CROSS-CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT AND THE BIBLICAL REPRESENTATION OF ISRAEL'S IDENTITY AT ABEL AND DAN

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This work argues that pairing the representations of biblical Abel and Dan in 2 Samuel 20 and 1 Kings 12 with the associated Iron Age remains at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi's "cult spaces" reveals that this area of the southern Levant held a culturally fluid population that the biblical texts ignored in favor of a polemic concerning Israel's redefinition outside a united Davidic dynasty. Scholarship on Abil el-Qameḥ and particularly Tel el-Qadi has often centered the efforts to identify discrete people groups in the material culture in an effort to contextualize biblical Abel and Dan, which reduces the cultural complexity present at both sites. In this work, I advocate for scholars researching this region of the ancient world to acknowledge the biblical authors' strategic construction of Israel's identity formation where Abel and Dan are concerned rather than assume that their construction is a historical description of the lived experiences in Iron Age Levant. Furthermore, when it comes to sites such as Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi, I argue that multicultural perspectives should take center stage in the discussion of identity in this region over reconstructing biblical political dynamics via ethnic identification. I posit that such a course will be more productive in understanding the transition from physical lived experiences into textual memory, and in discussing cultural identity within the heritage of the southern Levant.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Alma Nizaye Cortez Alvarez graduated Summa Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science degree in Behavioral Sciences and a Bachelor of Arts degree in French Studies from Andrews University. She has excavated in Israel and Jordan in the Tel Abel Beth Maacah Excavations and the Madaba Plains Project respectively. Alma is deeply interested in the study of biblical representations of place names and their impact on the cultural heritage of associated modern day archaeological sites.

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Introduction

The narratives of Sheba's revolt in 2 Samuel 20 and Jeroboam's secession from the House of David in 1 Kings 12 represent Abel and Dan as centers where the scribes who produced them can redefine what it is to be "Israel." Because these passages are actively producing cultural identity, they shape modern biblical scholars and archaeologists' notions of "Israelite" identity. However, reconstructing "Israelite identity" from these passages is particularly problematic when interpretation of the texts is paired with material culture from the sites of Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi, sites associated with the biblical cities of Abel and Dan. The material culture at these sites does not allow us to essentialize ethnic, cultural, political identities and entities, much less produce "Israelite identity," without reductively imposing biblical categories onto the archaeological data.

With this problem in mind, this paper will pair the diverse Iron Age material record at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi[1] with the biblical representations of Abel and Dan within the narratives of Sheba's revolt and Jeroboam's secession in 2 Samuel 20 and 1 Kings 12.[2] This paper sets out to define how these two sites transformed from physical settlements on the crossroads of multiple cultures into narrative elements that concern Israel's negotiation of its own, internal identity. The archaeological evidence presents these cities at the crossroads of multiple political and cultural entities (Yahalom-Mack, Panitz-Cohen, and Mullins 2018; Ilan 2019). Tell Abil el-Qameḥ has been

[1]From this point forward, when speaking of the archaeological sites associated with Abel and Dan, I will be using their Arabic names, Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi, rather than the names Tel Abel Beth Maacah and Tel Dan. I do this to distinguish the historical sites which have remains spanning far beyond the Iron Age and early antiquity from the biblical record scholars have associated them with. I will only use the names "Tel Abel Beth Maacah" and "Tel Dan" when referring to the excavation projects that have taken place in the last few decades.

[2] From this point on, I will use the term Abel to refer to the city appearing in 2 Samuel 20, since it is the one consistent element of the place name. Later on, I will address inconsistencies with regard to the name of the city in 2 Samuel 20.

associated with biblical Abel, a relatively secure identification originating with surveys from the 19th century to the current excavations of Tel Abel Beth Maacah (Panitz-Cohen, Mullins, and Bonfil 2013; Yahalom-Mack, Panitz-Cohen, and Mullins 2018). Tel el-Qadi today is identified as biblical Dan, a very secure identification based on surveys as well as the archaeological excavation led by Aviram Biran that discovered an inscription which confirmed the identification (Greer 2013, 17-19). If these two identifications are correct, then biblical Abel is only 6.5 kilometers west of Dan putting them in close proximity and within the crossroads of multiple Iron Age polities such as Israel, Aram, and Phoenicia (Panitz-Cohen, Mullins, and Bonfil 2013, 27).

The cities' material culture manifests extensive intergroup interaction that makes it difficult to identify specific people groups. It is therefore striking that the Bible presents Abel and Dan as imagined centers for negotiating Israel's internal political identity without acknowledging this complex and entangled political landscape. This contrast provides an opportunity to think about the differences between material and textual evidence as they pertain to political history.

I will argue that the study of biblical Abel and Dan in the context of Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi's Iron age remains reveal the importance of embracing the nearly undefinable multicultural complexities of the Iron Age Levant, both in the respective fields of biblical studies and archaeology, and the impact those fields have on modern cultural heritage. The archaeological remains at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi, particularly within spaces associated with cult and ritual, indicate that the region that biblical Abel and Dan would have inhabited consisted of a very complex diverse population that does not match biblical ethnic categories. However, various scholars have attempted to assign ethnic identities to answer questions on regional political control at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi despite the ethnically ambiguous and culturally diverse evidence within the material record.

Furthermore, it is clear that the biblical authors representing Abel and Dan within 2 Samuel 20 and 1 Kings 12 were aware of the cities of Abel and Dan as multicultural crossroads, yet they treat the cities as centers for negotiating Israel's internal political identity as if there were no people except for Israel. This is odd, since in the study of cultural identity, we often emphasize the construction of identity against an adversarial "other" (Bloch-Smith 2003; Matskevich 2019; McInerney 2014; Wallace-Hadrill 2008). Yet this is not the case in 2 Samuel 20 and 1 Kings 12 despite the locations of Abel and Dan at political crossroads. This suggests that ethnicity is not the focus in 2 Samuel 20 and 1 Kings 12's vision of identity formation/redefinition, but rather themes concerning political identity outside of ethnicity. Additionally, this suppression of intercultural dynamics for biblical Abel and Dan should not translate into scholarship that replicates a similar situation for Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi, one where we erase the cultural complexity and diversity of the region.

To support this argument, first, I will discuss the importance of treating the archaeological sites and biblical texts on their own terms, rather than conflating the biblical with the historical record. Second, I will discuss Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi's multicultural and ethnic complexity via their sacred spaces. Third, I will discuss how biblical Abel and Dan, particularly in the connections between Sheba's rebellion in 2 Samuel 20 and Jeroboam's secession in 1 Kings 12, become imagined spaces for the biblical authors to redefine Israel's identity via the exclusion of the multicultural context of these cities. Finally, I will explore how centering the discussion of intercultural engagement when evaluating the transition of the Iron Age Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi into biblical Abel and Dan can positively affect the research of both the material and biblical record. I will also argue that doing so will benefit discussions of Levantine heritage by prioritizing the diversity within the material record.

