ancient Near East in Honor of Peter Machinist*, ed. David S. Vanderhooft and Abraham Winitzer (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 75-95.

⁷¹ Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 192-93 no. 207a & 207b.

⁷² Lauren Ristvet, "Travel and the Making of North Mesopotamian Polities," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 361 (2011): 1-31; Ristvet, *Ritual, Performance, and Politics in the Ancient Near East*, 67-91.

isolated villages.”⁷³ Hogue has recently noted the same strategy in the Iron Age polities of Hamath and Moab with one distinct feature. The kings of Hamath and Moab constructed shrines throughout their territories that were all devoted to the same deity.

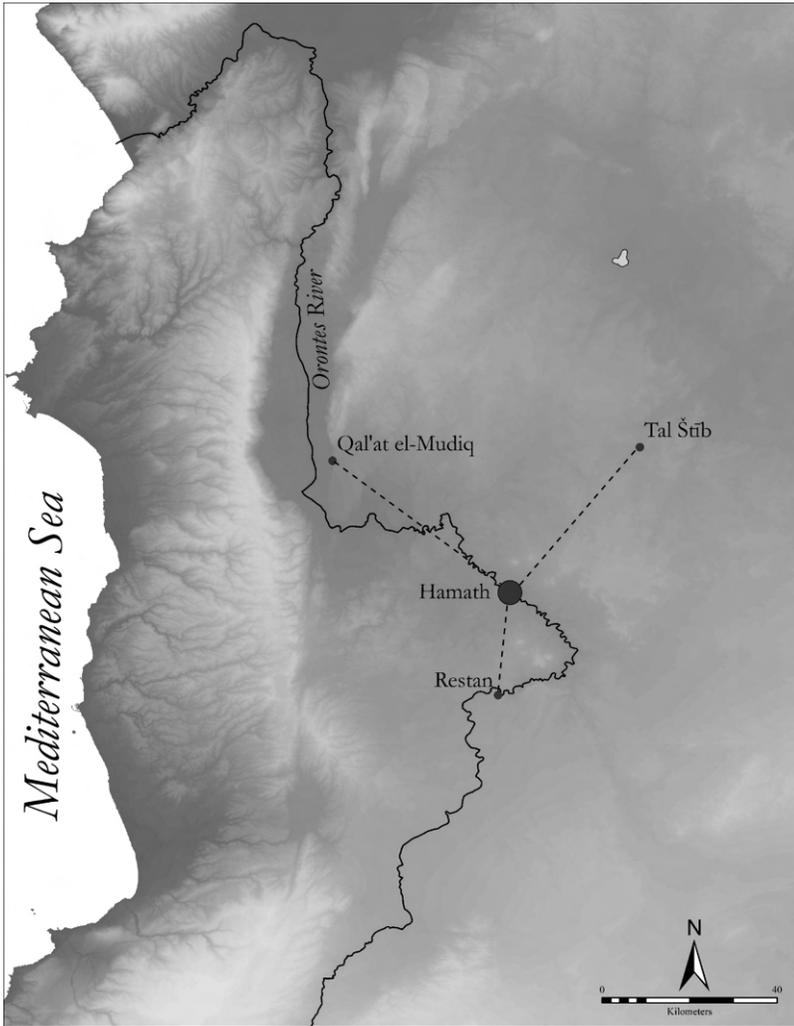


Figure 1: Pilgrimage sites in Urhilina's Hamath. Map by Amy Karoll.

⁷³ Ristvet, *Ritual, Performance, and Politics in the Ancient Near East*, 68.



The 9th century kingdoms of Hamath and Moab had to be constructed by their respective kings. They were not pre-existing territories to be claimed, but rather composed of disparate settlements that needed to be knit together in order to form any sort of territorial polity. Urhilina accomplished this for Hamath by reconstructing a temple for the city's primary deity within Hamath itself, and then installing cultic outposts devoted to the same deity at cultic outposts on Hamath's frontier (see Fig. 1) These constructions are indicated by Urhilina's inscriptions HAMA 4, QAL'AT EL-MUDIQ, TAL ŠĪB, and RESTAN.⁷⁴ Mesha attempted the same for Moab by constructing a *bmt* "shrine" for Kemosh on Dibon's acropolis (as indicated in KAI 181 line 3), as well as a cultic outpost for Kemosh in Kerak (see Fig. 2).⁷⁵ These rulers thus used cultic outposts to create pilgrimage networks that linked the cores and peripheries of their kingdoms together and created a relationship between disparate settlements based on their shared relationship to a particular king and his tutelary deity.⁷⁶ Jeroboam is depicted as engaging in the same practice in 1 Kgs 12:25-33* by claiming and establishing shrines to Yahweh at various strategic locations in Israel. The commonalities between the depiction of Jeroboam and the attested practices of Israel's neighbors lends further weight to the

⁷⁴ Hogue, "For God, King and Country," 353–54; Ristvet, *Ritual, Performance, and Politics in the Ancient Near East*, 68.

