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# Pour Forth the Sparkling Chalice: An Examination of Libation Practices in the Levant

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# **“Pour Forth the Sparkling Chalice”**

*An Examination of Libation Practices in the Levant*

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Honors Project 2007

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## **Abstract**

Across the Levant “libation installations” have been identified at numerous ancient archaeological sites. This paper examines these claims in light of both the surrounding material remains and the surviving texts of the region that mention libations of wine and water. It shows that libation, the ritual pouring out of a liquid offering to a god, in ancient Syria-Palestine did not require a receptacle for successful completion of the act. Rather, the category “libation installation” exists not because of solid evidence but to fulfill the needs of modern scholars and any such claim must be carefully scrutinized before being accepted.

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost I cannot thank my advisor, Professor Nanette Goldman enough for all that she has done for me and this project. She has read countless drafts, answered hundreds of questions, and was amazingly calm whenever I appeared in her office and announced sweeping changes or the occasional new thesis to the paper. The seeds for this paper came from a trip to the temple at Kedesh, for which I owe Professor Andy Overman thanks for first allowing me to write a paper on Kedesh, and second for taking me there. Special thanks are due to both Katherine and Samantha, who put up with countless episodes of libation-inspired babble at two in the morning. A final note of gratitude is also due to Maureen for all her tea, support, and general camaraderie throughout this process.

# **"Pour Forth the Sparkling Chalice"**

## *An Examination of Libation Practices in the Levant*

### **Introduction**

The world of ritual has been a popular field of inquiry in recent scholarship. Catherine Bell, P. Bourdieu, and J. Z. Smith have all published books on the theory of the practice in general. Within the study of the ancient world, following the work of Walter Burkert, interest in the field of ritual has also been renewed, especially with regards to sacrifice. Many works on sacrifice, the theory which surrounds it, and the method it consists of have been published. To a lesser extent, other aspects of cultic ritual behavior have also been studied. These include non-animal burnt offerings, meals offered to gods, and incense. Strangely, amidst this study of cultic ritual scholars have neglected one ritual, that of libation.

The libation, the pouring of a liquid offering to a god, is a concept rarely questioned. Considered an ancillary component of cult, its existence is assumed but seldom investigated. In his seminal work on ritual, Walter Burkert devoted little more than a page to the practice, writing it off as a simple demarcation practice. Perhaps part of the reason for Burkert's brevity was his misinterpretation of the inherent nature of the practice. The lack of a receptacle for the drink offering was for Burkert, and still is for most scholars working with libations, an insurmountable obstacle to accepting the act as a functional ritual as opposed to a demarcation practice.<sup>1</sup> A receptacle, it is speculated,

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<sup>1</sup> While few scholars have done studies devoted to libations, many have touched upon them in their work on larger ritual complexes in which libations make up a portion. When the libation is discussed the theory is taken from Burkert. For an example please see Ithamar Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

must have existed. And, indeed, across the Levant alleged “libation installations,” for the reception of liquid offerings, have been identified by excavators from various sites.

There are however several problems with such designations. No typology of a “libation installation” has been formulated because each site, and each “installation” itself, is too individualistic.

Another problem is the lack of mention in a single surviving text for such a structure, in fact, rarely is the receptacle for a drink offering mentioned at all. A close reading of the existing passages discussing libations within the ancient corpus from the region reveals the importance of the offering of a libation to the completion of cultic acts. These passages depict the act as not only one aspect in a larger ritual, but also as a complete ritual in and of itself. Even when a libation occurs as a discrete ritual unto itself, a receptacle is not necessary, and when mentioned, the required receptacle is never a built-in structure. Finally, scholars rarely address how these installations would have functioned, and a careful analysis of most of the theories regarding the various sites reveals flaws. The existence of the category ‘libation installations’ is due to the needs of modern scholars rather than the presence of solid evidence; any claim of such an installation must be carefully scrutinized before being accepted.

In order to determine the validity of these claims, knowledge about the offering of libations both in general and specifically with respect to ancient Syria-Palestine is needed. It is prudent therefore, to first define the ritual of libation, move on to an examination of the citations of libations in the surviving texts second from the region and to only then return to the material remains of the Levant.

Part of the problem in defining the act of libation is the nature of the evidence for the practice. As Pernille Carstens noted, “The number of cultic equipment, cups, goblets, chalices, bowl(s), wine decanters, jugs, discovered at many excavations in Palestine do not corresponds[sic] with the silence”<sup>2</sup> found in the surviving texts. Such a statement aptly sums up the problems inherent in studying libations. On the one hand stand the material remains, either caches of material or some sort of "installation;" and on the other hand are the references, scattered throughout numerous texts spanning several hundred years. Finding a way to combine the two types of evidence is difficult, and not always possible. This is why the paper has been divided into two main sections: the textual evidence and the material evidence.

Discussion of literary evidence is placed before first because of the common practice within scholarship to look to texts for support or explanation of material remains. This is true for libations installations; they are often referred to as evidence for the various claims posited. It is thus necessary to examine what the texts do and do not say about libations before looking at how they are employed in the defense of various installations. The majority of surviving references to libations are found in documents detailing cultic practice, but several mentions do occur in narrative texts. Most of these citations do not explain how to properly perform a libation, rather at what point in a larger ritual sequence the libation is to occur, as well as what beverage should make up the libation. Despite the paucity of detail, aside from a few vessels recovered in cultic contexts, the texts are the only recourse to piecing together a picture (albeit a fragmentary one) of how libations worked in the ancient Levant.

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<sup>2</sup> Pernille Carstens, “The Golden Vessels and the Song to God: Drink-offering and Libation in Temple and on Altar,” *SJOT* 17.1 (2003): 110-140. 111.



The texts have been grouped first by liquid mentioned, either wine or water. Following this the references are further organized by the collection of texts with which they are associated. These sections have then been organized somewhat chronologically. The exception to this is the Ugaritic texts, which all date to around 1200 BCE. These appear at the end of the sections after all of the Jewish writings whose continuity is easier to follow if taken as a unit, chronologically sequenced. In the water section, *De Dea Syria* comes at the end for the same reason, but it is actually in the correct place chronologically, dating as it does to around 160-170 CE.<sup>3</sup>

In surveying all the various texts of the ancient Levant (from Ugarit to Egypt, Babylon to Israel) mentioning, it will be found that diverse liquids are poured out to gods such as grape wine, sesame wine, beer (of various grains), and water. The two that I will deal with in this paper are those of grape wine and water. These selections were based on several considerations. First, the majority of libations mentioned in the surviving texts are wine. It is the 'default' libation offering when the beverage is not explicitly mentioned by the text.<sup>4</sup> Water is infrequently mentioned, especially in comparison to wine, but it occurs in multiple narrative accounts, allowing a greater reconstruction of the practice than possible for beer or non-grape wines. Water is also the liquid singled out as the offering to be poured into several of the "installations" designated by scholars,

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<sup>3</sup> J. L. Lightfoot, *Lucian On the Syrian Goddess* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 208.

<sup>4</sup> Pernille Carstens, "The Golden Vessels," Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit: The Words of Ilmilku and his Colleagues*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); Jack M Sasson, "The Blood of the Grapes Viticulture and Intoxication in the Hebrew Bible" in *Drinking in Ancient Societies*, edited Lucio Milano, (Padova: Sargon, 1994).

necessitating a careful study of the textual mentions of it. Thus, water is the other offering examined in this paper.

In addition, references to both water and wine are found in texts from the Hebrew Bible, the inter-testamental period including the Dead Sea Scrolls, Ugarit, and the Mishnah. Thus limiting the type of liquids surveyed does not overly circumscribe the region from which the texts come. Such a wide variety of texts thus allows for analysis of the two types of offering across time and space, an important fact for the various “libation installations” come from all over the region and are from differing eras. While Carstens is partially right with regards to the “silence” of the texts, this is mainly in comparison to the number of cultic vessels recovered. It is actually possible to gain a fairly detailed picture of libations by examining all the mentions made by these various texts together.

I omit the analysis of other liquids, partially based on the need to narrow the field of inquiry, but mainly due to the true paucity of recorded libations of them. While libations of beer are attested to several times, wine, not beer, is the beverage of choice for a libation.<sup>5</sup> Little can be said about libations of beer and they are never found in the context of a narrative. Oil, and the reason behind its exclusion, is the other liquid that requires explanation. While some view the pouring of oil as a libation, I do not hold with this view. Oil is used in two ritual ways in texts. It is either used to anoint someone or something; or it is burned upon the altar, but when this occurs it is not poured out onto the altar in the same way as the wine libations, instead it is mixed with the grain to make

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<sup>5</sup> Carstens, “The Golden Vessels,” 111.

combustible cakes. This is also not a libation, nor an oil offering rather it is an ingredient in a recipe.

The material remains section was developed featuring the sites with "installations." This is due mainly to the complexity and individuality of each site necessitating a detailed analysis of each on its own. Because listings of jugs, cups, and other vessels associated with libations are recovered at many sites identified as cultic, I selected only one site, Tel Nami, to serve as the example of what can and cannot be gleaned regarding libations from the material remains. It is necessary to examine cultic sites, due first to the large number of them and second because they are the sites that best reflect the nature of libations as recorded in the texts. Focusing on Tel Nami allows for an adequate look at this type of site without getting bogged down by the sheer number of such sites. Instead, the focus can remain on the widely divergent and problematic "libation installation" category.

The sites surveyed in this portion were all chosen because they held a structure identified by scholars as a 'libation installation.' While the title is the same for all of them, they differ greatly from one another. These installations were selected in an admittedly haphazard fashion, as I found mention of libation installation I added it to the paper. Despite this, there was a reason behind the decision to include each site in the paper. In the case of Kedesh, this paper was begun based on its installations, thus warranting its inclusion. Tel Dan was selected because it is considered "Biblical," allowing for an examination of the way scholars use the textual evidence, surveyed in the textual portion of this paper, to support their identification of libation installations. Ta'anach was then included because of its treatment by those both arguing for and

against a libation installation at Tel Dan. Ugarit's installations were examined for similar reasons. In the case of Ugarit, the interpretation of the site also influenced the translation of the texts from the city. Tell Chuera was added first to give an additional example of a site located in Syria and second as an example of the way scholars fall back on the nebulous category of "libation installation" to identify so many unusual and individualistic architectural features. This category has been organized individual site by individual site, except for Tel Dan and Ta'anach, which were combined because a reassessment of the finds of the two suggests that both sites' libation installations are actually misidentified olive oil presses. As stated previously, the reason for dealing with each site separately is because of the highly individual nature of each.

Given libation's status as the overlooked ritual in scholarship in the ancient world, there is a surprising amount of material on the practice, admittedly scattered here and there in fleeting references. Within these examples there is no evidence for the existence of built in receptacles for the poured out offerings. Perhaps if excavators had taken the time to investigate this material, so many libation "installations" would not litter the Levant.

### **Ritual**

For the purposes of this paper a libation will be concisely defined as a ritual pouring out of a liquid offering to a deity. The investigation will be limited to wine and water with the understanding that a libation can be made of some other liquid, such as honey or beer. Depending on the context, a certain type of libation will be more explicitly defined as needed. The intent of this broad definition is to create a jumping off

point that encompasses all types of libations. However, this definition does not include all ritual pouring of liquid. For example, it is possible, as well as documented, to ritually pour off a liquid, that is, dispose of it in an ordered sequence of actions. This however does not count as a libation because it is not poured with the intent of offering it to someone, rather the pouring off is a means of discarding an unwanted or volatile substance.<sup>6</sup>

As Carstens rightly observed, and this paper will support, the "ritual" aspect of a libation is extremely hard to detect, either in the material remains or in the surviving texts on the subject. Granted, ritual is a difficult category to define, especially in the post-modern world. The implications of various definitions are both lasting and problematic. While this paper will focus on a particular religious ritual in the ancient world, it is important to realize that religious connection is no longer considered necessary for the presence of ritual to be realized in the modern world.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the question of why humans practice ritual has many answers depending on the school of thought chosen.

Until quite recently, ritual was treated with a certain amount of disdain by the western scholarly community. Rites were associated with the Catholic Church, and thus, a strong Protestant polemic strain ran through all studies of Ritual.<sup>8</sup> Ritual in the more

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<sup>6</sup> A good example of this is the careful instruction laid forth in Leviticus for the disposal of the blood collected from the sacrificial victim. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus*, (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 238.

<sup>7</sup> For examples of this new way of approaching ritual please see Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, revised ed., (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995) and Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). Grimes refuses to define ritual in his work, but his definition of 'ritualization' as an act that "transpires as animated persons enact formative gestures in the face of receptivity during crucial times in founded places" sounds very similar to this definition of ritual. *Beginnings*, 42.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity*, (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1990), 34.

recent past has still been negatively viewed as “primitive,” “animalic,” and “regressive,”<sup>9</sup> taking humanity back to the un-thinking state of animals. This is based on the biological view that ritual behavior can be traced to an animal’s “behavioral pattern that has lost its primary function-present in its unritualized model-but which persists in a new function, that of communication.”<sup>10</sup> The behavior, though repeated, has been reduced to a symbol and is no longer meant to accomplish anything concrete. Ritual has also been viewed as “a mere ‘survival’” of an act that once had meaning it has now lost.<sup>11</sup> This theory also suggests that ritual is practiced by those who do not think, at least not while enacting the ritual.

Ritual, as defined by either view above, had meaning in the past, but that meaning has long since been lost and is now unrecoverable. Neither of these definitions of ritual show much deference to the concept of ritual and simply reify Protestant anti-Catholic thought within the academy. By positing the origin of ritual behavior in an unknowable past, the idea that ritual is simply what is left of earlier behaviors and actions can better be defended. To search for the origins of ritual as a whole may indeed be a waste of time, it is better to accept Grime’s less provocative assertion that all humans are “ritualizing animals” for whom ritual is a “human necessity,” of unknown origin.<sup>12</sup> In the case of an individual ritual, it is also highly unlikely that the specific reason for its inception can ever be known. However, by allowing thought an active role in ritual, the

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<sup>9</sup> Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 38.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 23.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1987), 103.

<sup>12</sup> Grimes, *Beginnings*, 42.

reason the ritual is being invoked by a certain individual or group of people can be explored.<sup>13</sup>

With all this in mind, a good basic definition of ritual would be: a set of repeatable ordered actions that are done toward some particular outcome or expected result.<sup>14</sup> This expectation toward a certain outcome is one way in which ritual is different from other behavior. Another aspect of ritual is the carefully set sequence of the actions that make up the ritual, done any other way the ritual will not work.<sup>15</sup> This "detail-structure of rituals causes the mind to engage in a process of thought, what to do, how to do it, and in what sequence, which enhances the factors of intention and intentionality."<sup>16</sup>

While a ritual cannot exist without action, it also requires a cognitive thought process on the part of both the enactor and the observer to make clear the purpose of the ritual. This framework of personal knowledge and awareness that surrounds and supports

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<sup>13</sup> While in the past the difference between individual and group ritual enactment has been used to distinguish between 'religion' and 'magic,' (As Emile Durkheim wrote, "The really religious beliefs are always common to a determined group, which makes profession of adhering to them and of practicing the rites connected to them...It is quite another matter with magic...it does not result in binding them into a group leading a common life." Page 47 in "Definition of Religious Phenomena and of Religion," in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life: A Study in Religious Sociology*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain), this is of no real importance to this paper. All the libations surveyed in this paper will be considered 'religious' in nature regardless of location or number of enactors. This is necessary as the purpose of the paper is not to argue over magic's frequent designation as either the 'other' to or a primitive form of religion, a debate which becomes necessary when labeling some acts 'magic' and others 'religious.' In addition, just as there is no one definition of religion, there is also no simple definition of magic. It is true that today, especially in the scholarly community, magic is often thought of "as ritual power" {Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki, "Introduction" in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, (ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki, Leiden: Brill, 1995), 4}. However, just as ritual is no longer always religious, it is also not always magical. Depending on the culture, time, and commentator, and perhaps most importantly the views of the scholar, what is and is not religion or magic varies. {Please see Jonathan Z. Smith's article "Trading Places," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, (ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki, Leiden: Brill, 1995), especially page 16}. In the case of differentiating between religion and magic in the ancient world, the divide, if one can even be identified, is far from clear and the two categories overlap and intertwine frequently. {Howard Clark Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 100} Therefore, the libations discussed will be identified simply as ritual without further clarification, accompanied by the understanding that even in the ancient world everyone would not have agreed over the proper designation of these acts.

<sup>14</sup> Thanks to Gorman and Gruenwald are warranted in the creation of this definition.

<sup>15</sup> Ithamar Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 14.

<sup>16</sup> Gruenwald, *Rituals*, 29.

all ritual does more than just lend import to a set of actions. It also allows those actions to be imbued with the power to create ordered meaning in an otherwise chaotic world. By providing "patterns for enacting an ordered existence"<sup>17</sup> in an anarchic and unpredictable world, rituals both allow an individual to feel involved in its fate and creates standards of behavior for controlling society. The order of the ritual is paramount in importance because it lends a sense of continuity to a culture. A ritual is both able to regulate society's order through its own order, as well as serve as a means of reestablishing that order when the normative patterns of a society have collapsed.<sup>18</sup> This is part of the reason the 'correct' method of enacting a ritual is so important and why a set of behaviors meant to unify a community can often lead to its dissolution or fragmenting. In addition to regulating a society's order, ritual can be used to define a spatial area. In this way a ritual should be conceived of as "first and foremost, a mode of paying attention."<sup>19</sup> The enactment of a ritual focuses attention first on one structure amongst many, then on one area within that structure, and finally on a certain object in that area. Thus, if the ritual can be said to have a message, it "is less an idea to be taught and more a reality to be repeatedly experienced."<sup>20</sup> For that reality to be created the correct order must be carefully adhered to.

This importance of order is one aspect of ritual that can be discerned within some of the texts on libations surveyed here. In the case of the ritual texts from Ugarit, the libation is positioned in a larger ritual, and must occur there, after one act and before the next one. The problem of what happens when a ritual is not performed in the right

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<sup>17</sup> Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 29.

<sup>18</sup> Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 29.

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place*, 103.

<sup>20</sup> Wade T. Wheelock, "The Problem of Ritual Language: From Information to Situation," *JAAR* 50.1 (March 1982): 49-71. 66.



manner can be seen in the texts of the Mishnah discussed in the water section, where a priest confuses the placement of the water libation at Sukkot, leading to disastrous consequences. It is also clear that the crowd's attention was focused when they became enraged; they are focused first on temple, then on altar, and finally on the water in the cup itself. Order is an aspect of ritual common to all rituals, regardless of type.

The category of ritual in the ancient world can be divided into three types, founding, maintenance, or restoration. A founding ritual is concerned with bringing a certain state or situation into being.<sup>21</sup> It is here that the importance of order in creating a reality is most readily apparent. This is because the ritual not only ensures a certain desired outcome, but it also creates a sense of order and functionality in a chaotic situation, moment or place. A founding ritual allows for "*living through* multiple planes of existence, temporal and spatial."<sup>22</sup> The second basic type of ritual is that of maintenance.<sup>23</sup> A maintenance ritual is an attempt to sustain the already created reality of an ordered and functioning society. The rituals listed in Exodus 29 are examples of maintenance rituals and will be discussed at a later point. The third type of ritual is that of restoration.<sup>24</sup> When, for whatever reason, the society has come undone and the supporting framework has been damaged, a restoration ritual is enacted to rebuild the framework and bring society back to an ordered state. In restoration rituals the ability of a ritual to compress "complex reality...into a dynamically livable experience"<sup>25</sup> becomes readily apparent. By creating a sense of order through a sequence of actions, the ritual

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<sup>21</sup> Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 54.

<sup>22</sup> Gruenwald, *Rituals*, 125.

<sup>23</sup> Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 54.

<sup>24</sup> Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*. 55.

<sup>25</sup> Gruenwald, *Rituals*, 125.

itself recreates a sense of normalcy in addition to being the means to a restored society in the future.