0.1 Biblical Texts and Material Culture: The Dangers of Conflation

The difficulties of connecting material culture to biblical texts are well documented. These include: connecting textually and materially based chronologies; the authentication of events; and issues of ethnic identity, to name a few (Davies 1992; Maeir 2021) Some archaeologists have decried using biblical texts to impose ethnic categories onto the material culture and archaeological record (Maeir 2021; Faust 2000; Faust 2022). Doing so obscures the complexities of identity and cross-cultural interactions archaeological data can reveal (Bloch-Smith 2003; Maeir 2021). It also renders biblical data as an obstacle in archaeological discourse. Meanwhile, biblical scholars have found using the Bible for historical reconstructions of ancient Israel increasingly difficult or unreliable (Davies 1992; Strawn 2016; Faust 2022). This challenge has prompted both textual scholars and archaeologists to collaborate through more subtle means, such as exploring biblical names and their attestation in the material record, or using archaeological evidence to better understand certain literary traditions (Monroe and Fleming 2021; Leonard-Fleckman 2016; Yahalom-Mack et al. 2021). My discussion builds on this movement to redefine the collaborative efforts of archaeology and biblical data without conflating them.

With this understanding, I will address the biblical cities of Dan and Abel and the associated excavated sites of Tel Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi as separate entities. This aligns with Philip Davies' call for separating the literary Israel of the Bible, the historical Israel which is the overall reality of the inhabitants in the Iron Age, and finally, the "Ancient Israel" that scholars attempt to reconstruct (1992). To clarify, this does not mean that there are no connections between biblical and archaeological contexts of Abel or Dan. However, it is important to acknowledge this distinction in order to avoid conflating the biblical cities with the historical cities. The distinction also allows for a

more careful discussion of how the biblical representation can work in tandem with the archaeological record to reveal different, inter-related processes of identity formation.

Additionally, distinguishing Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi from biblical Abel and Dan is important from a heritage (the tangible and intangible material and knowledge with which a culture builds meaning[3]) perspective. Material evidence and physical places form important centers where cultures build memory, identity, and purpose. Consequently, the archaeological remains associated with biblical placenames are quite powerful within religious communities and even national identities in the Near East. Israel in particular uses archaeological sites through biblical place name association as a key to building its national heritage/identity and sometimes weaponizes that heritage against the interests and/or heritage of other entities such as Palestine (Abu el-Hajj 2003; Mizrachi 2011; Kersel 2015; Hallote and Joffe 2002). However, archaeological sites that have Palestinian remains can also be powerful in activist circles to protect Palestinian heritage (De Cesari 2019). This struggle is centered on the interpretation of archaeological sites as pertaining to ancient and modern Israel's identity within Zionist discourse (Sherrard 2012). To fail to execute a careful and nuanced discussion of narrative, identity, and cultural boundaries for either biblical text or ancient material culture is to provide a reductive model of intercultural relations and identity politics that certain political groups can use to cause further division and issues for today's politics in the Near East.

These issues are pertinent to my discussion of Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi in relationship to biblical Abel and Dan. Both sites are near the borders of modern Israel with Lebanon and Syria, placing both in sensitive territory (Panitz-Cohen, Mullins, and Bonfil 2013). Tel el-Qadi has an even further sensitive placement in the Golan Heights, the region over which Israeli control is contested

[3] My use of heritage is inspired by Lafrenz Samuels and especially Laurajane Smith's works on the subject (2015; 2010).

(Ram 2015; Marwa 2008; Daoudy 2008). Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi were once Palestinian or Syrian, having historical remains far beyond the Iron Age, revealing diverse sets of history and heritage (Khalidi 1992; Biran 1994; Yahalom-Mack, Panitz-Cohen, and Mullins 2018; Ilan 2019). Yet, biblical Abel and Dan have had an undeniable impact on both these sites, from the naming of the excavations to the research focuses of their publications (Panitz-Cohen, Mullins, and Bonfil 2013; Biran 1994). It is very important to distinguish the biblical Abel and Dan from the excavated sites, as refusing to do so can contribute to the erasure of the multi millennial and culturally complex history of this Levantine region. Only then, is it possible to produce nuanced, inclusive, and decolonized reconstructions of the past.

0.2 Theoretical Frameworks

To engage the aforementioned issues, I will engage some of the following theoretical frameworks in describing the complex nature of Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi's cultural identity. There are multiple models for cross cultural engagement, such as hybridity (the various levels and kinds of mixture that occur in the encounter of multiple cultures, particularly in contexts of colonization) as explored by Bhabha (2004); and entanglement (where there exist a few different processes for the appropriation and creation of cultural products within cross-cultural encounters) as proposed by Stockhammer and endorsed by Silliman (2012; 2015; 2016; and finally Franklin's use of everyday cosmopolitanism (a convergence of worlds where plural cultures exist alongside and interact with one another on a consistent basis) (2014).[4] I find these frameworks as keystones for discussing intercultural engagement, however it is questionable whether any of these fit Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi adequately. This will be a point of discussion in the following sections.

[4] This model differs a little from the overall model of cosmopolitanism, as discussed by scholars such as Hannertz and Appiah, which focuses more on the individual "cosmopolitan" navigating multiple cultures in varying levels of engagement and who emerge displaying their acquired knowledge, often in the negotiation of status (1990; 2005; 2006).

Also relevant for this discussion is the challenge to define the terms religion, cult, and ritual. Defining these terms is essential for discussing the material remains within the sacred spaces of Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi, and the definitions will affect how I pair the material record with the discussion of biblical Abel and Dan. In Anthropology and Archaeology, defining these terms has been at best difficult, and at worst, nearly impossible (Barrett 2016; Kyriakidis 2007; Renfrew 1994). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to propose a universal definition of these terms, in the words of Kyriakidis, a definition does not need to be universal to be useful (2007). With that in mind, here are my current definitions, as influenced by definitions from the writings of Renfrew, Kyriakidis, and Levy (Renfrew 1985 & 1994; Kyriakidis 2007; Levy 2006). Religion is a system of belief and practices where an individual and/or collective that forges connections with the divine or transcendental realm;[5] Cult is the worship concerning the divine and creates a liminal space between reality and transcendence in which participants enter and participate;[6] Ritual, albeit a term that covers special and consistent actions within multiple spheres, functions similarly to cult in religious contexts as it is also based on action.[7] In this discussion ritual will be used interchangeably with cult.