⁷⁵ This cult outpost is indicated in the Kerak Inscription (KAI 306). Bruce Routledge argues that this inscription indicates Kerak was a secondary Moabite capital. He identifies it as ancient Kir-Hareseth, while Nadav Na'aman identifies it as *Hawronen*/Horonaim, which is mentioned in the far south of Moab in KAI 181. Routledge, "THE POLITICS OF MESHAN," 245; Nadav Na'aman, "The Campaign of Mesha against Horonaim," *Biblische Notizen* 73 (1994): 27–30.

⁷⁶ Hogue, "For God, King and Country."

argument that the strata under consideration originated in the Northern Kingdom before its fall.⁷⁷

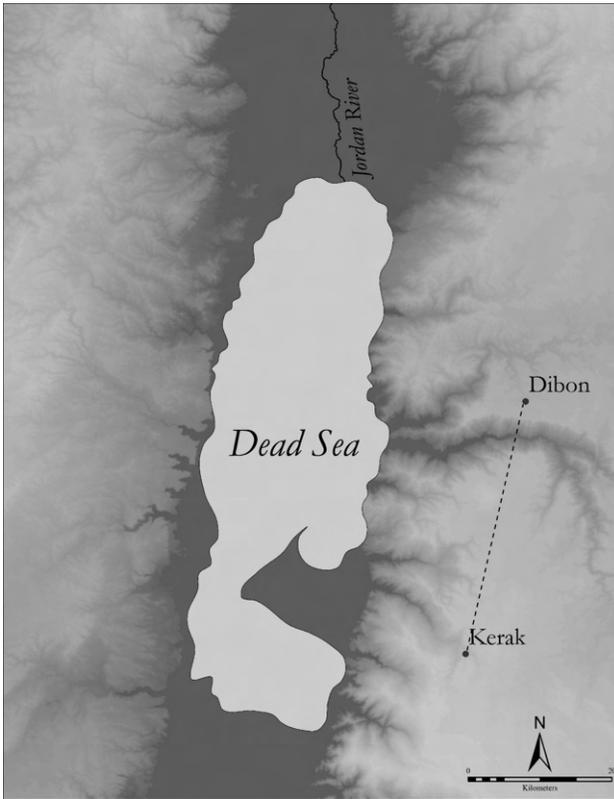


Figure 2: Pilgrimage sites in Mesha’s Moab. Map by Amy Karoll.

⁷⁷ There is some debate over assigning a more precise date to these strata. Angelika Berlejung and Thomas Römer argue that the account is of Jeroboam II rather than Jeroboam I, for example. My own approach leaves the date less certain. On the one hand, the function of the calves in directing ritual motion is attested at 10th century Carchemish and thus contemporary with Jeroboam I. On the other hand, the establishment of cultic outposts devoted to a single deity to construct political landscapes is attested in the Levant primarily in the 9th century, contemporary with the Omrides. The depiction of these practices in 1 Kgs 12:25-33* thus points to an Iron II date, but not necessarily to a specific Israelite king’s reign. Angelika Berlejung, “Twisting Traditions: Programmatic Absence-Theology for the Northern Kingdom in 1 Kgs 12:26-33* (The ‘Sin of Jeroboam’),” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 35, no. 2 (2009): 23; Thomas Römer, “How Jeroboam II Became Jeroboam I,” *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 6, no. 3 (2017): 372–82.



All of Jeroboam's building activity in 1 Kgs 12:25-33 is centered on sites of special cultic significance. Jeroboam is thus depicted as appropriating places of pilgrimage; he is engaging in a practice observed elsewhere in which elites would "introduce themselves into a preexisting ritual" in order to legitimate their control of that area.⁷⁸ This begins in v. 25 with Jeroboam's refurbishment of Shechem and Penuel. Shechem, or at least its environs, was the dwelling place of Jacob in Gen 33-35 and 37. Similarly, the origin of Penuel is connected to Jacob in Gen 32:22-32. In addition, Shechem also seems to have been the original Place of the Name in Deut 27, a chapter which may reflect an ancient, northern tradition.⁷⁹ It was signaled out in biblical tradition as a place where Yahweh could be manifested. While the passage in 1 Kings does not explicitly describe the placement of a calf image in this region, Jeroboam's rebuilding of these cities constitutes an appropriation of pre-existing cult sites. By travelling to these areas and engaging in construction, Jeroboam is depicted as utilizing these sites of pilgrimage to construct his new political landscape.⁸⁰

Besides appropriating places of pilgrimage in Israel's core, Jeroboam also constructed cultic outposts on Israel's frontiers. The elite appropriation of places of pilgrimage was especially important for

⁷⁸ Ristvet, *Ritual, Performance, and Politics in the Ancient Near East*, 71.