Offerings to gods are usually ritual offerings, able to take the role of any of the three basic types of ritual, and must be proffered in a precise way in order for them to be acceptable. These offerings in the ancient Near East ran the gamut from vegetable to animal and included wine, honey, and worked goods.<sup>26</sup> There is no denying that by far the most important form of offering was that of animal sacrifice. For “as sacrifice was the *raison d’être* of the archaic temple...a temple or altar without sacrifice is a mere monument.”<sup>27</sup> In cultic texts from Ugarit, the term *dbh* referred not only to a ritual offering but was also the principle term for sacrifice.<sup>28</sup> Two major forms of sacrifice can be readily identified, that of gift and that of substitute.<sup>29</sup> Regardless of which type of sacrifice is under consideration, both are marked by the idea that they will either reify the existing world or reinstate a broken or completely destroyed reality (in the line of restoration or maintenance rituals). Ritual offerings are a means of reconciliation with the gods.

In the case of sacrifice, a substitution sacrifice is the most important type of the most important ritual offering. In these rituals the victim, usually a large animal, dies in place of the person or people guilty of the transgression. While these sacrifices are the most spectacular and costly, they are not the only type of offering, nor the only significant ones.

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<sup>26</sup> Beth Alpert Nakhai, *Archaeology and the Religions of Canaan and Israel* (Boston, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2001), 40.

<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, “Constructing a Small Place,” in *Sacred Space: Shrine, City, Land*, ed. Benjamin Z. Kedar and R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, (Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1998), 24.

<sup>28</sup> Nakhai, *Archaeology*, 42.

<sup>29</sup> Gruenwald, *Rituals*, 185.

Gift sacrifices, on the other hand, overlap with the ritual meal, formal meals consisting of fully prepared foods placed out on dishes. Both were used as means of feeding and keeping the gods well satisfied. The ritual feeding of gods is attested to throughout the ancient Near East. In every case the meal was presented to a statue representing the deity. In Ugarit, the meal seems to have accompanied the transferring of the statue from one cult site to another and was preceded by the dressing of the statue and the presentation of offerings and sacrifices.<sup>30</sup> In ancient Babylon and Egypt the ritual meal accompanied ‘Opening the Mouth’ rituals. In ancient Egypt this was practiced when attributing to a statue the personality of a god or individual, and was quite similar to the ritual sequence of Ugarit with respect to the series of transfers of the statue, accompanied by feeding, dressing and offering gifts to it. Of course, the Egyptian ritual ended with an additional act of ceremonially “opening” the statue’s mouth.<sup>31</sup> The Babylonian version of the “opening of mouth” ritual differed in that it was done to allow oracles to come forth from the mouth of the deity. Because of this, in Babylonia the ritual was also practiced on divination priests who were having difficulty obtaining revelations from the gods.<sup>32</sup> Here the ritual served as a restoration ritual. For both statue and priest the process was long, complicated and differed from the Egyptian process through the use of libations to demark every one of the ten separate episodes of the ritual.<sup>33</sup>

The ritual practice of libation stands in contrast to the offering of sacrifices and ritual meals. The purpose of the act is generally assumed to be one of offering, but is

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<sup>30</sup> Nakhai, *Archaeology*, 43.

<sup>31</sup> Aylward Blackman, “The Rite of Opening the Mouth in Ancient Egypt and Babylonia,” *JEA* 10 (1924): 47-59. 53.

<sup>32</sup> Blackman, “The Rite of Opening the Mouth,” 53, 58.

<sup>33</sup> Blackman, “The Rite of Opening the Mouth,” 47-49.

more difficult to explain than a ritual meal. As Burkert observed, “Libation is quite a peculiar way of ‘giving’: you pour out wine on the soil, and there it stays: How are the gods in heaven to get any of it?”<sup>34</sup> This is a valid point, for while burning up animal sacrifices may not immediately seem to make good sense, the practice can be explained by the resulting fragrant smoke winding heavenward. No such transmutation occurs with libations. Once the liquid is poured out it remains there, a dark splotch upon the ground. Burkert’s solution to this problem is to redefine a libation as a “form of setting marks”<sup>35</sup> or boundaries rather than a ritual offering. This reflects the origins, as identified by Burkert, of libations in the practice of dogs marking their territory.

Such a definition is too limiting in that it fails to take into account the way people of the past actually treated libations. Burkert seems to have misinterpreted the meaning of libations as well as ignored the practice of pouring the libation into a bowl or onto a burning offering on the altar in creating his definition.<sup>36</sup> In these cases the libation is either being poured into the god's cup, thus allowing the deity to drink; or it too is being sent heavenward, evaporated by the flames of the altar. Such sets of actions are repeatable and have specified end results, both with regards to the libation itself and the post-offering altered world. This seems remarkably like the criteria for identifying a ritual. Thus, a simpler definition of libations as the ritual pouring out of a liquid to a deity is a better way of characterizing the word and such a concept is the one that will be implied throughout this paper.

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<sup>34</sup> Burkert, *Structure and*, 41.

<sup>35</sup> Burkert, *Structure and History*, 41.

<sup>36</sup> While this may be explained by the fact that Burkert was mainly interested in identifying the origins of the ritual, it is also a good example of the dangers inherent in any quest for origins.

## Textual References

### **Wine**

References to the practice of libations are somewhat confused in the written record. The evidence within the Hebrew Bible alone is spotty, inconsistent and reflects multiple traditions over hundreds of years. The libations of wine will be dealt with first, followed by the libations of water. Wine is considered a standard drink offering and appears to have been much more common than libations of water. Wine offerings in the Pentateuch are fairly uniform, e.g. they all deal with aspects of the sacrificial rites. The Jewish writings of the Hellenistic era that mention libation practices all refer back to the cultic practices of these texts. One exception to this focus on the temple is found in the prophets, with their concentration on elicit worship through libations. It is also only in the prophets that examples of libations occurring outside of the temple cult are found, even if the viewpoint is not that of the practitioners, but the condemning prophets.<sup>37</sup> While the thought processes behind the actions recorded and blasphemed by the prophets can never be known, the examples do still expand the number of identifiable libations from the ancient Levant. The drink offerings of Ugaritic texts will also be examined, and it will be shown that while they come from diverse sources, they all fit a rudimentary pattern of practice.

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<sup>37</sup> Unless one wishes to include the “dialogue” between the practitioners and Jeremiah in Jeremiah 44.

### *The Tabernacle Texts*

Some of the earliest references to libations in the Hebrew Bible are priestly<sup>38</sup> and are part of the Tabernacle texts, that is the texts dealing with the tabernacle in Exodus and Leviticus. The noun סִנְךָ is translated both as 'drink offering,' as well as 'libation' and it occurs frequently in the texts dealing with the tabernacle. It appears twice in the tabernacle texts of Exodus, where it is to be poured out with the daily offering in the morning and again in the evening (Ex. 29:40, 29:41).<sup>39</sup> It occurs most frequently in Numbers, thirty-five times, and these references save one, all deal with the pouring out of drink offerings and the offering of grain that accompanies a sacrifice. These references to the practice only state that a libation must be poured out with the sacrifice and the grain offering. These three items together seem to constitute a kind of ritual meal: meat, bread and wine, although this is never made explicit. It also does not explain how one is to conduct the ritual. The one extraneous reference, Numbers 4:7, describes certain vessels of the tabernacle as being "for the drink offering/libation," with no mention made of the accompanying grain.

These vessels are also mentioned in the portion of Exodus that delineates how to build the tabernacle and all of its accoutrements, along with the rituals to be conducted inside and in front of the structure. References to these vessels in Exodus dominate the majority of scholarly discussions on early Israelite cult libation practice. This is because of the contradictory nature of the vessels and their accompanying description. For

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<sup>38</sup> By which I mean texts written by the priests for priests and concerned with priestly matters, such as proper offering techniques and purity.

<sup>39</sup> "(40)and with the first lamb one-tenth of a measure of choice flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of beaten oil, and one-fourth of a hin of wine for a drink-offering. (41)And the other lamb you shall offer in the evening, and shall offer with it a grain-offering and its drink-offering, as in the morning, for a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the LORD."

although they are associated with libations, their placement within the tabernacle means they could not be used for a ritual involving wine. This becomes apparent after a careful reading of the complex of rules delineating the actions allowed in the tabernacle, a close examination of these references will show why this is.

The vessels appear in the list of items to be constructed for the table within the tabernacle. Setting a table for the gods with the foods of kings was a common ritual in both Mesopotamia and Egypt.<sup>40</sup> A set table was "a mark of affluence and status."<sup>41</sup> The importance of a set table for God is confirmed by the need for one not only in the Tabernacle, but also in both Solomon's temple and Ezekiel's plans for a temple. This need did not end with the exile, First Maccabees attests to a table in the post-exilic temple, and the Arch of Titus clearly depicts a table with a goblet perched upon it being carted off with the other spoils from the temple (App. B, fig. A).<sup>42</sup> Unlike the set tables of other religions, this one lacked a feast. It only held empty vessels and the bread of the Presence upon it (Exodus 25:29-30). All dishes of foodstuff dedicated to God were burned on the altar; sending vapors and odors heavenward was considered the only means of getting offerings to God.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, the Israelites were to pour the wine directly onto the sacrifice, allowing it to ascend heavenward like the food offerings.<sup>44</sup> This was in contrast to the libation rituals of surrounding nations, in which a libation was poured from a large jar into a smaller container "like a slave filling his master's cup" or

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<sup>40</sup> Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* Trans. Israel Abrahams, (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1967), 336. Please also see the above section dealing with ritual meals.

<sup>41</sup> Houtman, *Exodus*, trans. Sierd Woudstra, (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2000), 393.

<sup>42</sup> Houtman, *Exodus*, 390.

<sup>43</sup> Cassuto, *Book of Exodus*, 337.

<sup>44</sup> "Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs a year old regularly each day. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer in the evening; and with the first lamb one-tenth of a measure of choice flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of beaten oil, and one-fourth of a hin of wine for a drink offering." Exodus 29:38-40.

else directly onto the ground.<sup>45</sup> While this consistency on the part of the Israelites with regards to food offerings makes sense in terms of religious beliefs, it does not explain the function of the vessels left upon the table inside the tabernacle. Why did they need to be there?

The description of the table is given first in Exodus chapter twenty-five, with a description of the dishes atop the table at the end:

“You shall make its plates and dishes for incense, and its flagons and bowls with which to pour drink offerings; you shall make them of pure gold. And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me always.”

(Exodus 25:29-30)

Presumably, one of the plates was for the bread of the Presence, but aside from that it appears from the passage that the rest of the vessels remained empty. This is not as strange as it may appear, for in the ancient world where cupboards were scarce it was common to leave one's empty dishes on the table between meals. In the description of the Canaanite god Baal's palace the table was described as being “full of vessels.”<sup>46</sup> The difference being that in the case of Baal, the dishes would periodically be used in a ritual meal to feed the god, requiring many dishes of real food to be set out. This was not something that occurred in the tabernacle. The only food ever upon the table, and thus possibly in/on one of the dishes, was the bread of the Presence, which was eventually consumed by the priests.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Cassuto, *Book of Exodus*, 337.

<sup>46</sup> Cassuto, *Book of Exodus*, 339-340.

<sup>47</sup> Cassuto, *Book of Exodus*, 337.



The Hebrew pertaining to the drink offerings in the above passage reads:

ויתושקו יתיקנמוו דסי שאר<sup>48</sup>

The first term, תושק is the plural of the word שקה , which is viewed as “a kind of jug, jar, utensil of the tabernacle and temple” and only appears three times in the Hebrew Bible. Besides this passage in Exodus, the word תושק appears in First Chronicles and Numbers. This appearance in Numbers is the one mentioned above, where the phrase “for the drink offering” is used to describe the word תושק .<sup>49</sup> In First Chronicles the passage comes from David’s instructions to Solomon on how to construct the temple and all its accoutrements and furnishings. The jugs are part of the list of golden tableware for the tables within the temple.<sup>50</sup> However, in First Chronicles the passage lacks the phrase "for the drink-offering" so it is not clear what the vessels were intended for in the temple. It seems likely that they too were intended for libation, and it may be that this knowledge was assumed to be so well known that the descriptor was left out. Whether they were actually employed as such is an entirely different matter, which will be examined shortly.

The second word תיקנמ (here without the possessive suffix) is another word of rare occurrence. It is generally viewed as a "sacrificial bowl," but never occurs in the context of a sacrifice. Aside from the two passages in Exodus (25:29 and 37:16), the word only shows up twice more in the entire Hebrew Bible, once in Numbers and once in Jeremiah.

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<sup>48</sup> The above passage from Exodus is only one of many differing translations, with each translator choosing slightly different terms for the various vessels. Above is the NRSV translation, Robert Alter translates it most differently: “And you shall make its bowls and its shovels and its jars and its chalices, from which libation is done. Pure Gold you shall make them.” Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: a Translation with Commentary*, (New York: WW Norton and Company, 2004), 463; Houtman has “saucers”, “jugs and flagons” (*Exodus*, 397); and Cassuto prefers “beakers” for the “flagons” listed above (*Book of Exodus*, 337).

<sup>49</sup> "Over the table of the bread of the Presence they shall spread a blue cloth, and put on it the plates, the dishes for incense, the bowls, and the flagons for the drink offering" (Numbers 4:7).

<sup>50</sup> "and pure gold for the forks, the basins, and the cups; for the golden bowls and the weight of each" (First Chronicles 28:17).

The word appears in the same portion of Numbers as תושק above, listing them as part of the golden tableware of the tabernacle. In Jeremiah, the word appears in a list of the goods of the temple looted by the Babylonians.<sup>51</sup> Jeremiah describes the word as being "for libations," making the intended function of the item clear, but whether they were used to pour out libations is uncertain.

In contrast to the dispute over the proper terms for the various vessels listed is the near scholarly consensus on the implication for the term סך which describes the purpose of the vessels. The word סך is the third person imperfect of the hoph'l of סח which means "pour out." The word is clearly related to the noun סח, 'a drink offering'. The phrase is usually used to describe the pouring out of libations or the pouring out of wine. Only in Isaiah it is used to describe anything else, twice for the casting of metal images and once figuratively to describe "the spirit of deep sleep." This same stem is the root for the phrase "offering an oblation" in Akkadian and Syriac.<sup>52</sup> Thus there is no doubt that vessels intended for libations were kept with the other cultic paraphernalia in the Tabernacle. Whether these vessels were empty, full, and if full actively used for libations is a problem of much scholarly disagreement.

In theorizing about the vessels two points are generally held as being the largest problems. First, libations are explicitly called for during the morning and evening sacrifices on the altar outside of the Tabernacle (Exodus 29:38-41). The altar located before the tabernacle had its own set of "pots...shovels and basins and forks and firepans...utensils of bronze" (Exodus 27:3) separate from the equipment for the interior of the tabernacle. It logically follows that the altar would also have its own set of bronze

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<sup>51</sup> "The captain of the guard took away the small bowls also, the firepans, the basins, the pots the lampstands, the ladles, and the bowls for libations" (Jeremiah 52:19).

<sup>52</sup> Cassuto, *Book of Exodus*, 339. The BDB translates the Syriac as "pour out".

libation vessels, although no such items are mentioned. Second, the pouring of libations onto the incense altar, which was located within the tabernacle, was explicitly forbidden (Exodus 30:9).<sup>53</sup> Where then would the libations be poured? In Umberto Cassuto's commentary on Exodus he argues that no libations occurred in the temple; but he suggests that the golden vessels were employed for the actual pouring of libations. When the priest wished to perform a libation on the altar he would take the vessels out of the tabernacle and then replace them when he was finished.<sup>54</sup> Cornelis Houtman would certainly disagree noting, as he does in his commentary, that the pure gold used to make the vessels renders it highly unlikely that the vessels would be taken out of doors.<sup>55</sup> In his work on the temple and temple practice, Menahem Haran, having examined the evidence, concludes that the vessels must have served as reminders of drink-offerings. He suggests that they might have held "a choice libation" such as wine, but that it was never poured out anywhere.<sup>56</sup> Houtman arrived at a similar theory, seeing the vessels as possibly holding symbolic wine to accompany the symbolic bread. But his theory only leads him to more questions: how often was it changed, was it consumed by the priests with the bread once a week, finally poured out on an altar, or simply disposed of?<sup>57</sup>

It seems that if there was wine in the vessels, the wine would simply have to have been discarded due to two facts. First, as noted above, it was forbidden to pour libations on the incense altar. Second, in Leviticus the LORD instructed Aaron saying, "Drink no wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons, when you enter the tent of meeting, that

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<sup>53</sup> "You shall not offer unholy incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; and you shall not pour out a drink offering on it." Exodus 30:9.

<sup>54</sup> Cassuto, *Book of Exodus*, 399.

<sup>55</sup> Houtman, *Exodus*, 398.

<sup>56</sup> Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School*, (Oxford: Oxford, 1978),217.

<sup>57</sup> Houtman, *Exodus*, 398.

you may not die; it is a statute forever throughout your generations" (Leviticus 10:8-9). This proscription was followed by the granting of permission for Aaron and his sons to consume the grain of the burnt offering (Leviticus 10:12) as well as permission for Aaron and all of his children, male and female, to eat "the breast that was elevated and the thigh that is raised (Leviticus 10:14). In both cases the food was deemed holy but this did not prevent its consumption by humans. This holiness of the food was acknowledged by the demand that the grain be eaten next to the altar it was offered on, as the area was "holy" and that the meat be eaten in a "clean place." If Leviticus 10 is taken as a single unit of text, about one topic, it can be seen as a way of dealing with the various offerings outside of the Tabernacle. The grain offering and portions of the sacrifices may be consumed once they have been offered, as long as the actual eating occurs in a holy or clean place. While the drink offering at the altar was to be poured onto the sacrifice, preventing the drinking of any of it, the passage does not deal with this directly but instead strictly forbids consumption of any alcoholic beverage within the confines of the tabernacle. Therefore, wine was not banned from the tabernacle, only the consumption of wine. It is clear, due to the position of the altar directly before the Tabernacle, that alcohol did come into close proximity with the Tabernacle. As this area around the altar was deemed holy, it appears that if wine was present there, it could have been present within the Tabernacle. This was the case with grain offerings, for outside grain was burned on the altar mixed with oil and inside the Tabernacle the bread of the Presence sat upon the table.

This is the only mention in Leviticus of what to do (or not do) with strong drink in the vicinity of the tabernacle. It occurs in a larger set of rules for the tabernacle,

delineating the proper way to handle the various offerings of the interior; but except for one brief mention, the rules for the drink offering of the golden vessels are missing. Besides the vessels, the bread of the Presence was placed upon the table in the Tabernacle (Exodus 25:29-30). The incense was to be burned twice a day on the incense altar inside the tabernacle, and only "holy" incense was to be burned (Exodus 30:7-9). In Leviticus 24 the rules for the making and placing of the bread upon the table are clearly delineated and the LORD states that the bread of the Presence "shall be for Aaron and his descendants, who shall eat them in a holy place, for they are most holy portions for him from the offerings by fire to the LORD" (Leviticus 24:9). In contrast to these clear and specific instructions, the only mention of a drink offering is to forbid its being poured out onto the altar of incense (Exodus 30:9), which is really a continuation of the rules for the incense rather than an explanation for the treatment of the drink offering. By only forbidding the pouring out of wine within the Tabernacle, it suggests that wine could have been present in the Tabernacle. In this case, it would have stayed in the cup, just as the bread remained on the plate. But this is not stipulated. Thus a similar problem exists for the presence of libations within the temple as without. While the ritual for the bread of the Presence and the incense that sat alongside the drink offering are carefully laid forth, no explanation for the proper way to offer a libation or how to utilize the golden vessels demarcated for the task is given.