I am also adding in a definition for "ethnicity," as much of the discussion in the following sections will concern how different scholars approach identifying the inhabitants of Iron age Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi. My definition takes from Barth, Hall, Killebrew, and Bloch-Smith[8] and is as follows: ethnicity is a group larger than but often inclusive of a lineage or clan with multiple traits and shared values, self-ascribed and promulgated from the outside, that serve as boundaries to build, maintain, and renew group identity. To be clear, ethnicity does not necessarily equate to cultural

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[5] Inspired by Renfrew's application of the 1973 Oxford definition (1985; 1994).
[6] Definition inspired by Renfrew's "Towards a Framework towards the Archaeology of Cult" (1985), and Levy's application of Renfrew's framework in *Archaeology, Anthropology, and Cult: The Sanctuary at Gilat, Israel* (2006).
[7] Definition of ritual inspired by Kyraikidis "Finding Ritual: Calibrating the Evidence" (2007) and Renfrew's "Towards a Framework for the Archaeology of Cult" (1985).
[8] Please see "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The social organization of culture difference" (1969, 9-38); *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity*, (2005, 6-10); *Ethnic Identity in Greek Identity* (1997); and "Israelite Ethnicity in Iron Age I: Archaeology preserves what is Remembered and What is Forgotten in Israel's History," (2003, 402-403).

identity as a whole, as Jones has noted, since culture takes into account various aspects of group identity beyond that of ethnicity such as economic, social, religious, etc. (1997). In my discussion, I will be focusing particularly on how scholars attempt to recognize these group identities in the material record and whether they depend on ethnic group identification to define the cultural identity of Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi.

0.3 Methodology

To carry out this project, I divided the work into two halves. The first half focused on the analysis of archaeological data and the second on interpreting the biblical texts. On the archaeology side, I decided to focus on four excavated spaces from Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi. Leaders of the Abel Beth Maacah and Tel Dan excavation projects and scholars building on their work have associated all of the following spaces with either "cultic" or "ritual" activity (Yahalom-Mack, Panitz-Cohen, and Mullins 2019; Booth et al. 2022; Ilan 2019; Biran 1994). For Abil el-Qameḥ, I chose the early Iron I A4 cultic building and the later Iron I A2 open-air courtyard in Area A. For Tel el-Qadi, I chose the Iron I 7052b building in Area B and the Iron II cultic precinct in Area T.

I chose these spaces associated with ritual and/or cult for a few reasons. First, much of the available data at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi is concentrated in these spaces. Second, within both the Tel Abel Beth Maacah and Tel Dan projects, researchers have already made attempts to directly or indirectly tie the material finds from these designated "cultic spaces" such as Tel el-Qadi's 4 horned altar and Abil el-Qameḥ's Iron I cult building to passages from 2 Samuel 20, 1 Kings 12, and Judges 17-18 (Yahalom-Mack, Panitz-Cohen, and Mullins 2019; Greer 2017; Biran 1994). Not only have these attempts taken up much of the space in the scholarship for both Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi, but they also provide us with the opportunities to evaluate how these attempts have shaped our understanding of the sites.

To study these spaces, I mainly consulted the published data from the Abel Beth Maacah and Tel Dan excavation projects. For Abil el-Qameḥ, I used field reports from field A for the 2016-2019 seasons, written by Nava Panitz-Cohen, Frederika Loew, Netanel Paz, and Caroll Kobs. Other specific publications of interest for Abel Beth Maacah include: the article concerning the Iron 1 building in Area A; the discussion on the astragali hoard from the western platform in Area A; The newly published article on the deer antlers in Area A; and of course, the overall preliminary reports and articles for the Tel that integrate Area A's data (Booth et al. 2022; Panitz-Cohen et al. 2013; Panitz-Cohen et al. 2015; Yahalom-Mack, Panitz-Cohen, and Mullins 2018)

For Tel el-Qadi, the publications of Ilan's *Dan IV: The Iron Age 1st Settlement,* Davis' *Tel Dan in its Cultic Context,* and Biran's *Biblical Dan* became key in my research (2022; 2013; 1994). Other relevant publications on Dan include Greer's work on the Mizrāq find, and his book *Dinner at Dan* (2010; 2013). While these publications skew towards the Iron II cultic remains, they still provide important insight into the discussions of cultic spaces in Northern Israel and they still discuss some of the findings from Iron I.

Alongside these published materials, Nava Panitz-Cohen, Robert Mullins and Naama Yahalom Mack have been very generous in providing me slides containing photographs and drawings of Area A's A4 building and the A2 courtyard to help with my analysis. I also participated in the Abel Beth Maacah 2022 excavation season for four weeks at Abil el-Qameḥ and visited Tel el-Qadi during that time. This enabled me to make initial observations about both sites and have valuable discussions with the Abel Beth Maacah excavation staff.

There is a significant challenge in researching the material culture for this discussion. Most of the data on Levantine Iron Age cultures and polities relevant to Tel Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi heavily skews to sites in Israel. There is relatively little published data from Syrian and

Lebanese sites, limiting the knowledge of Iron Age polities such as Phoenicia and Aram that informed the complex cultural reality at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi (Panitz-Cohen et al. 2015).

In terms of biblical texts, I will be focusing exclusively on biblical representations of Abel and Dan in 2 Sam 20 and 1 Kings 12. I note that there are other significant passages that reference Abel and Dan such as 2 Chronicles 16 and Judges 17-18. However, I narrow my reading to 2 Samuel 20 and 1 Kings 12 as they share strong thematic and narrative parallels. Not only do these texts feature northern sites that are in very close proximity to one another, but they also share the nearly identical political slogan that represents Israel's desire to reject the House of David, "We have no share in David, we have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. Every man to his tent, Israel!" (2 Samuel 20, 1). This common ground suggests that the biblical authors intended for them to be read in connection to one another. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the excavations at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi have referenced both passages, especially in relation to the "cult spaces" (Yahalom-Mack, Panitz-Cohen, and Mullins 2019; Biran 1994). Understanding how these texts have been paired with the material culture will be very important.

I will discuss 2 Samuel 20 and 1 Kings 12 synchronically, in order to assess the representation of the cities within Sheba's revolt and Jeroboam's secession in its final form. I do this acknowledging that a diachronic reading that addresses the various layers of composition is essential in situating the biblical text historically. However, the final received form is the product of the authors' narrativization of Israel's identity, which is what ultimately interests me.