⁷⁹ While Deut 27 specifies that the Place of the Name is Mount Ebal, Sandra Richter argues that one of the main reasons Ebal is mentioned is its close proximity to regional center at Shechem. The same logic allowed the biblical authors to identify other temple cities by their associated mountains, as in the case of Jerusalem and Zion as well as Dan and Hermon. Sandra L. Richter, "The Place of the Name in Deuteronomy," *Vetus Testamentum* 57 (2007): 342-66.

⁸⁰ It is possible that the building Jeroboam did at Shechem and Penuel is to be understood as the construction of shrines. If the original source of 1 Kgs 12:25-33 was indeed a royal inscription, it need not have explicitly described all new shrines. The Mesha Stele, for instance, only narrates the construction of the shrine in Dibon in detail. As seen above, lines 29-30 of that inscription summarily mention the construction of temples at Madaba, Diblaten, and Ba'al-Ma'on without further explanation. The cult outpost at Kerak is only indicated by the inscription discovered there; the same is true for Urhilina's outposts. Perhaps the passage in 1 Kgs 12 reports only the construction of the most important shrines in detail: those that marked the extremities of Jeroboam's kingdom. The core cities are simply assumed to have similar installations. In fact, Hosea makes this explicit in speaking of a calf in the neighboring city of Samaria (Hos 8:5-6) - Israel's capital under the Omrides and all subsequent rulers.

establishing control over contested territory distant from the royal center. I begin with the least obvious example: the often missed fifth city built by Jeroboam. 1 Kgs 12:31 mentions very briefly that Jeroboam also built Beth-Bamot. This phrase is sometimes translated literally into the difficult “house of the shrines.”⁸¹ However, this may be a place name, based on its attestation in the Mesha Stele. Mesha claims in line 27 of his inscription:

w³nk . bnty . bt . bmt . ky hrs . h³

“Then I built Beth-Bamot, because it had been destroyed.”

Based on the geographical structure of Mesha’s inscription – which moves from north to south – this city was in northern Moab near Bezer and Medeba. While little is said about this place here, the name at least implies that it had some cultic significance. Furthermore, this appears to have been a city whose ownership was disputed between Israel and Moab. Both Mesha and Jeroboam claim to have rebuilt it in order claim sovereignty there. Like Shechem and Penuel, however, Jeroboam’s cultic activities are only implied here. His construction of cultic outposts is only made explicit in the cases of Bethel and Dan.

Bethel is a key fixture of the stories about Israel’s eponymous ancestor Jacob. Jacob raises a *maṣṣebah* at Bethel in Gen 28:18. One of the supposed functions of *maṣṣebah* was the manifestation of divine presence,⁸² so Jeroboam is depicted as using the site for the same purpose. The cultic significance of Bethel is further developed by Jacob’s construction of an altar there in Gen 35:1, and God’s appellation

⁸¹ Greer, “Recasting the Sin of the Calf: The Deference of Jeroboam in 1 Kings 12 and the Formation of the Earliest History of Israel and Judah,” 42.

⁸² Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, “Massebot Standing for Yhwh: The Fall of a Yhwistic Cult Symbol,” in *Worship, Women, and War: Essays in Honor of Susan Niditch*, ed. John J. Collins, T. M. Lemos, and Saul M. Olyan, *Brown Judaic Studies* 357 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2015), 99–116, <https://upenn.alma.exlibrisgroup.com>.



in Gen 31:13 “the God of Bethel.” Elsewhere, Bethel is depicted as a place of pilgrimage (e.g., 1 Sam 10:3; Amos 4:4; 5:5).⁸³ Bethel more specifically functioned as a cultic outpost connecting Israel’s periphery to its core, because it was the southernmost city claimed by Israel (at least during the period depicted in the passage).⁸⁴ Bethel was in a border region between Israel and Judah. While Bethel never seems to have been disputed territory, it nevertheless may have marked the transition between the southern and northern kingdoms and may have represented an ancient competitor to Jerusalem in the south.⁸⁵

Dan was one of the northernmost cities ever claimed by Israel, and it was subject to competing claims of sovereignty. The Aramaean king Hazael also laid claim to the city, possibly integrating it into his own pilgrimage network (Fig. 3). Archaeological evidence indicates that Dan was an important place of pilgrimage, perhaps for both Aram and Israel.⁸⁶ A bronze plaque found at Tel Dan seems to depict a throne for a deity on top of at least one bovine figure, providing extrabiblical evidence for the tradition in 1 Kgs 12.⁸⁷ In the Bible, Judges 18:29-30 connects the founding of Dan to the establishment of a cult site officiated by the descendants of Moses. The traditions associated with

⁸³ Jules Francis Gomes, *The Sanctuary of Bethel and the Configuration of Israelite Identity*, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 368 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 87–91; Daniel E. Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah’s Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 314–21.