Pernille Carstens, in his work on the golden vessels, addresses these issues surrounding the function of the vessels by creating a complicated translation of the word  $\text{סֵכֶל}$ . In his opinion the word ought to be translated in general as 'liquid offering' rather

than “libation or drink offering.” When the word is in the context of the interior *cella*,<sup>58</sup> ‘drink offering’ is an appropriate translation; but when it is used outside or in relation to the altar<sup>59</sup> it ought to be translated as ‘libation.’<sup>60</sup> While it is clear that when in conjunction with a sacrifice, a liquid offering was poured out; all that is certain is that inside the tabernacle (or eventually temple *cella*)<sup>61</sup> there was a cup for liquid as part of the tableware. While Carstens is in the minority with his views, his noting of the divergence between the interior meaning and the exterior meaning of the word is quite important. Carsten’s new definition shows the clear distinction between the act of libations accompanying the ritual of sacrifice and the vessels that sat first within the tabernacle and then within the temple.

While the tabernacle texts tend to create of more questions than they answer, they do provide a good deal of information on the practice of libations within the priestly sect. Due to the occurrence of the word  $\text{נֹסֵף}$  it is clear that libations happened frequently and were poured out on the sacrifice at the altar alongside the grain offering. While vessels, described as being “for libations/drink offerings” exist as part of the golden tableware for the interior of the tabernacle, no instructions for their use are ever given. Therefore, it is unclear whether they were used for libations, held wine symbolically, or stood empty as a reminder of earlier practices and beliefs. Unlike the other sacrificial food offered up to God, no instructions for the drink offering are given. However, in the same portion of

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<sup>58</sup> The *cella* being the most interior part of the structure and consequently the most holy. See Exodus 25:29-30.

<sup>59</sup> Exodus 29:40 and 41.

<sup>60</sup> Carsten, *Golden Vessels*, 118.

<sup>61</sup> The historical transition from tabernacle to temple is problematic, especially as there is no one accepted scholarly way for viewing the reality of the tabernacle. Most scholars do agree that even if the tabernacle is accepted as historical reality, its description is heavily colored by the reality of the temple that the writers knew. Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 194-195.

text that deals with the eating of the burnt offering and the grain offering, the only mention of “wine and strong drink” is a prohibition against its consumption within the tabernacle.

Thus, it appears that only outside at the altar were libations poured out. These were apparently all poured directly onto the altar, as no mention of any sort of receptacle for the drink offerings is ever made. While there is no reason the vessels inside the tabernacle/temple could not have held wine, the priests did not consume the beverage when they ate the bread of the Presence, the other foodstuff upon the table. It is clear that they did not pour it out inside the tabernacle as it was forbidden to do so. While the texts do not allow a reconstruction of the early priestly practice for the proper pouring of libations to be made, the number of references to the practice attests to its ever-present status.

### *Prophets*

In contrast to the confusion that surrounds the ritual of libations in the Tabernacle texts stand the evidence found in the Prophets. While the prophets occasionally refer to the practice of libations in association with the temple, for the most part their focus is on illicit worship of foreign gods and the libations that mark this practice. The three books that address this issue are Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. None mention wine by name, but all employ the term *לִסֵּךְ* to describe the libation. For these three prophets libations are a central part of immoral practice and deviance from the correct form of worship. How this is constructed is different depending on the prophet and the situation. Two Minor Prophets, Joel and Hosea mention libations, specifying that they are of wine, but they

lament the cessation of proper temple practice. In every instance in the books of the prophets, libations serve as markers of cultic practice and serve as a crucial component of both proper temple practice and illicit worship.

In Isaiah the term  $\text{כִּפְשֵׁת}$ , the same as in Exodus denoting drink offering/libations, appears only once, in Isaiah 57:6. The translation of this passage is rather difficult. The NRSV translates it as:

Among the smooth stones of the valley is your portion;  
they, they, are your lot;  
to them you have poured out a drink offering,  
you have brought a grain offering.  
Shall I be appeased for these things?

The word used to denote the pouring of the  $\text{כִּפְשֵׁת}$  is  $\text{כִּפְשֵׁת}$ , coming from  $\text{פָּשַׁךְ}$  a word used only here to denote the pouring of a libation; it is usually used to speak of spilling blood or figuratively about one's anger, contempt, or soul. It is also employed for the pouring of water, something that will be discussed later.

The first line of the verse is the difficult one and reads in the Hebrew

$\text{בַּחֲלָקֵי נַחַל הַלְקָךְ}$

This translates literally to “among the smooth of the valley.” The recipient of the libations is not at all clear. In his translation and commentary, Joseph Blenkinsopp translates the first line as: “As for you, woman, with the dead of the valley is your destiny.”<sup>62</sup> The difference between stones and dead people is rather great, but in actuality neither choice reflects the original Hebrew. Part of the problem is the nature of the passage. Verse six falls directly in the middle of the “denunciation of a sorceress”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 5.

<sup>63</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 162.



(verses 3-13) and the passage as a whole is full of double or even triple meanings.<sup>64</sup>

Blenkinsopp chose to bring this issue to the forefront in his translation and commentary, and his choice of words reflects this aim. In order to translate the passage the way he does, he was forced to use cognates to the word *הלקך* found in Akkadian, Ethiopic, and Ugaritic which mean “perish” to arrive at his “dead.”<sup>65</sup> As the desired outcome of the act is not made clear, it is difficult to say which insertion is the better one. The more conservative “stones” seems to make more sense in this passage, especially as the preceding verse also refers to “rocks” in the “valley”. It also requires far less reading into the text. However, the line does not actually need another word to make sense. It is clear that the words *הלקך* and *הלקי* were chosen to create word play, and it may be that there was never a fourth word in the section. In the end, it is not at all clear to whom the libations are being offered in the passage.

While the recipient of the offerings is less than clear, the offering itself is obvious: an offering of grain and one of wine. If this verse is taken with verse five, the previous verse;

(5) you that burn with lust among  
the oaks, you that slaughter your children in  
the valleys,  
under the clefts of rocks

(6) Among the smooth stones of the valley is your portion;  
they, they, are your lot;  
to them you have poured out a drink offering,  
you have brought a grain offering.  
Shall I be appeased for these things?

the unit can be read as describing an inversion of proper temple practice. Rather than

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<sup>64</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 162-163.

<sup>65</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 158. Blenkinsopp is not the only scholar to make this choice, both Irwin 1967 and Lewis 1989 also translated it so.

having a priest sacrifice an animal on the altar and then offer the drink and cereal offerings, here the people have taken cultic practice into their own hands. Now the practice occurs outside, and common people “slaughter” their own children instead of animals. Accompanying this are the wine and cereal offerings (the כֶּסֶךְ and the הַהֲנִיחַ the same terms used in Leviticus) completing this renegade service to other unnamed gods.

If one reads verse six as separate from verse five, the association made between libations and cultic practice is still apparent. In this reading, the pouring of drink offerings and the offering of grain serve as representations of the deviant worship practice. If people were worshipping some other entity down in the valleys, the cultic practice probably included more than just a libation and an offering of grain. Here, only the grain and libation are mentioned because they were visible acts with strong cultic association, allowing them to be used as a symbol of worship. Unfortunately, in using them as examples of cult, the mention contains no information on how the drink offering was to be poured. Directly onto the ground or into some sort of receptacle? This of little importance to the author, for the concern is not over how the offerings are being made but rather that they are being made at all.

While this passage from Isaiah is clearly a piece of diatribe condemning aberrant practice, it still reveals some information about the wide-spread practice of libations. Whether taken as an individual unit or paired with the preceding verse, verse six uses libations to denote general cultic practice.

In contrast to Isaiah’s single mention of libations, the prophet Jeremiah mentions libations five times (all denoted by the Hebrew כֶּסֶךְ) and all describe ritual practice of the home within the family, which is strongly condemned by the prophet. From Jeremiah a

much more detailed picture of the method of making a libation is gained. Twice the precise locality of the ritual is stated, both Jeremiah 19:13 and 33:29 identify the rooftop as the site.<sup>66</sup>

While the offerings to accompany these two acts are of unspecified type, the recipients of the offerings are mentioned. These are different, once to the nonspecific “whole host of heaven” in Jer 19:13 and solely to Baal in Jer 32:29. However, Baal is not the sole recipient of the libations, in both instances the libations are made to the “host of heaven.” Similarly, in Jer 7:18 the libations are offered up to “other gods” and the offering to one individual deity, here this is the offering of cakes to the queen of heaven.<sup>67</sup> As is the case with Jer 32:29, here the verse concludes with the statement “to provoke me to anger,” suggesting that the entire practice is solely carried out to make the LORD really angry. This is, of course, the viewpoint of a deity perceiving a slight on its strength.

In the other two passages (Jeremiah 19:25 and 44:17-19) the queen of heaven herself is identified as the recipient of both these libations and the cakes.<sup>68</sup> Here, as in Isaiah 57:6, the combination of libations and a cereal offering (in this case an actual baked good) serves to denote cultic practice. Who exactly was the queen of heaven, the recipient of these acts, is a question without a clear answer. She is often associated with the Assyro-Babylonian Ishtar, but she may have been Anat, Asherah, or Ashtart, three

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<sup>66</sup> “all the houses upon whose roofs offerings have been made to the whole host of heaven, and libations have been poured out to other gods” (Jer 19:13) and “with the houses on whose roofs offerings have been made to Baal and libations have been poured out to other gods, to provoke me to anger” (Jer 32:29).

<sup>67</sup> For a brief overview on the various scholarly positions on the “cakes” please see William Holladay’s overview in *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1-25*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 254-255.

<sup>68</sup> This leads Lundbrom to suggest that ‘the host of heaven’ in 19:13 may refer to “the queen of Heaven cult”, but this seems rather speculative. *Jeremiah 1-20: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Vol I (New York: Doubleday, 1999); 841.

overlapping west Semitic goddesses.<sup>69</sup> According to the people in Jer 44:17-19, the reason they offer libations and cakes to the queen is because when they did they “had plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no misfortune” (Jer 44:17b). Now that they have stopped pestilence and war have descended upon them. Unlike the LORD, the queen of heaven is responsive to their needs.

In Jeremiah then glimpses into the practice of libations amongst the common people are given. According to Jeremiah, the practice occurred at home, often on the roofs of the houses and was accompanied by the offering of baked goods to deities. While these deities are usually generic, Baal and “the queen of heaven” are the two exceptions, although who the queen was is unclear. While the LORD perceives this practice as being solely about “provoking me to anger,” according to the practitioners, the desired outcome is prosperity and peace, which they believe the deities will grant them if they appease them with drink and food offerings.

In Ezekiel 20:28, the final mention of libations by a major prophet is made. Like all the other libations mentioned by the various prophets, these are also considered deviant. While the deity to whom the offerings are made is not mentioned at all, it is obviously not the LORD. The only thing made clear about the practice of libations is their location. In contrast to Jeremiah’s household cult, these libations occur out on “any high hill or (under) any leafy tree” (Jer 20:28). The word employed here עֲבֹגָה denoting the location is a highly debated word, but it is generally viewed as a vestige of earlier cultic practice which was once licit but is now being stamped out by the younger temple-

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<sup>69</sup> Lundbrom, *Jeremiah 1-20* (I), 476-477.

based cult.<sup>70</sup> Unlike the cultic practice mentioned in Isaiah and Jeremiah, these libations accompany not just cereal offerings, but also sacrifices. This practice outlined by Ezekiel is then viewed as a “sacrificial meal” to unknown “pagan” gods.<sup>71</sup>

In contrast to the strict association between libations and deviant worship practice on the part of the major prophets stands the writings of two minor prophets, Hosea and Joel. These references are also about the erring of the people before the LORD, but here it is not what they are doing, but what they are not doing. In both cases the references are to the cessation of the offerings of wine and grain (that is the *החנמ* and *הסג* the same as in Exodus) to the LORD. Hosea 9:4 reads “They shall not pour drink offerings of wine to the LORD.” Joel 1:9 reads, “The grain offering and the wine offering are cut off from the house of the LORD,” in Joel 1:13 this sentiment is repeated, except the offerings are *נמנע*, that is “withheld” from the house of the LORD. The two prophets use different ways of referring to libations. In Hosea 9:4 the verb *הסג* is used to denote the ritual pouring of a drink offering, just as it was elsewhere. While the drink is usually assumed to be wine, here *הסג* that is wine, is named as the drink offering. This is the only instance of the actual pairing of *הסג* and *החנמ* in the Hebrew Bible. In Joel, the words for “grain offering” and “wine offering” are the standard cultic pair of *החנמ* and *הסג*.

While both references to libations deal with their absence from the temple cult, the situations surrounding these differ markedly. In Hosea the people, while having sinned in apostasy (Hosea 9:1), apparently still wish to offer sacrifices and bring offerings to the LORD. However, the LORD has refused their “unclean” food, and

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<sup>70</sup> Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Commentary*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 371.

<sup>71</sup> Daniel Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1-24*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 644.

banned participation in the cult.<sup>72</sup> Here cultic participation is represented by the offering of the cereal and the wine offerings. The people can pour as many libations as they wish, but none of them will be accepted by the LORD, who cannot be appeased. The standard ritual acts have failed.

In Joel the case is quite the opposite; the people are physically incapable to offer the grain and wine offerings. Locusts, both “powerful and innumerable” (Joel 1:6), have descended on the fields, and the cereal grasses and grape vines have been devoured. The danger this collapse of cult creates is understood by the priests,<sup>73</sup> and this state of dejection is expounded in verse 1:13, where the priests are instructed to “don mourning garments and lament...sob, presiders over the altar; come, spend the night in sackcloth.” The necessity of the daily offering of grain and the daily pouring of drink to the LORD is made very clear by the fear of total anarchy the priests experience when they can no longer complete these ritual acts. This may seem a little odd as the land has already been overrun by locusts, the physical world surrounding the temple is in shambles. However, from the priestly view, this can be remedied by supplication to the LORD. Unfortunately, they are unable to offer even the basic daily offerings of grain and wine. The locusts have destroyed not just the agricultural rhythms of the land but also the cultic cycle, demarcated by the twice-daily offerings of grain and wine to the LORD.<sup>74</sup>

Libations were still to be offered to the LORD during the time of the prophets, but this practice had ceased along with the other proper cultic practices. Sometimes this was

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<sup>72</sup> Francis Andersen and David Freeman, *Hosea: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), 526.

<sup>73</sup> James Crenshaw, *Joel: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1995), 99.

<sup>74</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos: a Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, trans. Waldemar Janzen, S. Dean McBride, Jr., and Charles A. Muenchow; ed. S. Dean McBride, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 31.

due to apostasy from the temple cult, sometimes the LORD rejected the offerings outright, and once, natural forces prevented the completion of the expected acts. However according to the major prophets, this apostasy from the temple did not lead to a cessation of all libations, for according to them, libations were still being offered regularly, only erroneously to deities other than the LORD. Therefore, the condemnation of libations made by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel need not be read as the call for an end to all libations, only those offered to other gods and at other spaces than the temple at Jerusalem. In fact, according to Joel, the offering of libations daily to the LORD in the temple was of the utmost importance in keeping the world functioning the way it ought to. None of these writings are concerned with the vessels employed, or the exact system used in pouring the libations. The physical act of pouring out the libation was the main concern, not what sort of container was used in the pouring or possible receiving of the offering.

### *Hellenistic Writings*

Little was written (at least within the corpus of texts which survives) on the subject of libations in the Hellenistic era. The most interesting pieces are about libations of water and will be dealt with in the next section. However, some texts did make mention of libations of wine, all of which dealt with temple practice and are based on the proscriptions for sacrifice recorded in Numbers. The texts are most useful in exploring the placement of libations, for they all make reference to the receiving spot of the libation, something lacking in the other texts so far surveyed.

One such mention of libations is found in the section on Noah in the book of

Jubilees.<sup>75</sup> According to the author of the book, Noah made two libations following the flood. The first accompanies the first sacrifice following the receding of the flood waters. Here it is written that Noah “sprinkled wine, and placed frankincense upon everything” (Jub 6:3). The second accompanies an atonement offering to the LORD in the fifth year after the flood (Jub 7:2-6) consisting of a burnt offering of a bull, a ram and a lamb “kneaded with oil”. The wine was “sprinkled...in the fire which he had placed upon the altar,” the offering of incense in this instance, was placed “upon the altar” (Jub 7:5-6). Here then the libation is offered in conjunction with the incense rather than the grain offering.<sup>76</sup> Both are said to have been sprinkled directly onto the fire of the altar, implying that the author did not see a libation receptacle necessary.

This belief that the wine offering ought to be poured directly onto the altar is reflected in the Temple Scroll from Qumran. In the portion delineating the proper method of offering of sacrifices to the LORD, libations are mentioned multiple times.<sup>77</sup> In Col. thirty-four the placement of the libation is described:

and they shall burn them in the fire which is on the altar: bullock by bullock and its pieces with it and its cereal-offering of finest flour upon it, and the wine of its libation with it and its oil upon it. And the priests, sons of Aaron, shall burn everything upon the altar  
(Col. 34:11b-14)

The term employed for libation is the same term used in Numbers, ִיִּבִי, accompanied by

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<sup>75</sup> The book of Jubilees is a retelling of the events of Genesis and Exodus in narrative form and was probably written between 160-100 BCE, most likely between 160-150 BCE. Copies were long known to exist in Ethiopic and Greek, and more recently fragments in Hebrew were uncovered at Qumran. James C. Vanderkam, *The Book of Jubilees*, ed. Michael a. Knibb, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 11 and 17.

<sup>76</sup> It is not completely clear whether Noah offers a grain offering in either one of these scenes, C. Rabin seems to interpret 7:5 as being about grain, choosing “the offerings, mixed with oil,” which suggests the grain offering more strongly than O. S. Wintermute’s “their sacrifice...kneaded with oil.” O. S. Wintermute, “Jubilees” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Vol. II*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 69. C. Rabin “Jubilees,” in *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, ed. H. F. D. Sparks, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 32.

<sup>77</sup> For example, Col. xxv 6 or Col. xxvi 8 or Col. xxviii 1, 4, and 8.



the expected *מזבח*, or grain offering. Here, as in Jubilees, the libation is to be poured directly onto the flames of the altar, to be burned up along with “everything upon the altar.” No receptacle is needed for the liquid offering, here poured directly onto the altar. Instead its scent, along with the scents of the other offerings, is sent heaven-ward.<sup>78</sup>

The book of Ben Sirach, a work believed to have been written in Jerusalem prior to 180 BCE (and thus slightly before Jubilees), holds one mention of cult libations within the temple in Jerusalem. This version of the drink offering and its placement differs from that of Jubilees or the Temple Scroll. This passage comes from the section praising Simon son of Onias, “leader of his brothers and the pride of his people”(Sir 50:1), a high priest of note. In the passage describing him in cultic service to the LORD the ritual of libations is described as the culminating act,

he held out his hand for the cup  
and poured a drink offering of the  
blood of the grape;  
he poured it out at the foot of the altar,  
a pleasing odor to the Most High,  
the king of all

(Sir 50:15)

In this poem about the temple service, the lengthy piece on libations, especially in comparison to the paucity of description in the recounting of the sacrifices of verse twelve, “When he received the portions from the hands of the priests, as he stood by the hearth of the altar with a garland of brothers around him” (Sir 50:12) is interesting given the dominance of mentions of sacrifice over libations in the written record. This may not reflect the author’s view of the importance of the libation over the sacrifice, instead it may be poetic license. This may also be the reason the cereal offering, which usually

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<sup>78</sup> “It is a fire-sacrifice of fragrance which appeases YHWH” Col. Xxxiv 14b.

accompanies the wine at the altar, is not mentioned by name. While other “offerings” are mentioned in the passage, these are of unspecified type. The burning of incense is also not mentioned at all.<sup>79</sup>

This aligns with what Josephus has to say about the offerings of libations at the temple. According to him, wine accompanies a burnt offering, and is poured “as a libation around the altar”(AJ 3:234).<sup>80</sup> He also makes no mention of an incense offering, but does mention the grain offering. According to Josephus, the amount of wine poured out was the same as the amount of oil “kneaded” into the choice flour (AJ 3:234). However, the grain offering is to be burned upon the altar along with the animal. For Josephus then a distinction exists between food offerings and drink offerings, food must be burned, but drink only poured out “around the altar.”