Chapter 1

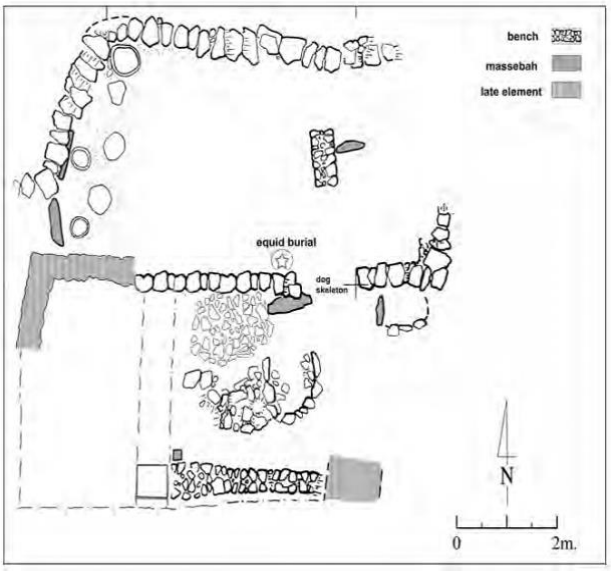
Multicultural Cults: the complexity of cultural identity at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi

To begin this discussion, I will delve into the material record at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi within their designated "cult/ritual" spaces. I will describe these spaces and the items excavated within; how these two cities are connected or not connected to each other; and how the material record speaks to a complex intercultural past that cannot and should not be essentialized into reductive ethnic categories.

1.1 Spaces of practice

1.1.1 Abil el-Qameḥ

Archaeologists working on the Tell Abel Beth Maacah excavation have excavated two spaces that they tie to cultic and/or religious activity.



Iron Age I A4 building, Abil el-Qameḥ (Yahalom-Mack, Panitz-Cohen, and Mullins 2019, 236)

The first is an early Iron Age I building, which the excavators defined as part of the A4 strata, and on the lower part of the eastern slope, and where field A lies.[9] This building includes a

[9] This description is adapted from "An Iron Age I Cultic Context at Tel Abel Beth-Maacah," (Yahalom-Mack, Panitz-Cohen, and Mullins 2019) please see this work for the original and fuller description. Also see "The Buck Stops Here…" for details on certain finds such as the deer antlers (Booth et al. 2022).

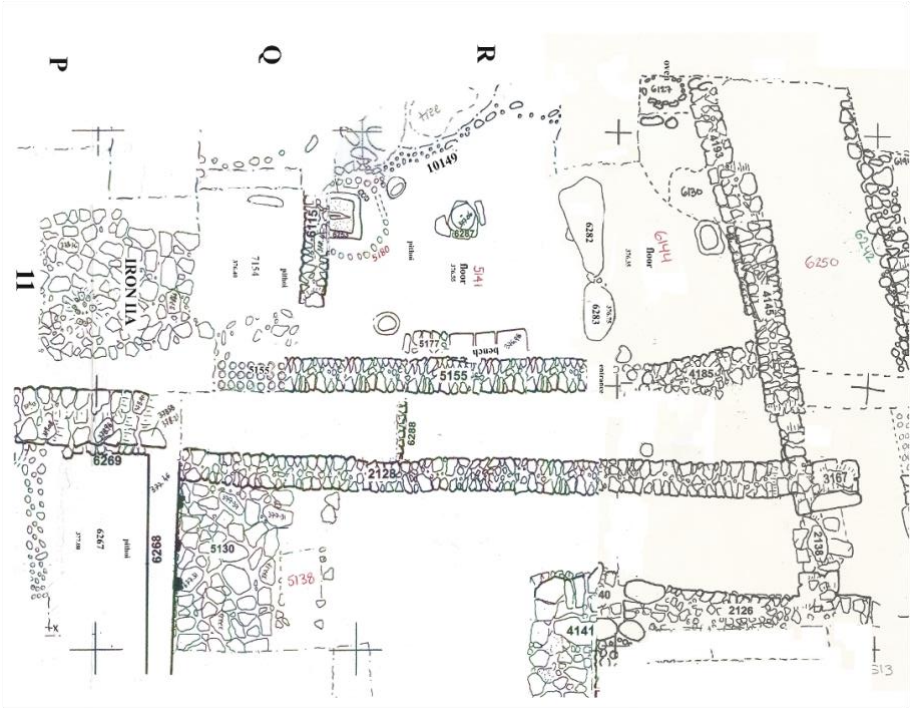
northern and a southern room that both have been completely excavated at this point in time (Booth et al. 2022, 82). Notable features of the northern room include: the rounded northwestern corner of the room, which makes the north and west side into one complete wall; and two standing stones,[10] propped up in the southern and middle part of the western part of the wall, yet not serving a structural purpose (Yahalom-Mack, Panitz-Cohen, and Mullins 2019, 238). Alongside this western part of the wall were two ovens, a storage jar, and a flattened stone that may have served as a work surface. On the eastern end was a north-south bench, adjoined by another standing stone at its eastern end. The entrance was on the southern end of the room, where excavators found a piece of a bull figurine on the floor, and an equid burial to the west of the entrance against the wall. In addition, they discovered a piece of a bull figurine on the floor (238).

The southern room included different features, both in terms of architecture and finds and include the following (see pages 239-241). The northern wall had stone pavement at its western end, and standing stones flanking both sides of the entrance (239). Directly south of the western standing stone stood a semicircle of ten small and medium stones with a small platform abutting this semicircle (239). On the southern part was a bench running across, east to west, cut off on the eastern end by a later wall and adjoined on the western end by a pillar-like mud superstructure. Adjoining the "mud pillar" was a trapezoid standing stone (240). On the floor of the northern entrance was a dog skeleton. Finally, a complete deer antler was found on the floor (240).