⁸⁴ For this reason, the evidence that 10th-9th century Bethel was more sparsely populated than at other periods does not mean that it was not still a significant cultic outpost. Cultic outposts like the ones depicted in 1 Kgs 12:25-33 in some cases only functioned as places of pilgrimage while other settlement activity was significantly limited. Israel Finkelstein and Lily Singer-Avitz, “Reevaluating Bethel,” *Zeitschrift Des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins (1953-)* 125, no. 1 (2009): 33–48. Ristvet, *Ritual, Performance, and Politics in the Ancient Near East*, 82..

⁸⁵ Ernst Axel Knauf, “Bethel: The Israelite Impact on Judean Language and Literature,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 318–19.

⁸⁶ David Ilan and Jonathan S. Greer, “A Pilgrimage to Iron Age II Tel Dan,” *Advances in Ancient, Biblical, and Near Eastern Research* 1.3 (2021): 145–90.

⁸⁷ Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 64–65.

Jeroboam’s cultic outposts bely broader strategies in the accounts of Jeroboam that relate his character to those of Jacob and Moses.⁸⁸

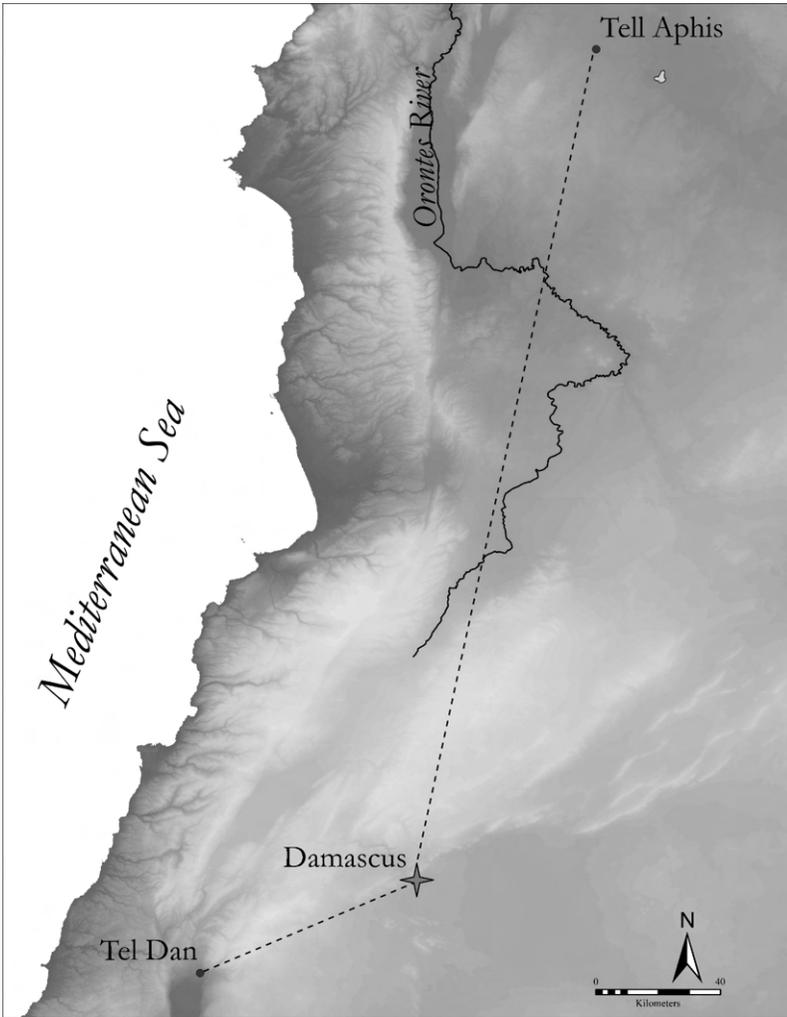


Figure 3: Pilgrimage sites in Hazael’s Aram. Map by Amy Karoll.

⁸⁸ Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction*, 478; Israel Finkelstein and Thomas Römer, “Comments on the Historical Background of the Jacob Narrative in Genesis,” *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 126 (2014): 317–38; Leuchter, “The Royal Background of Deut 18,15–18.”