There is then a disagreement in the Hellenistic texts over the placement of the libations in the Temple. Are they to be poured onto the flames of the altar or “around” the altar? It is impossible to say for sure, but what can be said is that most authors think the libation need not be poured into any sort of receptacle. It is significant that the Hellenistic authors all agree that the libation occurs at the altar, there is no mention of libations being poured out elsewhere. While this is partially reflective of their source texts in the Pentateuch, it also reveals their beliefs about libations. The libation accompanies the offering of animal and grain sacrifice outside at (if not on) the altar before the temple.

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<sup>79</sup> Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 551.

<sup>80</sup> “σπενδουσι δε περι τον βωμον τον οινον”

## *Ugarit*

Aside from the texts making up the Hebrew Bible and the non-canonical writings, the other main source of written records of Ancient Syria-Palestine comes from Ugarit. The city of Ugarit (or Ras Shamra), is located on the coast of Northern Syria. During the Late Bronze Age the city existed as a vassal state of the Hittite Empire controlling approximately 200 towns and villages in its vicinity.<sup>81</sup> Religion existed in two intertwined forms, the local and the national. The local sites were administered by local priests and were dedicated to local gods. However, these gods were deemed underlings to El, the head of the pantheon and chief god of the official religion.<sup>82</sup> This also made the local priests answerable to the royal palace, which remained in control of the national religion. Such a system had the effect of helping to unify the disparate groups into a more homogenous entity. The national religion was centered firmly within the walls of Ugarit proper, with the massive and prominent temples of Baal and Dagan the focal point for all worshippers.<sup>83</sup> The majority of information on Ugarit religion comes from the massive collections of writings discovered in several libraries within the city.

Mentions of libations in the surviving writings of Ugarit are relatively few and of varying levels of usefulness. Like the mentions of libations accompanying the texts on the tabernacle, the Ugarit texts also lack clear descriptions for the proper pouring out of libations. However, when the references found in both the ritual texts and the myths are combined, a fair reconstruction can be made. Part of the problem with reconstructing the ritual practice is the fragmentary nature of the texts themselves. For instance, in RS

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<sup>81</sup> Nakhai, *Archaeology*, 123.

<sup>82</sup> Nakhai, *Archaeology*, 123.

<sup>83</sup> Nakhai, *Archaeology*, 125.

1.003, a text on the extensive festivities demarking the last month of the year,<sup>84</sup> line 8-12 reads,

On the next day, he/someone will [...] (9) as TGML [...];  
two e[w]es (10) and a cit[y-d]ove someone will [...]; [...] (11)  
and a bul[l for] 'Ilu. And in the o[pening...] (12) he/someone  
will pour.

(RS 1.003 8-12)<sup>85</sup>

Unfortunately, in the portion that may refer to a libation, what the person was pouring and what sort of vessel the receptacle was has been obliterated. As the entire text is a list of offerings that must be made to various gods, apparently by the king (the “he” mentioned above), it is logical to read this passage as also denoting some sort of offering. If it is a libation, the fact that it occurs in the context of a larger ritual set of sacrifices to the various deities is helpful for reconstructing the role of libations in Ugarit. Besides this possible reference, two explicit mentions of ‘libations’ survive in the Ugaritic ritual material.

One is also a ritual to demark a month, 'iba'latu, and is also situated within a larger set of sacrifices, offerings and other cultic acts to be carried out, apparently mainly by the king, over a series of days.<sup>86</sup> The passage reads “Behold the oil of well-being of Ba'lu, a libation offering for the benefit of the *Malakuma*, of the best quality” (RS 24.266

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<sup>84</sup> Dennis Pardee, *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit*, ed. Theodore J. Lewis, (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 56.

<sup>85</sup> At the mercy of translator's editions of the Ugarit texts, I am forced to use two different methods of labeling the texts within this paper. Here, RS stands for Ras Shamra, where the text was discovered and the number is an excavation number. This is the form used by Pardee in his work. Later the letters KTU will appear, this acronym stands for Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit (the cuneiform alphabetic texts from Ugarit) and is a completely different system for organizing all Ugaritic texts, regardless of where they came from. N. Wyatt in his translations uses the KTU system. *Religious Texts from Ugarit: The Words of Ilimilku and his Colleagues*, TBS 53, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

<sup>86</sup> Pardee, *Ritual and Cult*, 50.

line 25). The oil and the libation are two separate offerings. The oil is clearly dedicated to Baal,<sup>87</sup> whereas the recipient of the libation is not so obvious. The word *Malakuma* means 'kings' but it is not clear whether the kings are offering the libation or receiving it. If they are receiving the offering, it refers to the dead kings of ages past, and if they are offering the libation the plural is generic, as there was only one king.<sup>88</sup> This act closes the series of rituals delineated in the text, all of which are directed toward Baal.

While the religion of the cultures contemporaneous to Ugarit is not always well understood, the noting of the month's start and end with rituals is a practice known to other societies. In a similar set of ritual acts to be carried out by Hittite kings to demarcate the months, the pouring of libations to the gods is among the acts recorded. Unlike the Ugaritic lists, more detail is given as to the way the libation is to be offered. The offerings are to be placed first in chalices or a rhyton, and then poured out into a bowl for the god(s).<sup>89</sup> The Hittite practice also stipulates that the king and queen "drink the god" during a libation ceremony.<sup>90</sup> This was accomplished by first drinking from the offering chalice and then pouring the rest of the wine into a bowl for the gods.<sup>91</sup> It seems that if a libation was thought of as the "drinking" of a god in Ugarit, this would have been recorded, but it may be that the use of vessels and the accompanying actions were quite similar to those of the Hittites.

The final passage comes from a slightly different type of ritual, it is a royal ritual lasting only one day, but the purpose is unclear. In this ritual the king must offer up

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<sup>87</sup> Baal and Ba'lu being different renderings of the same Ugaritic god's name.

<sup>88</sup> Pardee, *Ritual and Cult*, 104.

<sup>89</sup> Hans G. Güterbock, "To Drink a God," Pages 121-129 in XXXIVème Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, XXXVI, Uluslararası Assirioloji Kongresi, Kongreye Sunulan Bildiriler, ed. Hayat Erkanal, Veysel Dönbaz, Ays, egül Ug'urog'lu, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1998), 126-127.

<sup>90</sup> Güterbock, "To Drink a God" 125-127.

<sup>91</sup> Güterbock, "To Drink a God" 125.

sacrifices in the temple, leave the temple for a sacred meal, and upon his return, "(Again) in the temple: libations; (12) a ram for 'U<s>harâ Hulmizzi. (13) And a turtle-dove for QLH" (RS 24.260). This closes the ritual, which began in almost the exact same way, the sacrificing of a ram and a turtle-dove. However, the difference is in the libation, which only appears at the end of the ritual. While two texts are not enough to base a reconstruction of general libation practices on, it is interesting that both demarcate the end of a ritual series. This is a different sort of boundary marking than Burkert had in mind when he spoke of libations as indicators of boundary, for while he saw libations as a way of demarking physical territory,<sup>92</sup> here the act separates the holy from the mundane.

In the myths of Ugarit one finds references to libations serving to demarcate ritual acts as well. One is a repeated phrase of acts ordered by El and Baal in the Baal cycle of myths. These are all issued to Anat and read as follows:

Bury war in the earth;  
set strife in the dust:

pour a libation into the midst of the earth,  
honey from a jar into the midst of the steppe.

Grasp your spear (and) your mace:

Let your feet hasten towards me,  
Let your legs hurry to me!

For I have a word that I would say to you,  
A message that I would repeat to you

(KTU 1.3 iii lines 15-22)<sup>93</sup>

The first portion of the passage looks like a set of ritual actions, possibly for a certain

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<sup>92</sup> Walter Burkert, *Structure and History*, 41.

<sup>93</sup> The other occurrences are 1.1 ii 19-25, 1.3 iv 8-14 and 28-31.

ritual complex, and it has been suggested that they come from a royal enthronement.<sup>94</sup> Here, the “receptacle” for the libation is the ground. In this text is also the first mention of a possible substance to pour out, honey. However, most translators do not care for that term and strive to rework the passage so that a liquid a human actually drinks neat is mentioned. Johannes de Moor, in his translation of the text accompanying his work on seasonal cult at Ugarit, translated the word *arbdd* that Wyatt (above) translated as “honey” as “honey-like dew,” even while noting that by breaking apart the word the most literal rendering is “honey” for *ar* and “from a pot” for *bdd*.<sup>95</sup> In his work, de Moor was searching for evidence of an omnipresent seasonal cult, and thus found dew, with its cyclical nature a good fit for making the text into a rain ritual. He did, however, note that honey did figure in the rituals of Ugarit, often being paired with oil.<sup>96</sup> N. Wyatt, the translator of the standard English edition of the Ugaritic mythic texts, chose the more literal translation, but not liking the image of honey-pouring noted that the reference could perhaps be to “honeyed-wine” rather than honey itself.<sup>97</sup> This is based on other textual instances of libations where the liquid to be used is made explicit.

There are three references, two later in the myth cycle and one from the tale of King Keret, which make clear that wine is the proper substance for a libation. The first in the Baal cycle comes from “the Luminary of the gods, Shapsh” who is also addressing Anat, this scene follows the fall of Baal,

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<sup>94</sup> Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit*, 41.

<sup>95</sup> Johannes de Moor, *The Seasonal Pattern in the Ugaritic myth of Ba’lu, According to the Version of Ilimilku*, AOAT 16, (Kevalaer: Verlag Butzon and Bercker, 1971), 102 and 104.

<sup>96</sup> de Moor, *Seasonal Pattern*, 104.

<sup>97</sup> Wyatt, *Religious Texts*, 187.

Pour out sparkling wine from the chalice.  
Let your kinsmen bring garlands,

and I shall search for Valiant Baal

(KTU 1.6 iv lines 18-20)

According to Wyatt, in his notes to the text, this passage represents “a classic libation rite.”<sup>98</sup> Unfortunately, this concise appraisal does not make the exact nature of the libation clear. In/on to what is one to pour the wine? Are the garlands part of the libation act or an accompanying but separate ritual? If the wine and garlands go together they may be representative of life, and therefore reference a ritual towards the restoration of Baal’s life. They could also be an offering to Shapsh herself, to honor her for the task she is about to begin. Like the passage before it, the central cultic act here is the pouring of the libation. It appears that the offering of a libation can comprise an entire cultic act by itself. Not only is the act of pouring an important component of the ritual, in these two cases it is the ritual.

The second mention of libation comes from Mot, who is acquiescing to the dominance of Baal saying:

Let Baal be installed [on the throne of] his kingship,  
on [the back-rest, on the siege of] his dominion!

(six missing lines)

Come, pray, to the fresh meat;  
yes eat the offering-bread;  
pray drink the libation-wine

(KTU 1.6 vi 34-45)

This text is especially interesting, because it records the end results of a ritual from the viewpoint of the god receiving them. It also combines the sacrificial victim, the offering

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<sup>98</sup> Wyatt, *Religious Texts*, 139.



bread, and the libation together into one divine meal. Not only does the passage make the substance of the libation clear, it also gives purpose to the action: the wine is poured and the gods drink.<sup>99</sup> Still, where the wine is to be poured is not made clear, no mention of vessels for any of the foodstuffs mentioned are made. Here a libation is also seen in context with the event it is to accompany, the installation of a king (albeit a divine one) to the throne.

The third mention comes from the instructions of El to a bereaved King Keret, who desires children. This is the text from which Wyatt posits his claim that the “honey from a pot” of KTU 1.3 iii ought to be read as “honeyed-wine.”<sup>100</sup> King Keret must first wash himself and then enter the tent shrine and along with two lambs for sacrifice,

take the appointed portion of [your] offering-b[read],

dreg-[free] wine as a (drink-)offering;

Pour out wine from a silver [rhyt]on,

Honey(ed wine) from a rhyton of [g]old;

(KTU 1.14 lines ii 16-19)

This passage when combined with the one above can reveal much about the practice of libations. Based on the above passage, it appears that King Keret is offering a type of sacrificial feast consisting of meat, bread and wine. This appears to be done in order to appease El. This second passage also specifies a type of vessel for the wine to be poured out of, a rhyton. Once again though, the receptacle (or the lack of one) for the wine is not mentioned at all. The three-fold repetition of the offering of wine is for poetic device, but it also speaks to the importance of having wine as part of this set of offerings. The

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<sup>99</sup> Although it may be that only Shapsh is being asked to drink, the text, in the jussive, is not clear. Wyatt, *Religious Texts*, 143.

<sup>100</sup> Wyatt, *Religious Texts*, 187.

pouring of wine is a crucial component for this cultic act.

The literary material of Ugarit offers a diverse, if painfully hole-riddled, picture of libation practice in the ancient city. The liquid used was usually wine, sometimes mixed with honey, and it was poured out of chalices or rhytons (and possibly other containers as well). Whether it was poured into any sort of vessel, poured into various receiving tubes/channels, or directly onto the floor is not explained. If parallels from the Hittites are accepted, it may be that the chalice was poured into a larger offering bowl belonging to the god. From both the ritual and the mythic texts it appears that libations were most often offered alongside other food offerings, mainly sacrifices of animals and offering-bread. But, it appears that in some cases a libation could stand alone as a complete cultic act.

Due to the expansive nature of the texts surveyed it is difficult to posit generalized conclusions for them as a set. One exception to this is the issue of the presence, or lack thereof, for receptacles of the libations. There is no mention of a built in receptacle for libations anywhere in the texts. It appears that the drink offerings of the tabernacle and temple were poured directly onto the flames of the alter, thus precluding the need for any receptacle. While the status of the golden vessels in the tabernacle is debated, if wine was present, it was poured into the golden cup, where it stayed. For the prophets, the issue of whether libations were being poured, followed by the issue of to whom they were being poured to, was of far greater concern than the proper receptacles to pour the offering into. The illicit cults are depicted either in nature, or on their roofs. It may then be conjectured that they either poured the drink offering directly onto the ground before them or, in the case of the rooftop offerings, poured them into cups on the offering tables.

The passages of Joel and Hosea, the threat is a cessation of the temple libations, into what these are poured is of no consequence, so long as they are poured out. With regards to the surviving Ugaritic texts, they are so fragmentary as to make conjecture difficult, but in the case of the ritual texts, the acts themselves, and not the vessels to use, are recorded. The single exception to this breaks off right when it reaches the mention of the receptacle for the libation (RS 1.003). Thus nothing can be gleaned from it. In the mythic references to libation the vessels the wine is to be poured out of are sometimes made explicit, but the receiving vessel is not. Once it appears that the offering is poured directly onto the ground (KTU 1.3), barring any need for a receptacle. It could be conjectured that as the gods are instructed to drink the offerings, the libations were sometimes poured into cups or bowls, as the Hittites apparently did.

In none of the texts is the need for an elaborate built-in receptacle for the drink offering mentioned. While material finds do not always match up with the written record, there is no reason to expect to find libation installations at sites based on the texts. If the texts do make mention of the vessels associated with libation, they refer to the vessels to pour the offering out of, not what to pour it into. While silence does not equal absence in the material world, it seems odd that texts where the altar is always mentioned as the place for the sacrifices should lack a mention of such an elaborate structure as a libation installation. There is simply no support found for them in the texts dealing with libations of wine. The few times that the texts find it necessary to stipulate where the libation ought to be poured, portable vessels, the ground, or the altar are the stipulated recipients of the wine libations.

## Water

In contrast to libations of wine, references to water libations are far fewer and much more diverse. No clear ritual for pouring out water has emerged from the texts for any period at any time in Syria-Palestine. In the Hebrew Bible, references are limited to two distinct occurrences, an unusual water offering by Samuel on behalf of the repentant people and a substitution offering of water by King David. From the Hellenistic era a retelling and interpretation of David's libation occurs in Fourth Maccabees, giving the episode a very different understanding. There is also a passage in the Mishnah making reference to a water libation, poured out by a hapless priest, which was apparently offered concurrently with the wine libation at the altar. From Ugarit, a fragment of text survives attesting to a water ritual to Baal, possibly to revive the dead deity, to be carried out by the king. Finally, in *De Dea Syria*, an ethnography and a perigesis dating from the second century CE, the author Lucian describes a water ritual said to occur twice yearly at Hierapolis, modern Membij, in Syria. While few in number, the texts show a wide variety of ritual practice, making understanding the nature of water libations even more difficult than attempting to understand libations of wine. However, if a close reading of the texts is done, it becomes clear that some aspects of similarity can be found in these rituals from diverse nations and times. None support the idea of a built in receptacle for receiving libations and most state that the libation was poured out directly onto the ground.

The earliest reference to the ritual pouring of water to God comes in 1 Samuel, chapter seven:

Then Samuel said, 'Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you.' So they gathered at Mizpah, and drew water

and poured it out before the LORD. They fasted that day, and said, ‘We have sinned against the LORD.’ And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah.

(1 Samuel 7:5-6)

The verb used here to mean “poured out” is not the same verb employed for libations elsewhere. This verb is פָּשַׁךְ and it appears in connection with libations only once in all of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>101</sup> It occurs three other times in conjunction with the pouring of water, all having non-ritual contexts; once in Exodus and twice in Amos. In Exodus 4:9 God instructs Moses to, “take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground” promising that it will turn to blood and impress the unbelieving Egyptians. This act then describes a miracle rather than an offering. In Amos the two occurrences are part of descriptive passages on the might of God, who, amongst other awe-inspiring acts, “calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the surface of the earth” (Amos 5:8b and 9:6b). Only in 1 Samuel is the verb פָּשַׁךְ used to denote a ritual pouring of water. It is also the only occurrence of the verb פָּשַׁךְ in conjunction with water where the locality for the water to be poured on/into is not mentioned. In the other three passages where the verb פָּשַׁךְ is used in conjunction with water, all stipulate that the water is poured out directly onto the ground/earth. Pouring the water directly onto the ground is in keeping with the way פָּשַׁךְ is usually employed. The majority of occurrences of פָּשַׁךְ in the Hebrew Bible are in conjunction with blood. In these instances the people are ordered to pour out the blood of an animal directly onto the ground.<sup>102</sup> This correlation to the word and the ground in its more common usage, along with both the ritual nature of the act and the

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<sup>101</sup> “Among the smooth stones of the valley is your portion; they, they, are your lot; to them you have poured out a drink offering” (Isaiah 57:6).

<sup>102</sup> “And anyone of the people of Israel, or of the aliens who reside among them, who hunts down an animal or a bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth” Lev 17:13, also “The blood however, you must not eat; you shall pour it out on the ground like water” Deut 12:16.

lack of mention of a receptacle suggests that in 1 Samuel the water, although the only offering used with  $\text{שפך}$ , was poured directly onto the ground as well.

Likewise, the communal pouring out of water is recorded only here in the Hebrew Bible. Some think it may have been enacted to ensure sufficient rains for the crops.<sup>103</sup> Those scholars posit that it is an aetiological tale for the water libations of Sukkot.<sup>104</sup> However, due to its concurrence with fasting and an oral admission of fault, the act is clearly penitent in nature.<sup>105</sup> In addition to this, it has also been suggested that the act is purifying. Water is cleansing and lustration and fasting are common elements in purification rituals.<sup>106</sup> While these two theories regarding the purpose of the act appear to be quite distant from one another, they are not as incompatible as they may seem. A combination of the two suggestions yields a third option, for a drought was viewed as a sign of disfavor on the part of the LORD due to the sins of the people.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, the fasting was to purify the group and place them back in favor, while the water pouring was to ensure that the rains would come from a now (hopefully) appeased deity. In this case the ritual acts become one ritual of restoration. A final method of explaining the act is to do as Rashi did, who dealt with the issue summarily by stating, “It can only be a symbol of abnegation, that is, ‘Behold we are in your presence like this water spilled forth.’”<sup>108</sup>

In spite of what cannot be known regarding the ritual, such as the express purpose of the overall act, the significance of the water pouring is still apparent. Not only is it the most visible act, it opens the series of actions, and marks the communal fasting and

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<sup>103</sup> P. Kyle McCarter, Jr. *I Samuel: A New Translation*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 144.