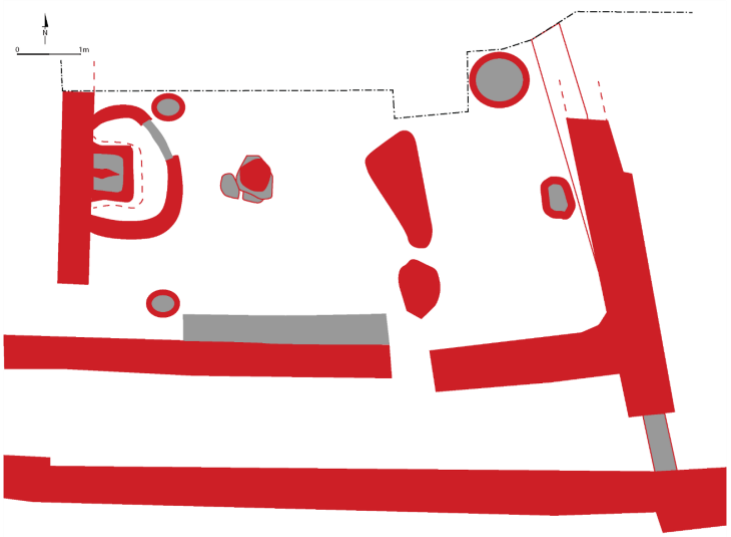
This building, particularly the southern room, held pottery such as bowls, kraters, cooking pots, jugs, pyxides, flasks and pithoi (239). This space was violently destroyed sometime in the 11th century. After this destruction, the next occupation layer shows activity unrelated to this phase of building. However, as the directors note, in the western area minimal activity occurred between the

[10] When large "standing" stones are determined to not have a structural function, they often suggest a cultic function in of themselves according to various scholars, including the excavators at Abil el-Qameḥ in this case (also see Avner 2001).

A2 and A4 occupation perhaps indicating an interim period where individuals would visit the ruined shrine (241).



Iron 1 courtyard top plan facing north, courtesy of the Tel Abel Beth Maacah Excavations



Iron I Courtyard schematic plan, courtesy of the Tel Abel Beth Maacah Excavations

The second space is an open-air courtyard within a large public complex higher up Field A and further west from the A4 building.[11] This courtyard is also dated to the Iron I; however, it belongs to the A2 stratum, which is later than the eastern cultic building. Therefore, the courtyard is neither contemporary nor directly linked to the A4 cultic building. The courtyard was surrounded by walls south, west and east (the northern boundary is yet to be excavated) (Booth et al. 2022, 84). Some notable features of the courtyard include the following. On the western side, a clay installation pressed up against the wall containing a bifurcated basin, an escape hole (at the northern "sink"), and a bottom "skirt wall" (84-85). Two large mortar stones flanked this installation on its north and southern end. A stone bench pressed against the southern wall and near it on the floor was an altar stand. 1.5 meters east were a stack of stones possibly an altar or offering table (84). A little further east were two stones, possibly standing stones, both lying prone (some suspect that the smaller one south of the larger one instead served as a table). South east of the standing stones was a goat horn and jawbone alongside a bronze razor with additional animal bones. A giant mortar stood against the eastern wall near a large oven one meter to its north. Another antler was found in front of this oven, paralleling the find from the eastern cultic building (85).

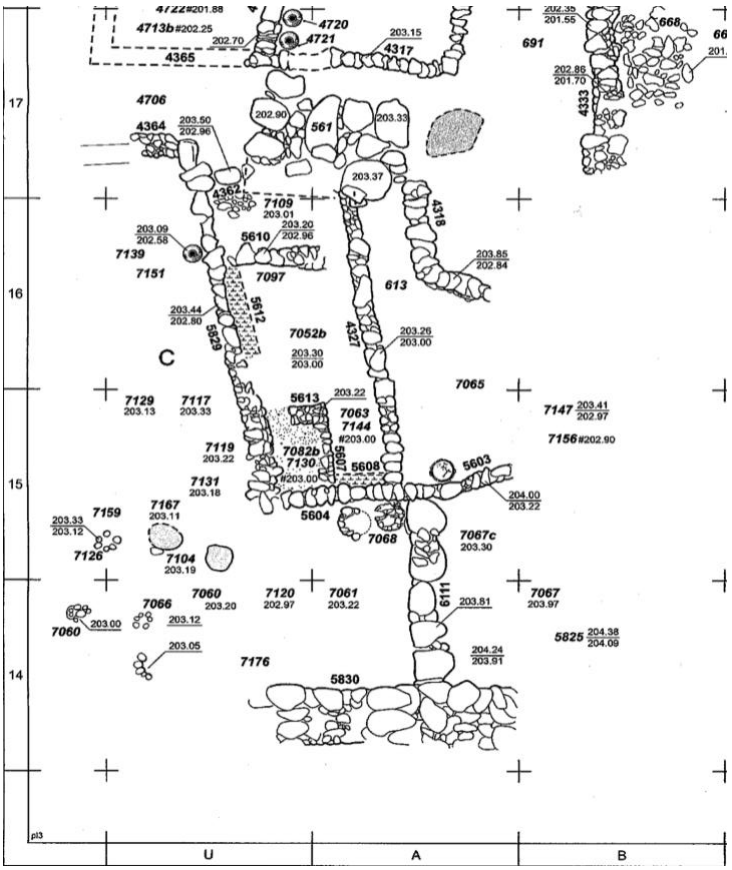
Objects within the courtyard have also been varied, some paralleling the A4 building. Aside from the deer antlers, the mortars, and the altar stand, three large basalt mortars, a variety of pottery types were also uncovered. This includes wavy band pithoi, spouted amphora, and cooking pots (84). This courtyard and surrounding buildings also suffered destruction in the 10th century as estimated by radiocarbon dating. However, due to continued occupation further west to the courtyard in the Iron Age 2 with finds such as an Astragali hoard, the directors of the Abel Beth Maacah excavations estimate that this area of Abil el-Qameḥ may have continued to serve a public

[11] This description is primarily adapted from "The Buck Stops Here…" (Booth et al. 2022). Please also see the 2017-2019 field reports on Area A from the Tel Abel Beth Maacah excavations (Loew 2017-2019).

ritual function after the destruction of the Iron I complex that contained the courtyard (86). However, as of yet, little is known about the Iron IIA occupation at Abil el-Qameḥ in area A.

1.1.2 Tel el-Qadi:

Tel el-Qadi's sacred spaces in the Iron Age are located in two areas of the Tel: Area B and Area T.



Building 7052b, Tel el Qadi (Ilan 2019)

Area B is located at the southern part of the Tel el-Qadi and it comprised the most exposed occupation in Iron Age I[12]. With this occupation there was a structure (7052b) with what Ilan described as a "cultic corner" (7082b) and dated to the mid Iron I within Stratum V (2019). The "cultic" designation of the southwest corner as will come into discussion later. This will be my main

[12] This description is adapted from chapters 2, 15 and 16 of David Ilan's *Dan IV: The Iron Age 1st Settlement*. Please also see Ilan's chapter 3 of *Northeastern Israel in the Iron Age I: Cultural, Socioeconomic and Political Perspectives*.