The narrative of Jeroboam's construction of calf shrines at Dan and Bethel suggests that he was projecting his sovereignty over those cities by directing its denizens in their ritual practice. If it functioned analogously to the calf images at Carchemish, the calves at Dan and Bethel were imagined as a ritual waypoint guiding ceremonial processions in the city. They thus compelled at least a basic form of obedience and distributed the king's sovereignty throughout the landscape.⁸⁹ Speaking of spectacles at Dan in particular, Hogue argues that they "allowed the Danites to see their community act as a collective – now an Israelite collective."⁹⁰ In other words, the calves afforded an Israelite identity – at least as defined by Jeroboam – at Bethel and Dan. Like the cultic outposts of Urhilina and Mesha, though, the erection of calves at both Dan and Bethel as well as the refurbishment of places of pilgrimage in the Israelite heartland implies that the waypoint function of the calves was expanded to directing travel around the region. The calves thus configured the entire region as Jeroboam's territory.

⁸⁹ Ristvet, *Ritual, Performance, and Politics in the Ancient Near East*, 90; Hogue, "For God, King and Country," 351; Cf. James F. Osborne, "Sovereignty and Territoriality in the City-State: A Case Study from the Amuq Valley, Turkey," *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 32 (2013): 774–90.

⁹⁰ Hogue, "With Apologies to Hazael: The Counter-Monumentality of the Tel Dan Stele," 256.

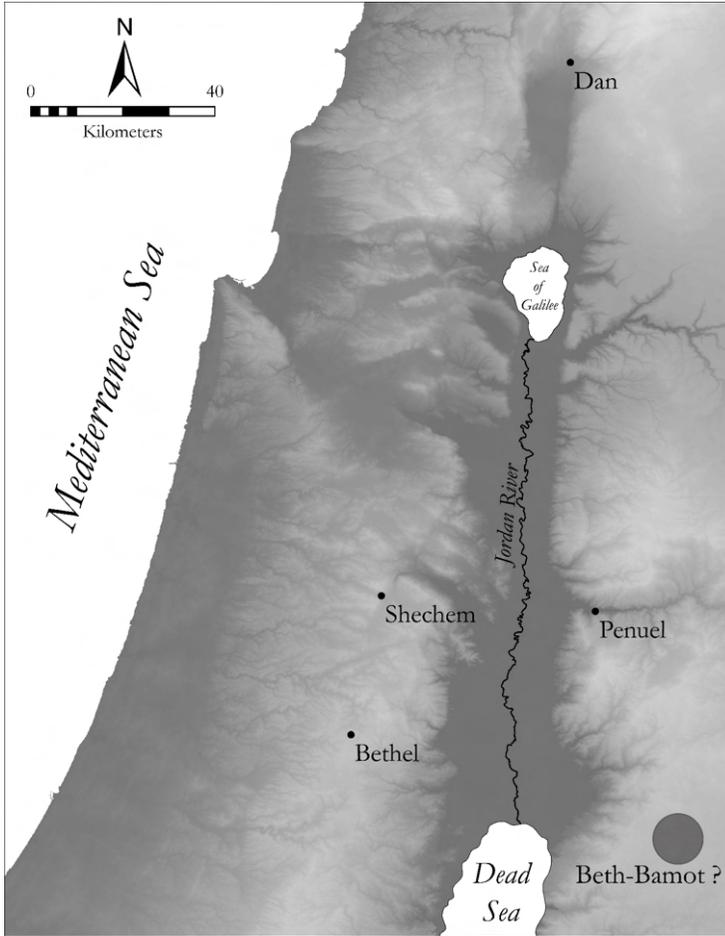


Figure 4: Pilgrimage sites in Jeroboam's Israel, as depicted in 1 Kgs 12:25-33.
Map by Amy Karoll.

In sum, the Israelite strata of 1 Kgs 12:25-33* depict Jeroboam establishing a pilgrimage network to define his political landscape as a kingdom as opposed to a loose collection of settlements. This pilgrimage network was narrativized as Jeroboam traveling to five cities (Fig. 4), engaging in construction, and designating them as sites of Israelite pilgrimage. Some of these pilgrimages culminated with ritual activity targeted at the golden calves. But far from being mere idols, the more important function of these calves was to



promote travel through the landscape of Jeroboam's Israel. The calves are depicted as focal points in pilgrimage rites, but they were ultimately just one aspect of a more complicated pilgrimage circuit. That circuit gave people the opportunity to experience Israel's natural and urban landscapes as networked together. Walking together to and through these cities provided the people an opportunity to experience themselves as a community connected to the landscape, as opposed to unrelated populations from various settlements. This circuit thus created the opportunity for Israelites to define themselves as Israelites, in contradistinction to more localized identities. The pilgrimage also served as an opportunity for these people to witness themselves as a community that did as Jeroboam directed. Jeroboam thus provided a set of spectacles intended to bring his Israel into being – to discipline the people of the north into his vision of Israelites.