<sup>104</sup> Please see the Ugaritic sections, with de Moore’s opinion in the wine section and Dietrich below.

<sup>105</sup> McCarter, Jr. *I Samuel*, 144.

<sup>106</sup> Robert Alter, *The David Story*, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, inc., 1999), 37.

<sup>107</sup> McCarter, Jr. *I Samuel*, 144.

<sup>108</sup> Alter, *David*, 37.

prayer as a ceremony set apart from other occurrences of these acts. The libation of water is then the crucial component of the ritual, there is hardly any ritual to speak of without it. In addition, a good amount of information about the act is present; it required the water be poured out, was communal in nature and was accompanied by other ritual acts. What is lacking in the description is any sort of receptacle for the libation. This lack of receptacle, taken in conjunction with the linking of the bare ground and the verb  $\text{שפך}$  in its most common connotations with blood suggests that the water was poured out directly onto the ground.

II Samuel and First Chronicles hold accounts of a very different, but equally intriguing water rite, this one carried out by King David himself. In chapter twenty-three of II Samuel David is encamped in an Israelite stronghold at Adullam, fighting the Philistines, who have chosen Bethlehem as their garrison. David longs aloud for water from the well of Bethlehem and, unbeknownst to him, three of his warriors manage to break through the enemy's lines and fetch the water, which they then deliver to David. But the king does not drink the water, instead

he poured it out to the LORD, for he said, 'the LORD forbid that I should do this. Can I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives?' Therefore he would not drink it.

(II Samuel 23:16-17)<sup>109</sup>

I Chronicles' account is the same, with a slight variance in word choice, here David says: "My God forbid that I should do this. Can I drink the blood of these men? For at the risk of their lives they brought it" (I Chronicles 11:19).

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<sup>109</sup> Of the various scholarly translations of this text P. Kyle McCarter's "I'll be damned, Yahweh, if I'll do this! Shall I drink the blood of the men who went?" expresses a slightly stronger reaction than the NRSV. P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel: a New Translation with Notes and Commentary*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 487.

In both accounts the verb used to describe what David does with the water is יָסַךְ, which is the hiphil imperfect of the verb יָסַךְ. Unlike the verb used to describe the collective pouring of water in I Samuel, this term is either used for the pouring of libations or, occasionally, molten metal. This coupled with the addition of the phrase "to the LORD" makes it clear that the act ought to be interpreted as a ritual offering. While the term יָסַךְ is employed here, David is not alluding to the stipulations for wine to be offered to the LORD, but instead to the prohibitions against the consumption of blood.<sup>110</sup>

The proper disposal of blood when away from an altar can be found in Leviticus 17:10-16, with the key verse being 17:13, "And anyone of the people of Israel, or of the aliens who reside among them, who hunts down an animal or a bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth." A similar proscription is issued in Deuteronomy 12:16, "The blood, however, you must not eat; you shall pour it out on the ground like water." The verb used for pouring the blood in both cases is שָׁפַךְ, the same as was used in the account of Samuel's communal water offering. The word, usually used to denote the pouring off of blood, is in context in these passages. It is curious then that the word was not used to denote David's actions. For the word יָסַךְ which was employed instead brings to mind the drink offerings of wine. Perhaps this was to remind readers that the water had been intended for the king to drink, while David's words make clear the possible cost of the water.

Regardless, the pouring out of the water is the central focus of the narrative and what it was poured out onto (or into) is not mentioned. If the act really is to mimic the pouring out of slain animal's blood, the water must have been poured directly onto the

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<sup>110</sup> Gary N. Knoppers, *I Chronicles: 10-29, a New Translation with Commentary*, (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 550. The prohibition against consuming blood is first laid forth in Genesis 9:4: "only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood."



ground. This portion of the narrative is possibly one of the more straightforward aspects of the story, for exactly what is going on in the text is confused on many levels. Even in the ancient world, a debate revolved around what David was attempting to do when he poured out the water, and dedicated it to the LORD.

### *Hellenistic Interpretation*

Versions of this tale appear in both 4 Maccabees and Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*. While both embellish the episode, the retelling of the story in 4 Maccabees 3:16 is the more dramatic version. The purpose of the work as a whole is to make the case that pious reason can overcome and control, if not eradicate, bodily passion.<sup>111</sup> The author then gives examples of biblical stories in which the hero used reason to overcome a difficult situation caused by irrational desire. The author of 4 Maccabees utilizes the tale of David's desire for water from Bethlehem to assist in illuminating his argument that the presence of reason is manifest throughout the bible.

In this rendition, rather than a home-sick King longing for water from a well of his childhood, David is "tormented," "inflamed," and "consumed" by "a certain irrational desire for the water in the enemy's territory" (4 Macc 3:11).<sup>112</sup> The irrationality of this longing is made clear in verse 10, where the reader is informed that "springs were plentiful" where David was, something neither II Samuel nor I Chronicles does. Despite this, when two of his men returned from their daring mission (4 Macc 3:13-14) with a

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<sup>111</sup> David de Silvia, *4 Maccabees: Introduction and Commentary on the Greek Text in Codex Sinaiticus*, (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 105. Moshe Hadas points out that the title of the work ought to be *On the Sovereignty of Reason*. Moses Hadas, *The Third and Fourth Books of Maccabees*, (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1953) 91.

<sup>112</sup> Hadas notes that the substitution of the words "inflamed" and "consumed" for the more staid choice of "longingly" in Second Samuel and 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles openly introduces Stoic terminology to the story. Both words being used as descriptors of desire. Hadas, *Maccabees*, 159.

pitcher of water, David came to his senses and "opposing reason to desire, he poured out the drink as an offering to God" (4 Macc 3:16). In this dramatic rendition, David realizes he is not worthy of a drink which potentially could have cost two soldiers' lives and pours it out to the only one worthy of such a gift: God. David is able to avoid committing hubris by using reason to keep himself from accepting a gift too worthy for a mere mortal.<sup>113</sup>

In his piece on 4 Maccabees, Klauck draws attention to the strong parallels this version holds to an episode in Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* (Alex 42.3-6).<sup>114</sup> In the episode, Alexander abstains from slaking his "wretched" thirst from the single helmet of water available when he notices the thirsty looks of his men. Alexander is a model of "self-control and loftiness of spirit" and this action inspires his men to press on and fight harder.<sup>115</sup> While David is also made to serve as a model of self-control in 4 Maccabees, a major difference is the presence of the libation culminating the event. The libation, due to its presence in the earlier versions of the story, needed to be retained, but the narrator works the deed quite skillfully into his argument. In contrast to Alexander's men's declaration that they will no longer regard themselves as mortal; the result of David's refusal of water is the tacit admission that he is only mortal. The libation is then an impromptu invention by a king looking for a way to express an understanding of his own mortality, and the immortality of his God.

This interpretation of the purpose of the libation differs greatly from Josephus' more controlled version of the event. Josephus writes in his *Jewish Antiquities*, that,

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<sup>113</sup> de Silvia, *4 Macabees*, 108.

<sup>114</sup> Klauck, *4 Maccabäerbuch* (Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit 3.6; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1989), 645-764. Mentioned by de Silvia on 109.

<sup>115</sup> Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives* (Perrin, LCL).

when the water was brought to him, the king did not drink it, saying that it had been brought at the risk of men's lives and that therefore it would not be right for him to drink it; then he poured some of it out as a libation to God, and gave him thanks for the safety of his men.

(J A 7.4.314 Thackeray)

Here it appears that Josephus views the libation as a thanksgiving offering to God rather than a way of acknowledging David's unworthiness. His stating that only a part of the water was poured out to God strengthens this interpretation. While Josephus does not mention the fate of the rest of the water, the possibility that David drank the remaining water exists in his account. Here self-control over passion is much less of an issue, and thanking God is seen as the act of most importance for the king.

As both accounts depict the act as being spontaneous and without forethought and Josephus makes no mention of similar or ongoing traditions, it appears that these later authors view the incident as a one-time occurrence rather than the documenting of an actual royal ritual. However, it may be that David's act did refer to an early monarchical ritual water pouring, the purpose of which was later lost. Regardless of whether it documents a "real" ritual or not, none of the authors recording it saw it as strange that a libation would be used to demarcate the event. The act of offering a libation, while qualified by later writers, was not questioned. It stands secure as an appropriate method of worshipping God, be it in thanks, praise, or out of concern for ritual purity. This is true even when a libation is of water and is not accompanied by the other standard ritual offerings, such as animal, grain, or incense offering. Unlike these other standard offerings, an offering of water did not require a special structure to receive it. Instead, it was poured directly onto the ground.

## *Mishnah*

The celebration of Sukkot, at least by the time of the Roman Empire, involved a rather complex water offering, to be poured out once a day for all eight days of the festival. This ritual is laid forth in the Mishnah, which was composed following the destruction of the temple, at the end of the second century CE.<sup>116</sup> The passage on Sukkot is in the second division of the six, which dealt with sacred times including, besides Sukkot, such dates as the Sabbath and Rosh Hashanah. The sages recount that this ritual started with the filling of a “golden flask” with “water from Siloam.”<sup>117</sup> Once they arrived at the Water Gate the priest went up a ramp and approached “two silver bowls” which are described as follows:

R. Judah says, ‘they were of plaster, but they had darkened because of the wine.’ They were perforated with holes like a narrow snout, one wide, one narrow, so that both of them would be emptied together...the one on the west was for water, the one on the east was for wine.

(mSukk 4.9)

While the text stipulates that the wine was to flow “slowly” and the water “quickly”, the text also states that even if the priest got confused and emptied the wrong flask into the wrong bowl, “he has nonetheless carried out the rite.” However, it is not permissible to pour the water on the ground, to prevent this,

to the one who pours out the water libation they say, ‘Lift up your hand [so that we can see the water pouring out]!’ For one time one [priest] poured out the water on his feet. And all the people stoned him with their citrons.

(mSukk 4.9)

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<sup>116</sup> Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: Introduction and Reader*, (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 4.

<sup>117</sup> All quotes from the Mishnah are taken from Jacob Neusener’s translation, *The Mishnah: a New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

In later texts, the sectarian identity of the priest was addressed, calling him a Boethusian in the Tosefta (tSuk 3:16), and a Sadducean in the Babylonian Talmud (bSuk 48b). This has lead scholars to focus on what they perceive to be evidence for the rejection of the water libations by the Sadducees,<sup>118</sup> rather than on what the passage can tell us about the importance of the water libation in and of itself. In order to do this, it is helpful to focus on the crowd's reaction to the priest's misstep and the resulting chaos. For in both of these accounts it is also recorded that the citrons damaged the horn of the altar and it had to be mended.

Citron-pelting is a common enough trope for authors of antiquity,<sup>119</sup> employed by, amongst others, Josephus (J A 13.372). Whether the people actually pelted the priest following his mistake or the trope was inserted to help illustrate the consequences of such a grave mistake is not of real consequence. What is important is that the priest received a sign of communal disapproval for his actions. By hurling their citrons, the community expressed their belief that in order for the ritual to be affective the libation must be properly poured out. In this case, that means pouring the offering into the receiving bowls and not onto the ground. If the ritual is not carried out correctly and completed, the end result of rain will not follow and disaster will descend. In the Tosefta and the Babylonian Talmud this thought process is taken a step further, for calamity ensues immediately: a horn of the altar is broken off by the flying citrons and temple practice has to be suspended until the altar has been repaired with a lump of salt (tSuk 3:16 and bSuk 48b). While it may appear that the damage would not have happened had the crowd not panicked and started hurling citrons, this is hardly the point. The carefully constructed

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<sup>118</sup> Jeffery Rubenstein, "The Sadducees and the Water Libation," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Ser. 84.4 (Apr., 1994): 417-444. 417.

<sup>119</sup> Rubenstein, "Sadducees," 423-424.

framework of the ritual world within the temple could have been destroyed by such a seemingly slight error, and the crowd, knowing this, responds in terror. The end result of a broken altar is to be expected when the rituals which support the temple are improperly carried out. In this case, that only the horn of the altar was damaged is both a relief and a warning as to the importance of following protocol precisely.

In this story then the libation's importance is revealed only when it is not poured out correctly. By enacting this crucial component of the ritual improperly, the priest failed at requesting water for the crops and this placed the community in peril. As a result of this damaging of the world ordered by the temple, the altar was broken and created a cessation of temple practice, and thus a cessation of the maintenance rituals necessary to sustaining the world. With the improper pouring of the water libation, the entire ordered world of the temple was thrown into disarray. While this disarray was caused by the pouring of the libation onto the ground, and not into the bowls on the altar, this is not an example of textual support for libation installations. The bowls the priest is to pour the water into are moveable vessels set upon the altar, not a built in structure of some sort. In addition, these vessels do not collect the offerings, but allow them to flow out in measured amounts onto the ground below. This is rather like a double libation, and a clever solution if one were ever unsure of whether the libation belonged in a bowl or on the ground. Here, it ends up in both, ensuring that the ritual is completed.

## *Ugarit*

In the Ugaritic texts one reference exists regarding water libations, a ritual demanding that a king pour out water. Due to the nature of this text, KTU 1.12, it offers one possibility for the purpose behind the practice of water libations in Ugarit.

KTU 1.12 was found in 'La Maison du Grand Pretre',<sup>120</sup> or the house of the high priest, which some now think was a library. This structure was located between the temples of Baal and Dagan, and was also where the Baal epic was found.<sup>121</sup> Such a locality lends credence to the belief that its possible references to ritual be seriously considered as windows into the actual ritual practices of the people. In the case of KTU 1.12, the ritual passage of interest occurs at the end of the text, following a myth recording an account of the death of Baal that differs from the one recorded in the Baal epic, and reads as follows:

Let the king pour out a jug  
let him pour water drawn from the well,  
let him pour from the well in El's temple  
and from the deep in the temple of the craftsman.  
(1.12 II: 58-61)

While El was the head of the Canaanite pantheon, Baal was the most active and consequently important member.<sup>122</sup> Baal, in his most generalized form, was a storm god, as well as king of heaven and earth. In his epic Baal fought death, was defeated, and his sister and possible consort Anat eventually freed him from death.<sup>123</sup> In the myth that begins KTU 1.12, Baal appears to be lured on a hunt and is killed by two monsters, he

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<sup>120</sup> Tryggve Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection: "Dying and Rising Gods" in the Ancient Near East* (CBOTS 50, ed. T. R. Mettinger and S. I. L. Norin; English ed. J. M. Starr; Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 2001), 67.

<sup>121</sup> Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection*, 67.

<sup>122</sup> William Foxwell Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1968), 124.

<sup>123</sup> Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 124.

lies dead for seven or eight years, during which time the “ea[rth] dried up entirely” and “The watercourses of the steppe became parch[ed].” Following this the text concludes with the portion quoted above on the water ritual.<sup>124</sup> This final piece of instruction for a ritual is interesting first due to its position as the conclusion to a myth and second because it clearly refers to a libation of water.

Tryggve Mettinger, in his work on dying and rising gods, has proposed that the mythic section here "motivates and sanctions the magic-cultic act at the end of the text,"<sup>125</sup> and such a suggestion seems tenable. This then means that the myth can be used to help explain the function this ritual is to have on the world that surrounds it. Because Baal is known to be a god who is revived from the dead it could be that in this variant of the tale the king takes the place of Anat as restorer of Baal's life. This then gives the people, through their representative the king, "a magical means" of actively restoring their god.<sup>126</sup> Thus here a water libation serves as a restoration ritual of great significance, restoring, as it does, a fallen deity.

The suggested seasonal occurrence of this ritual has been in the fall, in conjunction with the new year's festival as well as the installing of a new king/renewal of current king's reign.<sup>127</sup> In the myth a connection is made between the death of Baal and the onset of a drought. Therefore, the pouring of water may also serve to summon the winter rains and end the summer drought.<sup>128</sup> Baal is after all a storm god, so what better sign of his return from the netherworld and back to power than the start of the winter

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<sup>124</sup> Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit*, 164-167.

<sup>125</sup> Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection*, 67-68.

<sup>126</sup> Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection*, 68.

<sup>127</sup> Manfred Dietrich and Oswald Loretz, *Studien zu den ugaritischen Texten I: Mythos und Ritual in KTU 1.12, 1.24, 1.96, 1.100 und 1.114*, (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2000), 124.

<sup>128</sup> Dietrich and Loretz, *Studien*, 99.



rains? While it is true that the water is to be taken from the temple of El, this does not mean that the ritual could not involve both gods. Manfred Dietrich puts forth the argument that El should be seen as Lord of subterranean water sources and Baal Lord of heavenly water sources so that this ritual effectively includes/honors both gods.<sup>129</sup> Such an interpretation is clearly speculative, but is a good elucidation of the material at hand.

If indeed this libation of water is to assist in the reviving of a dead deity, the importance of the act cannot be overstated. If the pouring out of the water is to ensure the return of the rains, it is also extremely important. A dead deity will destroy the cosmos, as witnessed by the despair of the gods following Baal's defeat, and a drought destroys the physical world of the people. Here then the water serves not only as a maintenance ritual, to reify the world surrounding the people, but also as a restoration ritual, restoring a deity and the rains to their proper places and ensuring the continued survival of the people.

The importance of where this life-saving water is to come from is made quite clear, it must come from the well in El's Temple. The text also stipulates that the king himself must perform the ritual and it even denotes the type of vessel to be used: a jug. It does not make any mention of where the water is to be poured, let alone into what, if anything, it is to be poured. A careful reading shows that it is not even clear where the pouring is to occur. The water comes from the temple to El, but it does not say where it should then be poured out. Does the king stay within the temple, or does he exit, at least as far as the courtyard of the temple? This is not made clear. Place seems not to have been considered important to ritual pouring of water.

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<sup>129</sup> Dietrich and Loretz, *Studien*, 99.

### *De Dea Syria*

In Lucian's *De Dea Syria*, another water pouring in a temple is described, only here the water is brought into the temple and poured out into a chasm in the floor. The importance of the site of pouring depicted here stands in contrast to the water ritual of Ugarit surveyed just above. The study of *De Dea Syria* is an admittedly difficult undertaking, but despite what cannot be said of it, what is certain is that the text is written by an individual claiming to be giving an eye-witness account of the cult of the Syrian Goddess and her consort at Hierapolis (modern Membij) dating to between 160-170 CE.<sup>130</sup> It is thus both ethnography and a perigesis. It is further claimed that the author, himself Syrian, is a follower of this international cult. This international aspect is reflected in the Hellenizing of the narrative, most notably in the changing of the names Atargatis and Hadad to Hera and Zeus.<sup>131</sup> The work is simply structured and can be divided into five sections, with the second set containing all the various aetiologies for the temple. The description of the water pouring occurs in this origins section, following the recounting of a flood story which ends with the sole survivor of the flood, Deucalion, founding the sanctuary at Hierapolis, over the hole in the earth which drew back the waters of the flood from the earth's surface (Lucian *De Dea Syria* 12-13 Attridge and Oden).<sup>132</sup> Lucian writes that:

As a symbol of this story they do this: Twice each year  
water from the sea is carried to the temple. Not only priests, but

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<sup>130</sup> Lightfoot, *Lucian*, 208.

<sup>131</sup> Lightfoot, *Lucian*, 87.