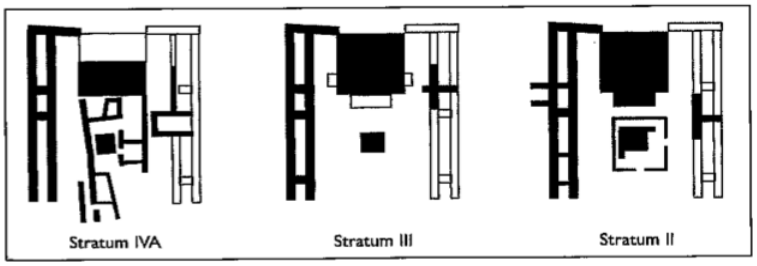
focus for the Iron I cultic context at Tel el-Qadi. The building seems roughly oriented south to north with two main rooms. The southern room contains the "cultic corner" on the southwest end adjoined by a bench to its east side (566). On the western wall was another stone bench. The northern room was paved and outside it stood a raised platform made with larger slabs of stone that Ilan and others suspect could have been an altar from earlier Iron I stratum VI (567).

The finds in this building, particularly those that can be associated with cultic or ritual function, come primarily from the "cultic corner" listed as 7082b. These include a model silo vessel, geodes, a carinated bowl, zoomorphic kernos fragments, a chalice, kraters, flasks, ceramic fragments of possibly a female mourning figure and another with modeled hair, beard, or talons, and a Galilean pithos. The figurines and especially the model silo are often found in cultic spaces and seen as indicators of ritual (Zevit, 2001). Other general finds include store jars, pyxides, hand stones, jugs, pestles, and a bowl within the southern central room. Unlike the structures at Abil el-Qameḥ, building 7052b does not include standing stones. This is interesting since Area B at Tel el-Qadi does have a few standing stones, but they are located on the eastern side of Area B, while building 7052b is on the western side. Ilan notes that building 7052b was surrounded by what seemed to be workshops with furnaces, cooking pots and ovens (41, 567-568). This building also exhibited destruction in the Iron I period, after which the occupation shifted away from activity associated with cult and ritual (568).

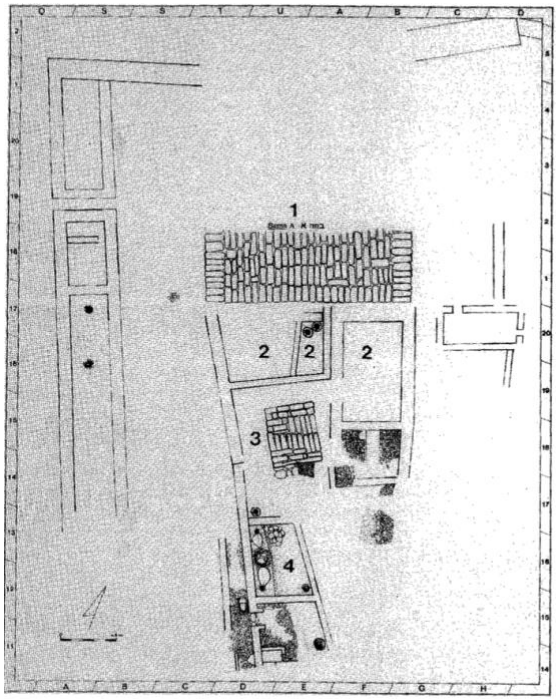
Area T is located on the elevated northwest part of the tell, relatively close to a spring, and is the most well-known sacred space at Tel el-Qadi, especially in terms of finding parallels with biblical Dan for the site.[13] Area T is primarily dated to the Iron Age II, with remains from 9-8th centuries. Little is known about the Iron Age I or Bronze Age strata underneath the Iron Age II remains, as

[13] Please see Avraham Biran's *Biblical Dan* (1994), Andrew Davis' *Tel Dan in its Northern Cultic Context* (2013), and Jonathan Greer's *Dinner at Dan* (2013) for a comprehensive understanding of Tel el-Qadi's Area T. My description lifts directly from these works.

those layers remain mostly unexposed. However, both Ilan and Biran believe that cultic activity possibly took place in this area from the Middle Bronze Age based on probes showing ceramic finds paralleling building 7052b and the later "cultic" designation at the Iron II phases (Ilan 70-75).



(Greer 2013, 45)



(Biran, 1994, 182)

The Iron II precinct includes three phases: stratum IVA (early Iron II), Stratum III (mid Iron II), and Stratum II (late Iron II) (Davis 2013, 68). General features of the three strata include a large 4.75x4.75-meter square platform in the center (usually described as a massive altar for all three strata), hallways with rooms on both sides, and a large 18x18 northern podium with a 5.25x8 m stepped porch (Greer 2013, 44).

Within stratum IVA (dated approximately to 10-9th centuries), Biran describes storehouses in the center around the square platform, and a spring pool at the southern end (1994, 168). These storerooms do not carry over to stratums III and II. The southern end in one of the central storerooms included a plastered basin now thought to be an olive press (Stager and Wolff 1981), fragments of a male figurine head, faience figurine fragments of an Egyptian king and of a monkey, and tub shards (Biran 1994, 165-181). These are arguably the most notable finds, particularly the olive press, and will be part of the cultural discussion in this paper. Other finds from this layer, particularly on the northern end, include so called "snake" pithoi (name originating from the snakelike decoration on the vessel), a seal impression on one of those pithoi amphora, an incense stand, and a bar handle bowl with a trident incised on the base. Biran writes that the IVA precinct suffered fire damage and destruction, particularly the sanctuary, but notes that Tel el-Qadi as a whole was not completely destroyed (182-183).

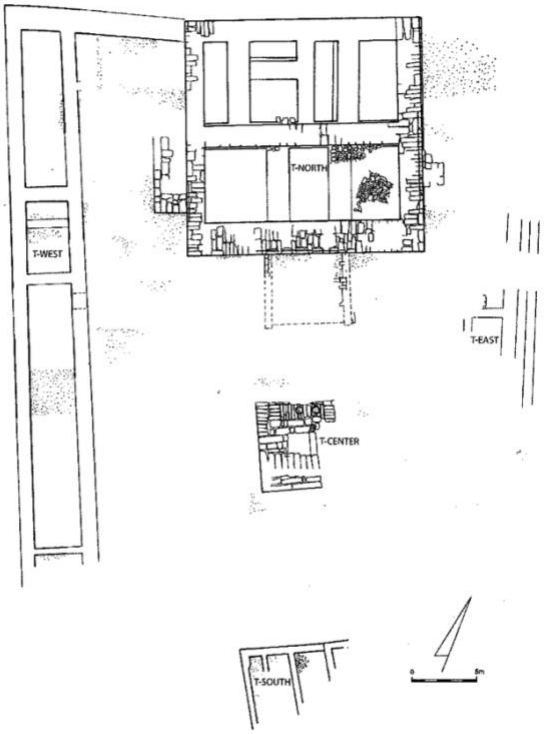


Figure 4. Area T in Stratum III (plan courtesy of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology, Hebrew Union College/Jewish Institute of Religion).