Discussion: The Struggle for Identity in the Redaction of 1 Kings 12:25-33

1 Kgs 12:25-33 is an account of Jeroboam establishing a pilgrimage network to configure his Israelite kingdom. The pilgrimage network served to direct people around the territory claimed by Israel and to initiate them into a particular relationship between the land, the god Yahweh, and Jeroboam himself. This was accomplished at least in part by Jeroboam's golden calves, which distributed Yahweh's presence in particular spaces but also directed people to travel to those spaces and engage in ritual activities there. Reading the passage in this light makes it possible to reread the polemic against Jeroboam with more nuance. This polemic is not concerned with an "idol" representing

Yahweh, but rather, as Levtow puts it, with “the way cult images and their associated rites *actualize* configurations of social relations.”⁹¹

Lauren Monroe has recently argued that “understanding the political development of Greater Israel first in the lived landscape and literary traditions of the north, and later in the literary imagination of Judah’s scribes” requires recognizing the transmission of these texts as a site of struggle.⁹² This notion of redacted texts as sites of struggle originates with Itumeleng Mosala and was recently developed by Gerard West. Mosala viewed redaction as indicative of struggle “between communities behind the text.”⁹³ Disentangling editorial additions from redacted texts thus exposes a conversation between a redacted voice and a redactional voice.⁹⁴ West proposes using such an approach “to access, via redaction criticism, ideologically co-opted voices in the midst of their own distinctive sectoral struggles.”⁹⁵ This accords well with Levtow’s proposed understanding of polemics against cult artifacts in the Hebrew Bible. These polemics claim power over that material culture by “othering” it – that is, by defining the writer’s community in contradistinction to the culture represented.⁹⁶

Othering is first apparent in the Israelite strata of 1 Kgs 12:25-33. Verse 27 presents Jeroboam’s pilgrimage network as an alternative to the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. While some scholars assign all the references

⁹¹ Levtow, *Images of Others: Iconic Politics in Ancient Israel*, 19 n. 1 emphasis in original.

⁹² Lauren Monroe, “On the Origins and Development of Greater Israel,” *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 10, (2021): 187-227, 188.

⁹³ Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 125.

⁹⁴ Mosala, 185.

⁹⁵ Gerald West, “Redaction Criticism as a Resource for the Bible as ‘A Site of Struggle,’” *Old Testament Essays* 30, no. 2 (2017): 543.

⁹⁶ Levtow, *Images of Others: Iconic Politics in Ancient Israel*, 29–39.



to Jerusalem to a Judahite redactor,⁹⁷ such competition between shrines is not unknown in other southern Levantine royal inscriptions. For example, lines 14-18 of the Mesha Stele report that Mesha captured an Israelite city, took the ritual implements from the local shrine to Yahweh, and devoted them to his god Kemosh. So it is not impossible that a reference to Jerusalem originated in a northern source, though Jeroboam's attitude towards Jerusalem is decidedly less violent.

In fact, some scholars have proposed that Jeroboam is being depicted here as deferent to the cult practices of Jerusalem, especially as indicated by his use of calves rather than bulls.⁹⁸ Even later in Israel's history as it expanded south of Judah, southern cult places seem to have been left unclaimed by the north.⁹⁹ Ristvet has noted a similar relationship between Kahat and Apum. When the larger kingdom of Apum incorporated settlements on either side of the smaller kingdom of Kahat, that smaller kingdom nevertheless went unclaimed by Apum. This was done out of deference to the pilgrimage network within Kahat, which was held in high regard by Apum.¹⁰⁰ I would therefore suggest that Jeroboam was engaged in what Nadia Ben-Marzouk calls "inclusionary othering" – a practice of marking differences between

⁹⁷ These references are assumed to be southern even by scholars who assign much of the rest of the text to a northern source. Ernst Würthwein, *Die Bücher Der Könige 1. 1 Kön 1-16*, Alt Testament Deutsch 11 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 162; Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 361; Jonathan Miles Robker, *The Jehu Revolution: A Royal Tradition of the Northern Kingdom and Its Ramifications*, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 435 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 127..