<sup>132</sup> Whether there was actually a chasm in the floor of the temple will, in all likelihood, never be ascertained, for the site, first thoroughly robbed out, was finally razed. However, A Schmidt in his work (1929) claimed to have located a natural cavern with a crevice holding a tiny water source on the hill he identified as having been the site of the temple. Lightfoot, *Lucian*, 3 and 349-350.

the whole of Syria and Arabia brings it and from beyond the Euphrates many men come to the sea and all bring water. First they pour it out in the temple. Afterwards it goes down in the chasm, and the chasm, though small, takes in a great deal of water.

(Lucian 13b DDS)<sup>133</sup>

This act is said to commemorate both the “disaster” and the “divine favor” manifested by the flood waters and their recession. This linking of Hierapolis to the ancient flood traditions is substantiated by other sources outside of Lucian. The most important one may be in the Semitic name of the city itself, today called Membij. The Assyrian *Manpigu*, Syriac *Mabog*, Nabataean *Manbig/Manbug*, and the Greek βαμβοκ or μαμβογ/βονβογ (derived from Aramaic spellings), all have similar roots. These words are all related to water, with meanings ranging from “to bubble, flow,” to “spring,” as well as “source.”<sup>134</sup> While the ‘correct’ root for the name of the city can never be determined, because all the roots deal with water it can be asserted that the city had an important connection to water. That all the roots are descriptors for ground water sources suggests that this water was probably subterranean in nature. The water pouring can then also be interpreted as an act of “pacification or memorialization of the subterranean sources responsible for the deluge.”<sup>135</sup>

This is the only one of the libation ceremonies of a temple surveyed which allows all people to participate in the actual pouring out of the offerings. The all encompassing nature of the ritual is further revealed a little later in the narrative. This occurs in the

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<sup>133</sup> All quotes from *De Dea Syria*, unless otherwise noted, are from Lucian, *The Syrian Goddess (De Dea Syria)*, translated by Harold W. Attridge and Robert A. Oden (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press for the Society of Biblical Literature, 1976).

<sup>134</sup> R. A. Oden Jr., *Studies in Lucian's De Syria dea*, (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press for the Harvard Semitic Museum, 1977), 30-35. Oden offers a much more in depth analysis of the etymology of the name within this section.

<sup>135</sup> Oden, *Studies*, 36.

listing and describing of the statues in the temple, including one peculiar gold one called simply “‘Sign’ by the Assyrians” (Lucian DDS 33). According to Lucian, “twice each year the statue journeys to the sea to fetch the water” (Lucian DDS 33). Why it is “Sign” who makes the trip is not clear, perhaps in part because the identity of the image is not clear either.

This collective ritual, enacted twice a year by the populace and involving the transporting of statues and a pilgrimage is centered on the act of pouring water. In addition, if the reference to the sea pilgrimage mentioned later in the festivals section is taken as another account of the ritual, sacrifice may be involved.<sup>136</sup> In this case, the ritual is not just dependant on the pouring of water to complete the series of actions composing the ritual, it serves as the culminating act that the rest of the ritual leads to. The pivotal act of the series is not the pilgrimage, the gathering of the seawater, nor the sacrifices (if they occur), but the water pouring. Were the people not to pour water into the chasm, the flood waters would return and drown them, making this a libation of grave importance.

Thus, here the receptacle for the libation is both clearly defined and of the utmost importance to the ritual. Because the chasm is where the primordial flood waters came from, it is where the water offering must be poured to keep the waters from returning. This is not a man-made structure but a naturally occurring feature, and is thus not an example of a libation installation, such as they have been identified.

The libations of water found throughout texts spanning hundreds of years display a remarkable level of uniqueness. No two are exactly alike, making it difficult to draw any conclusions about the ‘general nature’ of water offerings. They appear to serve as

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<sup>136</sup> Lucian, *De Dea Syria* (Attridge and Oden), pp 48. “Then they carry the water into the temple, pour libations and once they have sacrificed they return home.”

markers of repentance, admissions of mortality, thanksgiving offerings to the gods, requests for rain to return, or as aids to reviving a fallen deity. All are alike in that the actual pouring out of the water is the main component of the ritual acts they are a part of. Their importance is witnessed in their intended purposes, but the necessity lying behind their performance is best represented by the tale of the incorrectly poured water offering of the priest. When the libations are not poured properly, the order of the universe is thrown off, and disaster can easily occur. Likewise, their pouring can reorder the universe when it has been tilted by the death of a deity or the sins of the people. While the actual acts differ greatly amongst the libations of water, they all function in similar ways, and their cessation can have calamitous consequences.

These texts, like those dealing with wine, do not support the idea of an installed ‘libation receptacle.’ In both the Mishnah and *De Dea Syria*, the receptacles for the offerings are mentioned. In the case of the Mishnah, these are silver bowls set on the altar outside of the temple in the courtyard. Here, the bowls are examples of vessels (albeit costly and special ones) not of a built in receptacle. In the case of the *De Dea Syria*, the receptacle mentioned is that of a natural chasm, not an artificial structure. Thus, while the offerings occur inside of the temple, they are still poured out as they would have been outside of the temple, onto/into the earth. The other water libations are also poured out upon the earth; even the story of David’s offering, in all its myriad forms never makes mention of a receptacle for his offering. Therefore, the water libations, in contrast to libations of wine, appear to usually be poured directly on the earth; they also neither require nor support the notion of a libation installation.

The texts mentioning libations of water and wine come from diverse cultures and periods of Syria-Palestine and refer to numerous differing rituals. Practically the only aspect they hold in common is that they are liquid offerings to gods. Perhaps the only other commonality the textual citations of libations hold is their inability to support the notion of any type of built-in libation receptacle. Regardless of time, locality, or whether the liquid being poured is water or wine, none even suggest the need for a libation installation. Receptacles for the libations are rarely specified at all. The libations of water have more occurrences where a designated locality to pour the libation is implied, but these all suggest the water was poured out onto the ground. In the case of the libations of wine, sometimes vessels are specified for pouring the drink offering out of, but no vessel is specified into which the offering would have been poured. While some of the Ugaritic texts recount conversations of the gods, stating that they consumed the libations out of chalices and cups, but this does not mean the libations were necessarily poured into cups. Second, the references, if taken as examples of what the libations were poured into, do not support a built-in receptacle. Indeed, they suggest the exact opposite; that libations were poured into portable vessels and not into permanent installations. Thus, textual references to water and wine libations cannot be used as evidence of any sort for libation installations.

## **Material Remains**

Having now surveyed the surviving textual descriptions of libations, attention can be returned to the physical remains of libations. The main focus of this section will be on the concept of the “libation installation,” a term used loosely to describe various structures found in cultic situations, but will first look briefly at caches of paraphernalia identified as vessels for libations. Material remains associated with libations are, in general, difficult designations to support. Caches are problematic because proving that a vessel was used in a cultic ritual to offer drinks to gods as opposed to some other sacred liquid-holding function or simply in everyday life is not easy. While it is difficult to prove one way or another, supporting such a hypothesis is far easier than defending the various “libation installations” strewn about the Levant. In attempting to support their conjectures, some scholars do utilize textual mentions of libations as evidence for installations. However, as the preceding portion of this paper has shown, no support for libation installations exists in the written record, nor does any text suggest a need for such elaborate receptacles. In addition, most of these installations can be more easily explained and more solidly defended as portions of more mundane and utilitarian implements.

### **Caches**

Caches of cups, jugs, juglets, and bowls are often found in areas deemed “cultic,” and these assemblages are sometimes identified as having been used for libation practices. These designations are rarely questioned, and are, in general, uncontroversial

in nature. It is these sites that best reflect the nature of cultic libation practice as depicted in the surviving texts, and this is why at least a brief overview of them must be given here.<sup>137</sup> The sites of Megiddo, Nahariya, Bat Yam, Tel Nami, and Tell el-Hammah, all have such caches recorded.<sup>138</sup> As an example of these designations, the site of Tel Nami, a Bronze Age site on the Mediterranean coast of Israel will be examined here.<sup>139</sup>

The items of sites identified as vessels for libations tend to be recovered in cultic areas. Tel Nami is no exception to this, for its vessels of libations were recovered within the sanctuary of the city.<sup>140</sup> These consist of various kraters, cups and other such ceramic vessels. By far the most impressive piece found is a kernos (App. B, fig. C), a pouring vessel in ring shape with an animal head shaped “spout” for pouring out the offering.<sup>141</sup> While a kernos cannot be positively identified with a certain type of liquid offering, it can be used as evidence for libations in a way that the other vessels cannot. A kernos was not constructed for practicality, and would have only been used in a ritual or cultic setting. It is evidence for the practice of libations at the site, and suggests that the other vessels it was found in association with were also so utilized. Despite a lack of a receptacle for them, libations were poured at the sanctuary in Tel Nami.

The existence of the kernos is a very helpful find as regards the identification of the practice of libations, but this is unusual. The vessels recovered at sites are often more generic in form and may have been used for acts other than libation, for example they

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<sup>137</sup> Surveyed above in the “textual” portion.

<sup>138</sup> Nakhai, 93-95 and 180-181.

<sup>139</sup> Michal Artzy, “The Bronze Age Anchorage Site of Tel Nami” Pages 632-639 in *Biblical Archaeology Today, 1990: Proceedings of the Second International Congress on Biblical Archaeology*, Jerusalem, June-July 1990, (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993).

<sup>140</sup> Michal Artzy, “Anchorage Site,” 635.

<sup>141</sup> Michal Artzy, “Nami: A Second Millennium International Maritime Trading Center in the Mediterranean,” in *Recent Excavations in Israel: a View to the West: Reports on Kabri, Nami, Miqne-Ekron, Dor and Ashkelon*, ed. Seymour Gitin, et al, (Dubuque, Iowa : Kendall/Hunt Pub. Co., 1995), 23.



might have been part of the dishes reserved for the priests' use. However, unlike the libation installations, when the texts do make mention of vessels for libations they mention everyday objects such as chalices, cups, and jugs for the drink offering. This means that when such objects are found in a cultic context to identify them as libation vessels is a logical and legitimate designation.

This is in general the nature of the portable evidence. It supports the textual evidence for ritual liquid pouring because it consists of jugs, jars, cups, bowls, and more specialized vessels such as the kernos or a rhyton (App. B, fig. D) in a cultic context. This argument, of course, works the other way, for the texts support the designation of vessels found in a cultic context. Which ever way one chooses to read the evidence, the important aspects of libation, both textually and materially seems to be the pouring out of the liquid and not what it was poured into (if anything).

### **Libation Installations**

Various types of architectural features of cultic sites have been identified as “libation installations,” but few of these have been examined. The libations installations are found at sites scattered across Syria-Palestine and span thousands of years. Despite all carrying the label “libation installation,” the remains differ markedly from one another. Because no standardized type of “libation installation” has been identified support for such designations is tenuous and critique of these finds is abundant. Those surveyed below do not claim to be exhaustive, or representative of every type of “installation” so far categorized. A general breakdown can be made between installations

demarcated by sunken vats and jars, those identified by pipes, and finally a singular one, mainly identified by a depiction of a libation directly above the installation.

### *Tel Dan and Ta'anach*

The site of Tel Dan located in the Hulah Valley in Northern Israel, holds a good example of a contested cultic libation installation (App. A, fig. 1).<sup>142</sup> This installation dates from the tenth-ninth centuries BCE and was described by Avraham Biran, the director of excavations, as “a complex consisting of a large sunken basin flanked by two flat basalt slabs and two plastered jars”<sup>143</sup> (App. A, fig. 4). The slabs tilt slightly towards the jars and grooves leading to the jar’s mouths were carved in the northern slab and molded into the plaster of the southern one. This was apparently to help facilitate some sort of liquid’s flowing into the jars (App. A, fig. 5 and fig. 6).

Biran argues that the installation was used for libations of water. He notes that the installation is located near the natural spring at the site and a paving of flagstones leads from the installation south to the artificial pool fed by a channel coming from the stream.<sup>144</sup> However, he does not attempt to reconstruct how such a ritual would work. He does cite the water rite of Samuel in 1 Sam. 7:6 and David’s water offering of 2 Sam.

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<sup>142</sup> The cultic nature of the site itself is not contested, but held by most scholars regardless of how they feel about Biran’s other identifications, such as it being proof of King Jeroboam’s golden calf episode (2 Kings 10:28-29) or the fact that the installation under examination was for libations. Please see Nakhai, *Archaeology* and Lawrence Stager and Samuel R. Wolff, “Production and Commerce in Temple Courtyards: An Olive Press in the Sacred Precinct at Tel Dan,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 243 (Summer 1981): 95-102 for examples of this.

<sup>143</sup> Biran, “Two Discoveries at Tel Dan.” *Israel Exploration Journal* 30:1-2 (1980): 89-98. 91 and 95.

<sup>144</sup> Biran, “Two Discoveries,” 95.

23:16 (discussed in the water section of the textual portion above) as proof of the importance of water libation ceremonies in the Second Temple period.<sup>145</sup>

In contrast to Biran's assessment of the site, Lawrence E. Stager and Samuel R. Wolff, having studied the site drawings, have drawn completely different conclusions. They see the installation as an olive oil press (App. A, fig. 2), to produce oil for the temple cult.<sup>146</sup> The middle plastered basin served as the crushing vat, once the olives were crushed water would have been poured in causing the oil to come to the surface where it could be collected. The remaining pulp would have been put in baskets, which were then set on the basalt slabs and pressed, allowing the resulting oil to flow down the grooves into the collecting basins.<sup>147</sup> Both slabs would have had a wooden beam for pressing over it, extending out from the wall, with weights hung at the ends.<sup>148</sup> Such a reconstruction takes into account the pile of perforated stones found near the structure, something Biran did not explain. In this assessment they become weights, strung through with a rope and tied to the end of the beam as a counter weight to pull the beam down on the olives.

To further support this claim Stager and Wolff point to the sites of Shechem, which lies north of Jerusalem between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal; Shiqmona, located south of modern day Haifa near the Mediterranean coast; and Beth-shemesh, which is located on a Tel near modern Bet Shemesh, west of Jerusalem overlooking the Sorek Valley; where similar structures featuring "external ceramic recipient jars" were

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<sup>145</sup> Biran, "Two Discoveries," 95.

<sup>146</sup> Stager and Wolff, "Production and Commerce," 96.

<sup>147</sup> Stager and Wolff, "Production and Commerce," 96.

<sup>148</sup> Stager and Wolff, "Production and Commerce," 96.

found in industrial/household contexts.<sup>149</sup> At Beth-shemesh, “direct evidence” for the production of olive oil was recovered in the form of burnt olive pits.<sup>150</sup> Noting that the area of Tel Dan where the installation was found was cultic, they suggest that the oil was produced there to ensure its purity. They argue that it would have been mainly employed in lighting the lamps of the sanctuary, but may have also been sold for the making of the grain offering cakes and for libations of oil.<sup>151</sup> These oil libations would have been poured onto the ground or into the flames of the altar.

While I do not agree with their suggestion of oil libations, finding it a misconstruing of the basic definition of libation, I agree that the oil could have been used in the sanctuary lamps and the offering cakes. However, the lack of any evidence for olives having been present at Tel Dan is troubling for such a specified designation for the installation as an olive oil press, something Biran rightly took issue with.

More than ten years after Stager and Wolff, Biran responded to these criticisms in his book on Tell Dan. Having restated his original conjectures regarding the structure along with broadening the description of the biblical evidence for water libations, he wrote that the excavators had originally thought the structure an olive press as well.<sup>152</sup> Two items pointed against this view; first the bottom of the basin was not plastered, this would have allowed the oil to seep through, second the area lacked a single olive pit, an item expected near an olive oil press.<sup>153</sup> In contrast, burnt animal bones and ash were found in abundance, but blood ritual was ruled out based on the lack of a hole in the

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<sup>149</sup> Stager and Wolff, “Production and Commerce,” 96.

<sup>150</sup> Stager and Wolff, “Production and Commerce,” 96.

<sup>151</sup> Stager and Wolff, “Production and Commerce,” 97.

<sup>152</sup> Biran, *Biblical Dan*, (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 177 and 181.

<sup>153</sup> Biran, *Biblical Dan*, 177.

bottom of the receiving jars on either side.<sup>154</sup> This, combined with the near-by springs, made water offerings the best answer. In this re-analysis Biran still did not offer an explanation of how these libations would work, nor did he explain the use of the perforated stones found next to the structure.

While Biran's argument is the more interesting one, it is not the most convincing. While arguing for the discovery of a new type of cultic installation is not easy, Biran failed to address several key issues and most of his arguments have extremely weak points. The insistence on using 1 Samuel 7:6 and 2 Samuel 23:16 as reference points for the importance of water libations is a poor choice. As has been shown above, the two occurrences are unique, and the fact that they revolve around pouring water on the ground is about the only point the two tales have in common. The fact that both stories do state that the water was poured directly onto the ground is a point not addressed by Biran. In the case of David's ritual, the water appears to be a substitution for the blood of his warriors, and thus must be poured on the ground. The inability of later writers to agree on the purpose of these acts is also not a point addressed by Biran.

In addition, Biran's assessment of the entire site is centered primarily in the book of 1 Kings. This is due to his belief that he had uncovered Biblical Dan, and that the cultic site was the one mentioned in conjunction with various kings, including King Jeroboam, who had a golden calf installed at the site (1 Kings 12:25-30).<sup>155</sup> While that

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<sup>154</sup> Biran, *Biblical Dan*, 177.

<sup>155</sup> 25 Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and resided there; he went out from there and built Penuel. 26 Then Jeroboam said to himself, "Now the kingdom may well revert to the house of David. 27 If this people continues to go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, the heart of this people will turn again to their master, King Rehoboam of Judah; they will kill me and return to King Rehoboam of Judah." 28 So the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold. He said to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." 29 He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. 30 And this thing became

can be problematic in and of itself, in order to textually support his designation of the installation as being for libations he was forced to turn to 1 and 2 Samuel. The fact that no mention of the practice of water rites at Dan is made in 1 Kings apparently does not trouble Biran. Based on his desire to find the proper position of the golden calf mentioned in the texts (1 Kings 12:28 and 2 Kings 10:28-29) in the material remains,<sup>156</sup> it seems he ought to be equally interested in finding textual support for his material evidence for water rites at Dan, especially given the peculiar nature of water rites as they survive in the texts. In fact, in neither 1 or 2 Kings is there any mention of the rites carried out by Jeroboam at Dan, only the rituals enacted by Jeroboam at Bethel are specifically recounted and these consist only of sacrifice (1 Kings 12:32-34).<sup>157</sup> Later, in 2 Kings, when Jeroboam's "sins" with regard to Dan are mentioned these are listed only as the setting up of the golden calves (2 Kings 10:29).<sup>158</sup>

A second problem with Biran's assessment is that in the initial analysis it appears he neglected to see if any similar structures existed at other archaeological sites, and in his defense of his conjectures, he fails to address the sites mentioned by Stager and Wolff at all. It is true that at this time no other structures looking just like the one at Tel Dan exist, especially with regards to the symmetrical design of the site, however, as Stager and Wolff pointed out, similar sites do exist. In the case of Shechem, the installation was

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a sin, for the people went to worship before the one at Bethel and before the other as far as Dan. (1 Kings 12:25-30)

<sup>156</sup> Biran, *Biblical Dan*, 25 and 181.

<sup>157</sup> "Jeroboam appointed a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the festival that was in Judah, and he offered sacrifices on the altar; so he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he had made. He went up to the altar that he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, in the month that he alone had prescribed; he appointed a festival for the people of Israel, and he went up to the altar to offer incense." (1 Kings 12:32-34).