(Stratum III: Davis 2013, 33)

Stratum III, built on the remains of the Stratum IVA precinct, dates to the 9-8th centuries (Davis 2013, 30-31). This layer is known for its yellow travertine floor and expansion of the Stratum IV precinct. The northern "sanctuary" podium is made with ashlar blocks. Davis notes that it is difficult to ascertain whether this podium held a proper superstructure as it was not well preserved. However, because of the large foundation walls and other architectural clues, he finds it possible that a superstructure existed (36). In this area excavators found: a pillar base, a four horned incense altar in secondary use and an Egyptian faïence figurine (Davis 2013, 41,43). The platform in the center of Area T remained in use. Davis and others believe that the platform first appeared in stratum III rather than Stratum IVA (38). The inhabitants of Stratum III paved over the rooms and streets in the central and southern area of Stratum IVA. Another notable feature of the Stratum III precinct are the various deposits of ash and bone around the central podium (and in a couple of the northwestern rooms). Greer's work on cultic feasting at Dan focuses on these remains (2013).[14]

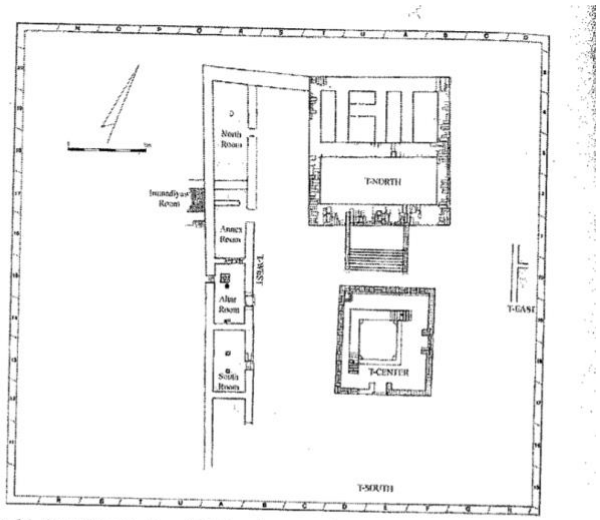


Figure 14. Area T in Stratum II (after plan provided by the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology, Hebrew Union College/Jewish Institute of Religion).

Stratum II as well as some suggestions of the cultic practices that may be indicated by these material remains.

(Stratum II: Davis 2013, 68)

[14] Greer's findings suggest that the deposits of animal remains were consistent from Strata IVA-II. However, many of the deposits seem to date primarily around Stratum III. He argues that these deposits illustrate a consistent culture of ritual feasting at Tel el-Qadi (2013).

Stratum II is the latest layer of Iron II occupation and contains some of Area T's most notable finds at Tel el-Qadi. Stratum II built was built on top of Stratum III without signs of a massive destruction between occupation phases. Stratum II ended at the end of the 8th century, in the most striking destruction layer of the Iron II sacred precinct. Most notable changes include the addition of a staircase leading into the northern podium, a new northern wall added the central platform along with staircases to the northeast and south west corners. In T west a seal containing the name "'Immadiyaw[15]" was found in one of the rooms (Biran 1994, 200-201; Greer 2017). In addition, another room contained a five-block square altar, two incense altars containing a bronze bowl, and three iron shovels, which I will discuss later (Davis 2013, 82-85). Finally in the southernmost room of T west, many pottery finds were noted such as storage jars, cooking pots, jugs, kraters, bowls (including a basalt one), a bronze & silver scepter, a bull and anthropomorphic figurine fragments (Davis 2013, 87-88). As mentioned above, this stratum suffered a massive destruction in the mid 8th century. However, Biran writes on the persistence of cultic activity at Area T in some shape or form after the Assyrian invasions of region from Persian to the Roman periods (210-233).

1.2 Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi: Representations of Diversity

To begin the discussion, I will address the question of whether the spaces described above at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi's designation as "cult spaces" by their excavators is justified. There has been much discussion and debate, on the definitions of cult and ritual, the parameters used to identify a "cultic" or "ritual" space and what spaces can be persuasively "cultic" in the first place (Press, 2011; Kyriakidis 2007). The excavators at Abil el-Qameḥ have acknowledged these challenges in the case of the Iron 1 A4 building, and as a result argue for the "cultic" designation based not only on the material finds (the bull figurines, antler, and faunal remains) but also the care and intent

[15] Transliteration lifted from Greer's "The Cult at Dan: Aramean or Israelite?" (2017).

of the spatial and architectural arrangement (such as the installations, the two-room structure, and the non-structural standing stones) (Yahalom-Mack, Panitz-Cohen, and Mullins 2019). Meanwhile, Ilan used Renfrew's framework concerning cult and ritual to discuss the Iron I 7052b building in area B, matching the finds and architecture to Renfrew's criteria (39-40).

I find Yahalom-Mack et al.'s argument for designating the Iron A4 building as "cultic" mostly persuasive. I find that the various installations including the likely altar installation, the standing stones, the specific faunal remains plus the deer antlers suggests a curated space of worship. I believe the same goes for the A2 courtyard, in particular due to the basin, the stand, altars, and possible standing stones, all often associated with cult.

I find Tel el-Qadi's 7052b building's case less persuasive as a whole, since even Ilan admits that only the southwest corner can be described as persuasively "cultic" (2019, 566). However, I do support the idea that the corner itself may be a curated ritual space, due to its assemblage, particularly the figurines and the model silo, and their purposeful deposition in the corner of the two-room building. However, I do find Area T's designation particularly justifiable, as the architecture, with the massive platform, side rooms, and the large likely altar; the items, which include figurines, smaller altars, and incense shovels all often associated with cult; and finally the distribution of faunal remains, all point to not only a dedicated space for worship, but one meant to serve as a center for the local community throughout the Iron II as pointed out by Biran, Greer and Davis (1994; 2013; 2013). All this said, there is space to question any of these designations (at least concerning the extent of the spaces' religiosity). That said, I am more interested in how scholars use these "cultic" spaces to discuss cultural, political, and ethnic identity at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi to draw parallels with the biblical texts.