⁹⁸ Fleming, "25?," מִיָּהוּ עַגְלֵי פָר, אִם אֵל הוּא פָר, Wilson-Wright, "Bethel and the Persistence of El," 716; Greer, "Recasting the Sin of the Calf: The Deference of Jeroboam in 1 Kings 12 and the Formation of the Earliest History of Israel and Judah."

⁹⁹ Israel Finkelstein, "Jeroboam II in Transjordan," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 34 (2020): 19–29.

¹⁰⁰ Lauren Ristvet, "Legal and Archaeological Territories of the Second Millennium BC in Northern Mesopotamia," *Antiquity* 82 (2008): 592–93.

groups without necessarily marginalizing one or the other.¹⁰¹ Jeroboam seems to have differentiated his cultic practices from southern ones in intentional ways – particularly in his use of calves and avoidance of appropriating pilgrimage sites in Judah. The pilgrimage to Jerusalem is thus not implied to be illegitimate but merely non-Israelite.

The editorial material, however, is engaged in exclusionary othering; it asserts Jerusalem’s dominance and “strips those labeled other of their agency.”¹⁰² Alongside the reference to Jerusalem in v. 27, a redactor argues that to go to Jerusalem would turn the hearts of the people אל-אדניהם אל-רהבעם מלך יהודה “to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah.” Placing these words into the mouth of Jeroboam transforms him from a legitimate king constructing a political landscape for Israel into a rebel refusing to acknowledge the true king – Rehoboam. This redactor thus recasts Jeroboam’s pilgrimages as acts of sedition. Worse still, the redactor makes Jeroboam’s pilgrimage into an act of cowardice by having him express the anxiety that the people would kill him if they participated in the Jerusalem pilgrimage.

The clearest indication of exclusionary othering is the insertion in v. 30 ויהי הדבר הזה להטאת “and this thing became a sin.” It must be emphasized that the calves are not explicitly labeled idols here. In this regard, it is worth noting that the verb ויין “and he took counsel” in v. 28 may imply that Jeroboam undertook the necessary divination or consulted with a prophet to get divine sanction for his calves. Such sanctions were required before constructing divine images in the

¹⁰¹ Nadia Ben-Marzouk, “Othering the Alphabet: Rewriting the Social Context of a New Writing System in the Egyptian Expedition Community,” in *Ancient Egyptian Society*, ed. Danielle Candelora, Nadia Ben-Marzouk, and Kathlyn M. Cooney (London: Routledge, 2022), 287–89.

¹⁰² Ben-Marzouk, 287.



broader region.¹⁰³ This part of the text appears to have been left alone. Instead, this accusation of sin was inserted between an account of the calves being erected in two cultic outposts and the people's pilgrimage to those outposts. The redactor is targeting Jeroboam's pilgrimage and its markers, not idols as such.

Jeroboam engages in inclusionary othering again in vv. 31-33. He draws his priests from the "full extent of the people," potentially avoiding competition with the ritual specialists of Jerusalem.¹⁰⁴ He goes on to prescribe activating his pilgrimage network by means of a repeated festival. As Ristvet argues for pilgrimage networks more broadly, "frequent royal visits and state ceremonial reinforced a sense of belonging."¹⁰⁵ While both Jeroboam's festival and the pilgrimage festival in Jerusalem were likely Sukkot, Jeroboam's festival is notably shifted from the seventh month to the eighth month. It is possible that the timing of Jeroboam's festival reflects an earlier cultic calendar in use in Israel than the one preserved in the Bible that places this festival in the seventh month.¹⁰⁶ It is also possible that Jeroboam was following an accepted procedure for moving a festival in order to keep open the possibility for his people to participate in the pilgrimage to Jerusalem.¹⁰⁷ Jeroboam thus avoided delegitimizing the festival in

¹⁰³ Victor A. Hurowitz, "What Can Go Wrong with an Idol?," in *Iconoclasm and Text Destruction in the Ancient Near East and Beyond*, ed. Natalie Naomi May, Oriental Institute Seminars 8 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2012), 269–76; Katharina Pyschny, "Concepts of Prophetic Leadership in Chronicles and Their Relation to Prophetic Literature," in *Transforming Authority: Concepts of Leadership in Prophetic and Chronistic Literature*, ed. Katharina Pyschny and Sarah Schulz (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 302–3; Elizabeth VanDyke, "Designing the Golden Calf: Pens and Presumption in the Production of a 'Divine' Image," *JBL* 141 (2022): 219–33.

¹⁰⁴ Greer, "Recasting the Sin of the Calf: The Deference of Jeroboam in 1 Kings 12 and the Formation of the Earliest History of Israel and Judah," 44–45.

¹⁰⁵ Ristvet, *Ritual, Performance, and Politics in the Ancient Near East*, 71.