<sup>158</sup> "But Jehu did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to commit—the golden calves that were in Bethel and in Dan" (2 Kings 10:29).

also found in a courtyard and consisted of a round slab, a large rectangular vat, and a sunken receiving jar. Grooves, carved into the rounded “platter,” lead to a channel, which would have directed liquid into the jar (App. A, fig. 13).<sup>159</sup> The installation is reminiscent of one half of Biran’s structure in appearance. The excavators of the site suggested that it was employed for “fruit processing,”<sup>160</sup> but in his study of olive oil production in Ancient Israel, David Eitam identified the fruit processed more specifically as the olive.<sup>161</sup> While a lack of any evidence of olives makes such a specified designation of the press questionable, that the structure was a press of some sort does seem likely. With regards to symmetry, one example can be found at the site of Beth Shemesh’s installation, consisting of two vats, side by side, one round and one square; each flanked by two huge jars set in the ground (App. A, fig. 11).<sup>162</sup> This was identified as an “olive oil refinery” by the excavators.<sup>163</sup> Except for the lack of sloping stones and channels, the vats with jars of Beth Shemesh are remarkably similar to the vat and jars of Tel Dan. Neither of these sites, nor any of the thirty-two stone olive presses identified by Eitam in his work are plastered on the inside.<sup>164</sup> This suggests that the lack of plaster on the interior of the Tel Dan vat is not as problematic as it may have first seemed.

This leaves standing only the argument of cultic context for the decision to label the Tel Dan site a structure for water libation. Aside from Tel Dan, one such site with a similar installation in a cultic context exists at the site of Ta’anach. Ta’anach is located

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<sup>159</sup> Robert J. Bull, et al., “The Fifth Campaign at Bala’ah (Shechem),” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 180 (Dec. 1965): 7-41, 19.

<sup>160</sup> Bull, “Bala’ah (Shechem),” 19.

<sup>161</sup> David Eitam, “Olive Presses of the Israelite Period,” *Tel Aviv* 6 (1979): 146-155, 150.

<sup>162</sup> Elihu Grant, *Ain Shems Excavations (Palestine) 1928-1929-1930-1931: Part I*, (Haverford: Haverford College, 1931). 73 and 78 (image).

<sup>163</sup> Grant, *Ain Shems*, 73.

<sup>164</sup> Eitam, “Olive Presses,” 150.

south of both Megiddo and the sea of Galilee, approximately mid-way between the two and the level associated with the installation dates to the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the same as that of the installation at Tel Dan.<sup>165</sup> This installation consists of a rectangular stone lined basin, with a large stone stele (App. A, fig. 7).<sup>166</sup> Paul Lapp, the director of excavations at Ta'anach, named the installation "the cultic installation,"<sup>167</sup> and suggested it was "for lustration or, less likely, libation."<sup>168</sup> Stager and Wolff, disagreeing as they did with regards to Tel Dan, returned it to its earlier designation of "olive press."<sup>169</sup> This act along with the renaming of Biran's discovery to their mind effectively removed any examples of libation installations from the record and firmly established that all such structures, while unique, ought to be viewed as olive oil presses.

Interestingly, at Ta'anach, in addition to the so-called "cultic installation," two other vats of similar shape were found in the "Cistern Courtyard" (App. A, fig. 10). Lapp noted the similarity between his cultic structure and one of the basins, also rectangular in shape, with a large stele plastered onto the structure's east wall (App. A, fig. 9).<sup>170</sup> This was the extent of his investigations though, for having mentioned them, Lapp remarked that the rectangular basin of the Cistern Courtyard, "in its present position" was probably not used in a cultic manner.<sup>171</sup> For Lapp the difference in use between the "cultic

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<sup>165</sup> Paul W. Lapp, "The 1963 Excavation at Ta'anek," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 173 (Feb. 1964): 4-44, 28 and 37.

<sup>166</sup> This stele is problematic, Lapp found it in the basin, but it appears that the earlier German excavations found the stone in the area and put it in the basin when they were covering the site back up. Thus, while not found in the basin, the stone was still in association with the site. Lapp, 29-30 as well as footnote 52 and Stager and Wolff, 99.

<sup>167</sup> Lapp, "Ta'anek," 26ff.

<sup>168</sup> Lapp, "Ta'anek," 32.

<sup>169</sup> Stager and Wolff, "Production and Commerce," 99. Sellin, the German archaeologist heading the first excavations had earlier uncovered the structure and labeled it an olive oil press.

<sup>170</sup> Lapp, "Ta'anek," 32.

<sup>171</sup> Lapp, "Ta'anek," 32.



installation” and the basin in the Cistern Courtyard appears to be based on context: cultic versus non-cultic. Because the “cultic installation” was found in a courtyard adjacent to a room filled with cultic paraphernalia meant that it could be identified as “cultic” (App. A, fig. 8), whereas to Lapp’s mind, the Cistern Courtyard should not be viewed as “cultic” in nature, meaning the rectangular basin within was not used for “cultic” purposes.

Following this assessment he offered no explanation for how the non-cultic basin would have been employed, as it was not for libations. He also neglected to mention the role of the second basin, located in the Cistern Courtyard, consisting of “a square plastered basin with a store jar set into the plaster floor nearby.”<sup>172</sup> Not only was its similarity to the “cultic installation” overlooked; no explanation for its purpose was given either. This blatant ignoring of two structures in close proximity, first to each other, and second to his “cultic installation” highlights the carelessness of Lapp’s “cultic” label. Lapp appears to have fallen back on the nebulous “libation installation” category to identify an unusual structure rather than taking the time to piece together a more coherent and cohesive argument.

If Eitam’s findings on olive oil presses are used,<sup>173</sup> it appears that when combined, the rectangular basin and the square basin with receiving jar in the Cistern Courtyard fit the description of an olive oil press perfectly. The olives would have been crushed in the rectangular basin and then pressed in the square basin. The lever for pressing would have extended from the wall that the square basin was built against. As the sap, pits, and other debris sank, the oil would have risen and overflowed into the

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<sup>172</sup> Lapp, “Ta’annek,” 33.

<sup>173</sup> Eitam, “Olive Presses,” 146-155.

waiting jar.<sup>174</sup> While it may be that the basins were not for olives specifically, to designate them as presses of some sort is a logical argument to put forth. Because Lapp never identified these structures, such a designation does not go against his findings, so much as explain what was left enigmatic.

However, if indeed the rectangular basin in the Cistern Courtyard is a press, what of the similar basin which Lapp labeled a cultic installation? While Lapp's hesitance to view them as two examples of one type of structure may be valid,<sup>175</sup> his argument for water rites is rather weak. If water rites were going to be found anywhere, they would have been better suited to the courtyard holding the cistern (serving as it did as a source of water). But, Lapp not only rejected the notion that the structures found in the courtyard be labeled 'libation installations,' he failed to explain their existence at all. While Stager and Wolff's assessment of the structure as an olive oil press admittedly does not work out as tidily as the basins in the cistern courtyard, it is the more defensible argument. In this case, the basin ought to be viewed as the vat for the crushing of the olives. It may be that the second vat lay in the part of the courtyard not excavated, or that this oil was produced by a slightly different technique, wherein only one crushing was performed.<sup>176</sup> The least that can be said of the structures is that they are more easily and better explained as presses of some sort for the production of, if not olive oil, some sort of oil or juice as opposed to Lapp's unsubstantiated designation of one for libation/libations and his silence on the uses of the other two.

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<sup>174</sup> Eitam, "Olive Presses," 149.

<sup>175</sup> Lapp, "Ta'annek," 32.

<sup>176</sup> Stager and Wolff, "Production and Commerce," 97.

This identification of production in a cultic area is no longer considered strange, with examples of such activity existing at Nahariyah and Hazor.<sup>177</sup> Within the cultic area of Ta'anach, one of the rooms adjoining the cultic installation's courtyard has been identified as a "storage room."<sup>178</sup> The artifacts recovered there, consisting of cookware, loom weights, whorls, pestles, and a figurine mold amongst other things,<sup>179</sup> suggests the production of material goods in the immediate vicinity. An olive oil press would then not be as out of place in the courtyard as might at first be expected. Finally, this allows three very similar structures in close proximity to share a common use instead of ignoring the possible functions of two in order to defend the designation of the third as "cultic" in nature as Lapp has done.

It appears then that both the installation at Tel Dan and that of Ta'anach are more convincingly identified as industrial structures (possibly more specifically olive oil presses) rather than structures for water rites. While the identification of olive oil presses is not an area without its own issues of controversy, it appears that a typology of presses can be established,<sup>180</sup> and that a subset of these can be identified by their sunken receiving jars. Whether the installations of Tel Dan and Ta'anach ought to be added to this category is a different question. Notably, the lack of a single olive pit in the vicinity of the structure at Tel Dan makes such a specific designation as having been for olive oil tenuous. Based purely on form, the structures fit the criteria for presses. It seems then, that if not for olive oil, they were used for some other fruit's pressing.

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<sup>177</sup> Stager and Wolff, "Production and Commerce," 98.

<sup>178</sup> Lapp, "Ta'annek," 28.

<sup>179</sup> Lapp, "Ta'annek," 28.

<sup>180</sup> Eitam, "Olive Presses," 153-154.

What is clear is that their current designations as receptacles of libations are untenable, failing as they do to address problematic issues, depending on questionable evidence, and lacking in good explanations for how they would have functioned. While archaeological evidence of water rites would be fascinating to uncover, there is currently no evidence for them. If one wishes, as Biran did, to turn to texts for support of their existence, it is imperative to notice that the texts make no mention of such receptacles for the libations. The only mention of a receptacle for an offering of water is the Mishnah's reference to the silver bowl in the temple. While it seems likely that water libations did occur, what does not seem likely is the discovery of definitive proof for them.<sup>181</sup> They were, almost certainly, simply poured upon the ground and not into elaborate receptacles.

### *Ugarit*

Much farther north, at Ugarit, excavators labeled the function of several entirely different types of structure as libatory in nature. For over seventy years (1929 to 1994) it was believed that Ugarit was the home of an elaborate cult of the dead, whose ritual centered on the pouring of libations to the deceased. This was due to the reports and conclusions reached by Claude F. A. Schaeffer during the first decade of excavations (1929-1939). Schaeffer discovered that the dead of Ugarit were interred in tombs located beneath the floor of houses. Believing that the dead of Ugarit, like the dead "of all "ancient civilization(s)," must suffer great thirst in the netherworld, Schaeffer began searching for evidence of libations having been offered to these dead.<sup>182</sup> He found his

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<sup>181</sup> As mentioned above in the "Cache" section, it is impossible to determine the precise liquid poured out of the vessels recovered at various sites.

<sup>182</sup> Claude F. A. Schaeffer, *The Cuneiform Texts of Ras Shamra Ugarit*, The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy 1936, (London: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1939), 49.

evidence in the form of "numerous devices to allow libations" including pits, pipes, gutters, and basins or pots.<sup>183</sup> Until 1994 this assessment was not seriously challenged and heavily influenced the portrayal of Ugarit culture and ritual in the written corpus as well as the funerary practice of the various groups of Bronze Age Canaan.<sup>184</sup> This interpretation not only envisioned funerary cults all about the greater Syro-Palestine region; but also gave purpose and meaning to the collections of libation paraphernalia recovered at various sites; the various pieces of equipage were evidence of the existence of a funerary cult.

Unfortunately, this interpretation is based on faulty logic. As Wayne Pitard was able to prove through a reassessment of the findings in 1994, there is no evidence for libations to the dead in Ugarit.<sup>185</sup> Schaeffer's libation pits are better viewed as "ordinary utilitarian sumps for disposing of water," as has been found in other homes and courtyards in more recent excavations.<sup>186</sup>

Amongst the various receptacles that Schaeffer identified were pots placed beside the graves and underground (App. C, fig. 1 and 2). According to Schaeffer, the living family members would have poured libations into them on a daily basis to quench their ancestors' thirst.<sup>187</sup> There is a major problem with this theory however, an examination of the placement of the pots shows they were interred in the earth under multiple layers of solid stone blocks, making it physically impossible to pour offerings into them. What these pots were intended for is not clear, they may have been buried at the same time as

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<sup>183</sup> Schaeffer, *Ras Shamra*, 50.

<sup>184</sup> Please see for example Margaret S. Drower's work on Ugarit, especially page 152, "Ugarit" in *The Cambridge Ancient History* (Cambridge: University Press, 1975).

<sup>185</sup> Pitard, "The 'Libation Installations' of the Tombs at Ugarit," *Biblical Archaeologist* 57.01 (1994): 20-37, 34.

<sup>186</sup> Pitard, "Libation Installations," 24.

<sup>187</sup> Schaeffer, *Ras Shamra*, 49.

the dead individual, filled with water for their life in the afterworld, but this is not the same as a libation, especially not one that happens on a daily basis.

More elaborate systems of stone channels and conduits (App. C, fig. 3) were assumed to have channeled libations into the tombs, another way of appeasing the thirst of the dead relatives.<sup>188</sup> Upon re-examination these have been shown to direct water away from the burials, rather than towards them. Indeed, they do not meet up with the tombs at all. Because the dead were buried beneath the homes of Ugarit, this means that the channels carried water away from not only from the tomb but from the house as well. It is then logical to reinterpret them as drains for the house and its gutters rather than being for libations.<sup>189</sup>

Schaeffer himself seems to have noticed some of these incongruities, for he identifies one such channel as carrying the libation "away into the depths" rather than into a tomb.<sup>190</sup> In another problematic set of gutters he admits that, "in these latter examples one would have had to penetrate inside the (burial) vault to perform libation rites."<sup>191</sup> However, his analysis of his claim ends there, he does not give an explanation for how these would have functioned with regards to libations given their inaccessibility to would be suppliants. Interestingly, this designation seems to be wholly dependent on the presence of the tombs near to the gutter system. When a similar set of channels was found out by the city wall (and thus away from the houses and the tombs below them) Schaeffer correctly identified them as being a gutter system (App. C, fig. 4).<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Schaeffer, *Ras Shamra*, 50-51.

<sup>189</sup> Pitard, "Libation Installations," 26.

<sup>190</sup> Schaeffer, *Ras Shamra*, 50.

<sup>191</sup> Schaeffer, *Ras Shamra*, 51.

<sup>192</sup> Schaeffer, *Ras Shamra*, Plate VII.

In addition to these structures situated next to the tombs, one architectural feature of the tomb itself was identified by Schaeffer as having been used for offering libations. These consist of small square windows set into the walls of the tombs (App. C, fig. 5 and 6), through which Schaeffer speculated the dead could obtain drink from the libation pits.<sup>193</sup> Similar to the problem with the pots, the windows are completely inaccessible to the living above the tomb, the only person who could access the window was the interred individual. In addition, Schaeffer never gave an example of one of these windows being next to one of the pits. Finally, they appear to be the same as other niches built into the interior of the tomb, except that they lack a back panel, leaving them open to the earth.<sup>194</sup> While the function of these is not clear, they may all relate to the same purpose, which is not related to libations.

Schaeffer's libation installations then, lack evidence to support them, especially in the case of the windows and pots, which are inaccessible to the living. Others, such as the systems of channels, pits and pipes are easily, and convincingly explained by the more mundane designation of gutters and sumpt pits.

In addition to this various libation channels for the dead, Schaeffer identified several structures as "libation tables" (App. A, fig. 7). These differ from the cult tables of ancient Greece that David Gill has studied, in that Gill's tables actually look like tables, have multiple square insets carved into them for food, and are often made of marble.<sup>195</sup> These various "libations tables" of Ugarit, while differing from the libations installations found at Tel Dan and Ta'anach, have fallen victim to the same critique. Here, rather than

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<sup>193</sup> Schaeffer, *Ras Shamra*, 50.

<sup>194</sup> Pitard, "Libation Installations," 29.

<sup>195</sup> David Gill. *Greek Cult Tables*, Ed. Gregory Nagy (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991).

full installations with vats and jars, the libation tables consisted of large flat slabs with irregular but often rounded insets carved into them. They have been relabeled with the more functional designation of being parts of olive oil presses, not for making offerings to the deceased, but for making oil for domestic use (App. A, fig. 8).<sup>196</sup>

In the case of the *Ville Sud*'s (a sizable dwelling located in the South of the city) structure, much like at Tel Dan, this new designation also helps to explain a carved rock, with hole through it, found in the vicinity. Like the cluster of smaller stones with holes through them at Tel Dan,<sup>197</sup> this mysterious stone is now the counterweight for the press, enabling the lever to exert enough force to crush the olives.<sup>198</sup> In the case of the Ugaritic structures, the olive press is, as Oliver Callot puts it, a far more “utilitarian” explanation befitting the surrounding domestic setting than the more imaginative and thoroughly impractical libation table.<sup>199</sup>

Therefore, on the whole, it appears that evidence for libation installations, either in the form of channels or tables at Ugarit is completely lacking. While Schaeffer seems to have, at times, perceived the flaws in his argument, his desire to find firm evidence for his funerary cult led him to either explain away these incongruities or simply ignore them. Although, unfortunately, the texts of Ugarit are not overly clear with regards to the necessary treatment of the dead, they do not support the receptacles Schaeffer triumphantly identified. As has been shown earlier, no receptacle is identified when making mention of these libations, not even in the more technically focused ritual texts.

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<sup>196</sup> Olivier Callot, "Les Huileries Du Bronze Récent A Ougarit: Premiers Elements Pour Une Etude," Pages 197-212 in *Le Centre de la Ville: 38eme44eme Campagnes (1978-1984)*, (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1987).

<sup>197</sup> Stager and Wolff, 'Production and Commerce,' 96. In the case of Tel Dan, there were multiple smaller stones with carved holes through them.

<sup>198</sup> Callot, "Les Huileries," 205, figures 8 (pg 204) and 10 (206).

<sup>199</sup> Callot, "Les Huileries," 208.



Indeed, in the surviving texts mentioning libations, the libations are dedicated to the gods, and not to the dead.

In addition to the textual mentions of libations, there is material evidence for the practice of libations at Ugarit. Some of these examples were uncovered by Schaeffer himself. The most prevalent artifact is that of the rhyton, of which multiple examples have been found (App. B, fig. D). The rhyton was a zoomorphic vessel, with handle and spout for the pouring out of liquid offerings, often through the animal's snout. These are often associated with libations, and as was seen in the section on Ugaritic texts, they are mentioned by name in the surviving writings as an implement of libation. The other example of libation found in the archaeological record is a carved depiction (App. B, fig. B). This was also uncovered by Schaeffer, who was surprisingly restrained in his identification of the scene labeling it an example of "offering." Given his desire to find evidence of libations it is surprising he did not think a more specific designation necessary, for a close examination of the scene reveals it to be a depiction of a libation. Here, the king of Ugarit has either just poured or is about to pour out a drink offering from a jug into a cup that an enthroned El holds out to him. Perhaps the problem for Schaeffer was that he was looking for evidence of libations being offered to the dead, which this is not. This depiction is in agreement with the image of libations gained from the texts of Ugarit, surveyed earlier. While the image is not, in all likelihood, a depiction of the water offering called for in the temple of El,<sup>200</sup> it is representative of that general type of libation. It is apparent then that the actual remains of libations found at Ugarit have a very high correlation to the depiction of them gleaned from the texts. Thus,

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<sup>200</sup> Let the king pour out a jug/ let him pour water drawn from the well/  
let him pour from the well in El's temple/and from the deep in the temple of the craftsman (KTU 1.12 II: 58-61).

libations were poured out at Ugarit, only they were offered either "into the midst of the earth," or possibly into a simple cup or bowl (as is depicted in the one surviving image of libations), rather than into some sort of elaborate underground receptacle.<sup>201</sup>

### *Tell Chuera*

In addition to Ugarit and its multiple installations, another Syrian site, that of Tell Chuera (or Al Kwera), in the Northeast, holds several examples of structures identified as libation installations. The site was excavated by Anton Moortgat and, following his demise, Ursula Moortgat-Correns. They identified both libation tables and actual libation installations at the site. These various examples have little in common with one another, although they do all date to around 3,000 BCE. They are also all in cultic contexts, all being associated with one of the two temples identified at the site.<sup>202</sup> These installations are of interest for two reasons, first they serve as a good example for the over-eagerness of scholars to identify various unusual installations as "libation installations" and second, the site holds one example of a "libation installation" that when examined is actually supportable.