¹⁰⁶ Wesley I. Toews, *Monarchy and Religious Institution in Israel under Jeroboam I* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 100–104; Gomes, *The Sanctuary of Bethel and the Configuration of Israelite Identity*, 34–35.

¹⁰⁷ Num 9:10-11, for example, authorizes celebrating the Passover one month later in cases where people are unable to participate on the usual date. Greer, "Dinner at Dan," 39–41..

Jerusalem; he simply othered it. It was not illegitimate, but neither was it Israelite.

Again, the editorial comments here take a more exclusionary approach. The insertions in vv. 31-33 argue that the only legitimate priests were Levites, that Jeroboam's festival was a disingenuous fabrication, and that Bethel was an illegitimate shrine. The redactor's focus on Bethel as opposed to Jeroboam's other shrines warrants special comment. This was partly motivated by historical factors.¹⁰⁸ The Israelite center moved to Samaria after the reign of Jeroboam I, and Shechem and Peniel both seem to be left out of polemics against the north. Dan was one of the first cities conquered by Assyria in 733 BCE. It quickly became the seat of an Assyrian province and appears never to have regained its earlier cultic significance for the Israelites.¹⁰⁹ The reference to the city Beth-Bamot in the Israelite strata was simply misunderstood by the redactor, who reads the name literally in v. 32 as a reference to multiple *bmwt* "shrines" constructed by Jeroboam. This misunderstanding implies that the city had been forgotten by the time this text was redacted. Bethel, however, retained its cultic significance even after the fall of the northern kingdom.¹¹⁰ The continuity of this cult site and its potential competition with Jerusalem may explain why the redacted form of the text "used Bethel, its cult, priesthood, iconography and festivals to fashion...identity vis-à-vis the "other" – i.e. Jerusalem and Judah."¹¹¹ The Judahite redactor – who was

¹⁰⁸ A broader regional shift in ritual practice during the late 8th and 7th centuries may also explain the public nature of Jeroboam's manifestations of Yahweh as opposed to the restricted nature of Yahweh's presence in Jerusalem. Hogue, *The Ten Commandments*, 183..

¹⁰⁹ Yifat Thareani, "Imperializing the Province: A Residence of a Neo-Assyrian City Governor at Tel Dan," *Levant* 48 (2016): 254–83.

¹¹⁰ Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition*, 314–21.

¹¹¹ Gomes, *The Sanctuary of Bethel and the Configuration of Israelite Identity*, 215.



likely editing the text after the fall of Samaria in 722 BCE – took aim at Bethel to exclude the surviving cult of Israel in the north.

The focus on Bethel also provides a clue for a more specific historical setting for the redaction of this passage. Bethel plays an important role in Josiah’s reform as described in 2 Kgs 23:15-20. This account takes great pains to describe Josiah’s defilement of Jeroboam’s cult place at Bethel. The polemical language used to describe Jeroboam in v. 15 – אשר החטיא את-ישראל “the one that caused Israel to sin” – is reminiscent of the polemical note in 1 Kgs 12:30. Furthermore, 2 Kgs 23:19 seems to rely upon the same mistaken reading of Beth-Bamot implied by the editorial material in 1 Kgs 12:32. These parallels suggest a Josianic redactor for 1 Kgs 12:25-33. This suggestion comes with some caveats, however. None of these parallels are precise. Additionally, the text in 2 Kgs 23:15-20 shows signs of having been transformed itself. Lauren Monroe, for example, sees at least two strata here – one Josianic and one postmonarchic. Both strata develop a polemic against Bethel, but in different ways.¹¹² Perhaps the editorial material in 1 Kgs 12:25-33 is similarly to be explained as the result of multiple redactions. Nevertheless, the editorial material is united in its polemic against Israel.

In short, the polemic in 1 Kgs 12:25-33 is targeted not at the calves as idols, but the calves as loci for identity formation. Jeroboam’s “Israel” and not idolatry was the true sin of the calves. Traveling to cities like Bethel and engaging in ritual activity centered on the golden calves made one into an Israelite, in Jeroboam’s vision of Israel. Travelling to Jerusalem was not illegitimate, but it was not part of Jeroboam’s political landscape of Israel. The Judahite redactors thus understood the identity formation afforded by Jeroboam’s pilgrimages as competing with their own ideal of pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

¹¹² Lauren Monroe, *Josiah’s Reform and the Dynamics of Defilement: Israelite Rites of Violence and the Making of a Biblical Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 110–15, 134.

Accordingly, they constructed a polemic targeted at the elements of material culture that defined Jeroboam's pilgrimages. In so doing, they othered Israel – arguing that Jeroboam's "Israel" was an illegitimate fabrication.