During the 1964 season, in the "kleinen Anten-Temple,"<sup>203</sup> located at the center of the Tell, at the fourth and earliest level of the sanctuary, Moortgat discovered multiple

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<sup>201</sup> On a final note, Schaeffer's argument relies heavily on perceiving the peoples of the libation installations as Mycenaean, today a rather troubling designation. However, a similar set-up to Schaeffer's involving buried broken vessels at Mycenae, originally identified as proof of libations has recently been reassessed, and it has been determined that they were not in fact intended as libation receptacles, but were in their positions due, most likely, to earthquake. Thus, Schaeffer's would be cross-cultural support from Mycenae is nullified. Robin Hägg, "The role of Libations in Mycenaean Ceremony and Cult," 180.

<sup>202</sup> Josef Oesch, "Die religiösen Zeugnisse von Tell Chuera," pages 30-39 in "Der Alte Orient." Chapter one in *Religionsgeschichte Syriens: Von der Frhzeit bis zur Gegenwart*, (ed. by Peter W. Haider, Manfred Hutter, and Siegfried Kreuzer. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1996), 33.

<sup>203</sup> An "Anten-Tempel" is a temple style common in 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE Syria, consisting of a cella with altar against the back wall and an entry way, only partially separated from the main chamber, the "anten" of the temple.

niches with troughs or bowls carved out of the floor directly beneath them, which were then identified as having been used for making drink offerings (App. A, fig. 14). This was a feature particular to the earliest stage of the temple alone, and served as an example of the importance of libations to the cult at that period.<sup>204</sup> According to Moortgat, these allowed the passerby on the road, or in the alley, to offer a drink offering to the god/gods of the temple without having to enter the main cella, located as they are in ante-chambers to the side of the main portion of the structure.<sup>205</sup> It is unfortunate then that he does not give a more detailed explanation for these installations, especially the niches, the function of which he never explains. He also fails to explain why libations would have been so important to the cult as it was practiced at the site, or if the ability to provide libations to the gods outside of the cella was really an issue of import in the ancient city. Thus, the argument for libations appears to be built solely off of the pits below the niches and their connection to a temple.

While it is rather difficult to critique an argument that does not really exist, the general lack of explanation for the designation does make these libation installations suspect. It should also be noted that the basins are not at all large and, lacking a drain, could not have accepted many libations before overflowing. What they should be identified is not at all clear. If more examples of such architectural features were uncovered it might be possible to either build a more believable argument for libations or put forth a different and more plausible theory. As of now, the designation for libation is

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<sup>204</sup> Anton Moortgat, *Tell Chuera In Nordost-Syrien: Vorläufiger Bericht Über Die Fünfte Grabungskampagne 1964* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1967), 35.

<sup>205</sup> Moortgat, *Tell Chuera*, 35-38.

not supportable based on any sort of evidence and seems to reflect a general scholarly trend toward identifying unusual basins and pits as “libation installations.”<sup>206</sup>

Of all the various receptacles labeled as having been for libations, the one most likely to have actually had a connection to libations was the first installation identified as such by Moortgat, consisting of a table that he believed to have been a table for libations and grain offerings.<sup>207</sup> The evidence behind the libations portion of the designation was the discovery of two *in situ* rounded wide-mouthed pots, one on either end of the table (App. A, fig. 15).<sup>208</sup> According to Moortgat's designation then, the grain offering would have been placed in the center of the table, and the wine poured into the two bowls. While this is the most plausible explanation for the evidence of libations, it fails to take into account the pile of animal bones directly next to the altar. These were designated as demarcation of an “offering site, but perhaps instead the table served as an altar of sacrifices. Even if this were the case, the bowls still could have served as receptacles for libations. Granted, neither hypothesis is provable, and a third option, wherein the altar was used for grain and meat offerings and the bowls for libations of wine, is also a logical argument.

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<sup>206</sup> Over twenty years after Moortgat's discovery of the niches (and several years after his death), another installation at Tell Chuera was identified in a different temple in 1985. The installation is an unusual structure of four plastered ovals on the top, with drains leading down into the structure, and emerging out on the side, above a flat oval shaped receptacle on the floor. This too seems to be an example of using the designation “libation installation” as a label for an unusual structure. While it appears that this structure is unique, that should not lead to an immediate designation of “libation installation” for it. Ursula Moortgat-Correns was the one to label it as such, and she, like Moortgat before her, failed to explain how this structure would have been utilized in the cult or how exactly it would have functioned. Because of its similar nature to Moortgat's niches and the lack of information about it further discussion will not be undertaken in this paper. Ursula Moortgat-Correns, *Tell Chuera in Nordost-Syrien: Vorläufiger Bericht Über Die Elfte Grabungskampagne 1985* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1988), 21.

<sup>207</sup> Moortgat, *Tell Chuera*, 32.

<sup>208</sup> Moortgat, *Tell Chuera*, 28.

Perhaps what is most convincing about the structure in the Anten-Tempel is the simplicity of the structure, it hardly counts as an “installation” as it consists of two bowls atop a slab of rock. Another aspect of the table that is convincing is the nature of the receptacles themselves. As the survey of the texts dealing with libations has shown, in the rare occurrence that the libation was associated with a receiving container, that receptacle was some sort of moveable vessel. Here, the bowls are just such vessels. Unlike the vessels found in Ugarit, these would have been readily accessible to those making offerings.

Finally, its location inside a temple, and perched upon the corners of an offering table/altar is also convincing. Many of the libations made in the texts are made in conjunction with other offerings, especially sacrifice and/or grain offerings. This connection between grain and wine offerings seems to have been known to Moortgat, his suggestion for wine and grain having been placed on the table reflects this. In the texts when the libations are in conjunction with other offerings and the placement of the libation is mentioned, it is often upon the altar. While the exact nature of a libation being poured out onto the altar is not clear, it is possible that bowls were set on the corners of altars to receive the offerings, such as the silver ones mentioned by the Mishnah. The bowls found at Tell Chuera could be a concrete example of this practice.

The site of Tell Chuera then holds a myriad of structures identified as libation installations. Most of these designations are not supportable, and fail to withstand a closer inquiry. While it is not clear what some of these libation installations should be relabeled, the current assignment of libation installation serves as an example of the overuse of “libation installation” as a scholarly catchall category for unusual architectural

features of various sites. One exception to this is the first “libation installation” identified by Moortgat, the libation table of the Anten-Tempel. The fact that this libation table matches several descriptions of libation offerings in the texts, is located within a temple and cannot be easily identified as some other type of structure suggests that it could be an example of an installation for libations.

### *Kedesh*

The Roman Temple at Kedesh, in the Northern Galilee, is the youngest site with a built in receptacle for libations, dating as it does to around 117 CE. There are two such receptacles, one on either side of the side entrances of the façade of the temple. These consist of volute craters with ribbed bodies in carved relief (App. B, fig. E), with apsidal niches carved immediately above them.<sup>209</sup> From each of these niches runs a downward slanting groove, cutting through the width of the wall to larger niches on the interior of the temple.<sup>210</sup> These installations have been attributed to various purposes over the years; they were first identified by Wilson as confessionals and later re-identified by Conder and Kitchner as coin slots for donations to the temple oracle.<sup>211</sup> In the most recent explorations of the temple, by Mosche Fischer, Asher Ovadiah, and Israel Roll, these have been labeled “elements of a system of libations.”<sup>212</sup>

While it may at first seem that these installations are reminiscent of the niches associated by Moortgat with libations at Tell Chuera, these examples are actually more closely connected to Tell Chuera’s libation table. While built into the wall of the temple,

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<sup>209</sup> M. Fischer; M. Ovadiah; and I. Roll. “The Roman Temple at Kedesh, Upper Galilee; A Preliminary Study,” *Tel Aviv* (1984):146-172, 153.

<sup>210</sup> Fischer; Ovadiah; and Roll. “Roman Temple,” 153.

<sup>211</sup> Fischer; Ovadiah; and Roll. “Roman Temple,” 153.

<sup>212</sup> Fischer; Ovadiah; and Roll. “Roman Temple,” 153.

these installations are carved in the shape of kraters, a generic vessel for holding liquids. These, it has been noted, flank the main entryway to the temple, this means that they also flank the altar that was located in the courtyard of the temple. If these carved kraters are associated directly with the altar rather than the temple, these could be viewed as built-in replicas of the vessels that usually were placed on the corners of the altar. If the difference behind this line of reasoning and the reasoning behind Moortgat's niche designation seems slight, there exist other more concrete reasons to accept the features of Kedesh as actual examples of libation installations.

First, there is the presence of channels, tilting slightly downward, to funnel the liquid into the temple, something Tell Chuera lacks. Firmer evidence exists as well: on the south side of the temple, above the krater and niche is another apsidal niche with the carved sunken relief of a figure in it (App. B, fig. F). The figure is toga-clad and stands in a contraposto stance, with head bent down and feet pointed out in opposite directions. The individual holds in its right hand "some kind of basket-handled pear-shaped vessel with pointed base," and in its left hand a spear, with the tip facing downward.<sup>213</sup> This carving is interpreted as a depiction of the libation ceremony, with the figure as the worshipper and the vessel representing the libation.<sup>214</sup>

This image is quite similar to two other published images, both Roman in date. The first is noted by Asher, Ovadiah and Roll, and is a carved relief from the tomb of the Valerii in Rome (App. B, fig. G). This depicts a veiled man, also in controposto, pouring a libation out from a dish held in his right hand.<sup>215</sup> This dish appears to be a phiale,

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<sup>213</sup> Fischer; Ovadiah; and Roll. "Roman Temple," 154.

<sup>214</sup> Fischer; Ovadiah; and Roll. "Roman Temple," 154.

<sup>215</sup> Toynbee and Perkins identify the man as a "priest-ancestor" of some sort. Jocelyn Toynbee and Ward Perkins, *The Shrine of St. Peter and the Vatican Excavations*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), 85.

which is a shallow handle-less dish which received preferential treatment in the pouring of libations.<sup>216</sup> Rather than the staff of the figure at Kedesh, this man simply clutches his clothes in his left hand. The other image comes from the Sparta Museum, dates nebulously to the “Imperial Period”<sup>217</sup> and also depicts a man in contraposto, head inclined, with the right arm fully extended and a libation dish in the right hand (App. B, fig. H). While this figure is nude, and thus not veiled, he does hold a lance in his left hand in the same manner as the figure at Kedesh. This figure is also flanked by two seated individuals who both hold vessels associated with libations, a kantharos and a mesomphalos phiale, out towards the youth.<sup>218</sup>

Kedesh is peculiar in that a disagreement over the designation does exist and it revolves around the substance used for and the purpose behind the libations rather than the identification of the grooves as a “system of libations.” Asher, Ovadiah and Roll speculate that blood, wine or oil was poured into the grooves as a funerary offering. The funerary context stems from the presence of graves and mausolea on three sides of the temple.<sup>219</sup> This offering was made directly to the deity of the temple, identified as Baalshamin, but was intended to help ease the plight of the dead vicariously through the appeasement of the “exalted and worshipful godhead”.<sup>220</sup> Jodi Magness, who argues that the deity of the temple should be seen as Apollo, reinterprets this figure and the niches

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<sup>216</sup> M. G. Kanowski, *Containers of Classical Greece: A Handbook of Shapes*, (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984), 116.

<sup>217</sup> M. N. Tod and A. J. B. Wace, *A Catalogue of the Sparta Museum*, (Rome: “L’Erma” di Bretschneider, 1968), 137. However, Elpis Mitropoulou has re-dated the piece to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE in her work, *Libation Scene with Oinochoe in Votive Reliefs*, (Athens: PYLI, 1975), 81.

<sup>218</sup> Elpis Mitropoulou, *Libation Scene*, 81. The kantharos was a double handled cup, most often associated with Dionysus and the mesomphalos phiale was a phiale with a bump in the center. Kanowski, *Containers*, 49 and 116.

<sup>219</sup> Fischer; Ovadiah; and Roll. “Roman Temple,” 153. This designation probably stems from Schaeffer’s work at Ugarit, which was brought under question earlier in this paper.

<sup>220</sup> Fischer; Ovadiah; and Roll. “Roman Temple,” 153.



along with all the rest of Asher, Ovadiah and Roll's findings.<sup>221</sup> She argues that the offering liquid was water and it was offered at the temple in order to receive oracles.<sup>222</sup> To support this water claim, the vessel that the figure holds in the relief is identified as a *situla*, a water-drawing device.<sup>223</sup>

This seems a rather great claim from such a small and worn image. Given that the figure's features are so worn away that he no longer has a face, to attempt to identify the blurred object in his hand seems a bit presumptuous. It could as easily be reattributed to a rhyton, its image now worn down or perhaps, like the Spartan image, an oinochoe, that is, a juglet specifically designated for pouring libations.<sup>224</sup> As the word oinochoe (οινοχονη) stems from the combining of the words "wine" and "to pour" it seems that were this the case the libation would have had to have been of wine.<sup>225</sup> But this is all speculative, in reality it seems best to leave the object's designation as that of a vessel, being employed for libations.

As this removes the specificity of the liquid, it also removes the connection drawn between the water and the deity receiving the libation as Apollo. This however, is not overly troubling because attempting to draw strict correlations between gods and the specific type and manner of their libation is a futile endeavor. While it is true that general trends can sometimes be detected,<sup>226</sup> as Mitropoulou wrote in her work, "It is not necessary to try to find a different meaning for the libation in the case of each god and

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<sup>221</sup> Jodi Magness, "Some Observations on the Roman Temple at Kedesh," *Israel Exploration Journal* (1990): 173-181.

<sup>222</sup> Magness, "Some Observations," 178.

<sup>223</sup> Magness, "Some Observations," 178.

<sup>224</sup> Kanowski, *Containers*, 109.

<sup>225</sup> Kanowski, *Containers*, 109.

<sup>226</sup> For example, kantharos being associated with Dionysus, but even this is not exclusive for the vessel is also found frequently in association with Hercules and less frequently with other gods and heroes. Kanowski, *Containers*, 49.

each pair of deities.”<sup>227</sup> The libation is simply another way of connecting with the deity, in order to either give thanks or ask for help.

Kedesh then seems to be the only site wherein a true installation for libations can be sustained. While the set of grooves leading to the inside of the temple and the carved kraters do point toward such a designation, this assessment is mainly based on the presence of the carved relief directly above the southern niche. The relief depicts the pouring of a libation by a suppliant and is reminiscent of at least two other published images of men offering libations. To whom this offering is being given and what liquid is being offered cannot be ascertained from the depiction. Such conclusions will have to come from other, most likely unavailable, data.

Material remains of libations have been recovered all across the Levant, at sites dating from 3,000 BCE to 117 CE. These are invariably associated with sites designated as cultic and consist of either caches of portable vessels or elaborate built in “libation installations” of varying sizes, shapes, and designs. The caches of vessels’ labels of “libation paraphernalia” are rarely questioned and the vessels themselves are quite similar in form across time and space. These best reflect the nature of libations as depicted in the textual references and through specialized pouring vessels show a focus on the act of pouring itself.

In contrast to these stands the “libation installations” appearing all about Syria-Palestine. In the main these appear to be scholarly fictions as opposed to supportable designations. The installations at Tel Dan and Ta’anach are better designated as presses of some sort, possibly for olive oil. At Ugarit, the various libation installations identified

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<sup>227</sup> Mitropoulou, *Libation Scene*, 91.

by Schaeffer when examined are illogical and would not have been functional. The majority of libation installations identified over the years at Tell Chuera lack support for their designations.

The two exceptions to this are the libation table of the Anten-Tempel at Tel Chuera and the installations at the Roman temple at Kedesh. The libation table, while designated an installation, hardly counts as one consisting as it does of a table/altar with two bowls perched on the sides of its top. This set-up finds support from textual references to pouring libations upon the altar. More specifically, in the case of the silver bowls of the Mishnah, into containers on the altar. While the installations at Kedesh are built into the façade of the temple, they consist of carvings shaped to look like kraters. These would have flanked the altar of the temple courtyard and may have been architectural reproductions of the vessels that once sat upon the altar of the courtyard, like the bowls of Tel Chuera. This designation of libation is further supported by the presence of a depiction of a suppliant offering a libation located directly above the south installation. While a few libation installations can be substantiated then, most are examples of the overuse of a nebulous category of architectural features by scholars to describe unusual finds.

### **Conclusion**

In the scholarly world the libation leads an odd double life. It is usually seen as an ancillary component of larger ritual complexes, not worthy of study on its own. Thus, little effort has been put forth in understanding how and why the libations mentioned in antiquity were performed. This lack of understanding manifests itself in the

interpretation of various archaeological remains across the Levant, allowing the nebulous label “libation installation” to explain the existence of countless unique architectural features. These built-in receptacles exist due to the erroneous belief that a libation required a receptacle in order to have been successfully completed. Such an opinion shows a fundamental lack of understanding in the nature of libations in the ancient Levant.

A close examination of the surviving textual citations of libations has shown that rarely is any sort of receptacle for libations of water or of wine mentioned. When receptacles for wine are stipulated they are portable vessels such as cups or more elaborate bowls, the altar, or the ground. Never is wine to be poured into a built in receptacle. With regards to water, the references are fewer, but the results are the same. The exact locality for pouring the water is mentioned only a few times explicitly, in all these cases, save one, the receptacle is the earth itself. The only exception is found in the silver bowls of the Sukkot water offering, but this mirrors the use of portable vessels for the reception of offerings of wine. Never is any sort of built in structure mentioned, indeed, the receptacle is rarely of any import to the ritual at all.<sup>228</sup> The importance of the libation, if expounded, centers around order, the liquid of the offering, and how it is poured out.

In the material remains reflections of these findings can be found, mainly in the form of the caches of vessels designated as “vessels for libations.” These all consist of pouring vessels and are found in cultic contexts. The “libation installations” that are

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<sup>228</sup> The main exception to this being the ritual recounted in by Lucian, however, the receptacle was the crack in the ground into which the floodwaters were pulled to rejoin the primordial forces of the earth. No association with a construction of human-make can be drawn to such a tale, centering as it does on the power of non-human agents.

tenable also reflect the portable nature of receptacles for libations. This is reflected in the installation of Tell Chuera, consisting as it does, of a table/altar with two bowls of clay set on either end. The other example, that of Kedesh, differs in that it is an actual architectural feature, carved into the façade of the temple. However, it mirrors the idea of bowls flanking the altar through the mimicking of kraters in the form of its receptacles. The nature of the structure's intent for libations is further reflected in the carved depiction of a worshipper offering a libation directly above one of the installations.

In contrast to these two examples, most of the installations of various sites do not stand up to an examination. Sometimes a different designation is not possible, but often more mundane and industrial explanations can be posited, as is the case for Tel Dan. In the case of Ugarit, Schaeffer's "installations" often would not have worked as receptacles for libations from the living, due to their complete inaccessibility to the non-dead. These designations stem not from a careful assessment of the finds, but a desire to find receptacles for libations. Such a desire is prevalent in modern scholarship, but completely unfounded with regards to ancient Syria-Levant.

As mentioned previously, the category of libations is little studied and thus little understood, therefore the results of this study may or may not reflect the nature of offerings of libations in other ancient cultures. While the results suggest that the general desire for scholars of all ancient societies to find evidence of libations in the form of receptacles may be unfounded, a detailed study of libations in other societies surrounding the ancient Mediterranean is needed. Only following such a study will it become possible to set forth generalizations about the practice across the ancient Mediterranean world as scholars, such as Burkert, are already doing. I think that such a study will

perhaps both reveal oversights on Burkert's part with regards to viewing libation as a method of physical boundary marking and establish the act of pouring as the main component in the ritual. What is certain is that in the ancient Levant the ritual of libation was focused on the actual pouring out of the liquid. A receptacle was not necessary to completing the ritual, making the existence of the category "libation installations" highly suspect.

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