There are some interesting similarities between the above-described spaces for Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi. Both Abil el-Qameḥ's A4 cultic building and Area B's 7052b exhibit a 2-

room structure on a south to north axis. In both cases, the southern room had a denser number of items and finds that excavators associated with a ritualistic or cultic function. Excavators at both sites in all areas uncovered a variety of items that they tentatively associated with Egyptian, Phoenician, Cypriot, and Canaanite styles/origins (Yahalom-Mack et al. 2019; Ilan, 2019; Greer 2017). Some scholars such as Sian Jones have questioned the use of ethnic people names to describe material culture, even in terms of "style" (1997). While I do support the need to interrogate or reflect on the usage of these categories, I do note that this is the main way excavators have described diversity within the material culture of this region. For now, I will take these names as referring to the possible origins of finds rather than to the identity of the users/inhabitants. At Tel el-Qadi's Area B, the kernos and standing figurine fragments emphasize features and/or styles seen in Aegean and Syrian Coast assemblages. The Model "Shrine" has been attested to be a shared feature throughout the eastern Mediterranean (Zevit 2001). At Area T, Biran identified the faience figurines as "Egyptian style" and described some of the pottery as "Cypro-Phoenician" (Biran 1994, 165-283). At Abil el-Qameḥ, the excavators described the pottery as exhibiting styles seen in the Aegean, Cyprus and Phoenicia especially with bichrome "Phoenician" painted pyxides and juglets (Loew 2018; Yahalom-Mack et al. 2019). This likewise shows some level of interconnectivity across great distances.

However, there are significant differences as well. We know very little about Abil el-Qameḥ's cultic nature after the destruction of the Iron I precinct, both for the A4 two room building and the A2 courtyard. The only hint for possibly later ritual or cultic activity happening in Area A post Iron I is the astragali hoard (animal knucklebones used for gaming, gambling or divination), found on the Iron IIA platform west of the A2 courtyard, which on its own is not enough to make a "cultic" designation (Susnow et al. 2021a; Susnow et al. 2021b). Tel el-Qadi's Area B context also changes after the Iron I period and does not have the continuation of the same cultic/ritual nature.

However, at Tel el-Qadi, Area T's cultic center revives after destruction and has continuous occupation well into the Hellenistic and Roman ages (Biran 1994). Abil el-Qameḥ also has much heavier use of the standing stones within the spaces described. At Tel el-Qadi, the standing stones seem to be concentrated outside the Area B building and the Area T precinct within more localized shrines throughout the mound (Biran 1998). Furthermore, there are unique features to each place. For example, Abil el-Qameḥ's walls in the A4 cultic building in the northern room are rounder than Tel el-Qadi's 7052b building, and indeed unique for the region (Yahalom-Mack et al. 2019). Tel el-Qadi Area T in Stratum IVa has the olive press installation, which while not necessarily cultic in of itself, is one of if not the earliest found in the southern Levant, with its own very unique shape and installation (Stager 1981).

Finally, the quantity of finds at Tel el-Qadi seem to be denser and more directly linked to cult ritual or religious activity such as the altars, incense shovels etc., whereas Abil el-Qameḥ's have the zoomorphic remains and burials alongside the deer antlers found in both the A4 cultic building and the A2 building. In other words, Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi seem to have less in common than one would expect in some ways. The religious practices suggested by the evidence were not standardized in order for these two cities to mirror each other. This follows what the Abel Beth Maacah Excavation team have said about Abil el-Qameḥ's A4 building when contextualizing it within other cultic spaces in the southern Levant. They noted that the building at Abil el-Qameḥ had little in common with Tel el-Qadi's 7052b (Yahalom-Mack et al. 2019). In fact, they asserted that Abil el-Qameḥ had more in common with spaces at Hazor and Tall Umayri, yet even then, the building was unique especially in terms of architecture (243-247). I suggest this also applies to the A2 courtyard. Meanwhile at Tel el-Qadi's Iron I building 7052b, Ilan notes that a fenestrated stand, which is extremely common in the region for this period (and does appear at Abil el-Qameḥ), is

nowhere to be found (558). There is little to suggest that there was a standardized ritual expression that we can associate with any one particular group within this region of the southern Levant.

1.3 Whose Sacred Space is it?

Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi do not manifest identifiable ethnic traits within these cult spaces for a few reasons. As mentioned above, excavators have noted the diversity in styles, origins and types of objects and architectural features. Additionally, Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi each exhibit its own unique architectural space, ritual paraphernalia, etc.

There are a number of problems in attempting to assign ethnic identity to the cult spaces at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi. The first has to do with the general issues with assigning ethnic labels to the material culture. As mentioned in the introduction, to force a label is to push aside the cultural complexities of any one site and to erase the range of cross-cultural interactions happening within this region of the southern Levant. It may have even been unlikely for the residents of Iron Age Abil el-Qameḥ or Tel el-Qadi to self-identify with any of the ethnic labels we might be inclined to apply based on the Bible. The people at these sites were interacting with multiple worlds that do not clearly align with our ethnic categories.

In fact, it is difficult to even distinguish the multiple cultures or polities at play within the region. As mentioned earlier, the data set relating to "Phoenician" and especially to "Aramean" material culture is limited, further obscuring the different cultural elements at play in the region. We do not have a very good idea of what is definitively "Aramean," "Phoenician," "Canaanite," or even "Israelite." We may assume that these are the cultural or political groups that may have interacted at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi based on biblical text and other records, but it is impossible to match individual remains to any particular group for various reasons. First, some features are shared across space and time, such as the standing stones which are present at both sites Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi. Standing stones at the Iron Age levels of these sites can match biblical descriptions of

Israelite "masseboth,[16]" but they are far from unique to an Iron Age Israelite identity, appearing throughout the ancient Near East and across multiple ages (Avner 2001; Ben Ami 2006).

Second, even in the cases where archaeologists and other scholars have come to a general conclusion to the ethnic or cultural origin of a particular type of object or architectural feature, that knowledge does not translate into the cultural identity of the space in which it was found, nor necessarily align with categories of self-identification within ethnicity. Earlier, I mentioned how many of the finds feature what archaeologists have called "Phoenician" or "Canaanite" style based on form and assemblage patterns. However, they cannot directly and possibly not even indirectly reflect the ethnic composition of the sites. The presence of certain styles of material culture could be a result of trade. For example, having a significant number of "Phoenician style" bichrome painted jars or pyxides at Abil el-Qameḥ does not equate to a direct Phoenician presence or control at Abil el-Qameḥ. The excavators of the Tel Abel Beth Maacah have themselves discussed the finds of Phoenician ware in relation to the trade economy rather than the possibility of a "Phoenician" controlled city (Panitz-Cohen et al. 2022).

In line with this thought, there's the fact that imported goods and styles of imitation can reflect a spectrum of appropriation from seeing and using a "foreign" item or feature in a strictly utilitarian or aesthetic view, to reinterpreting the feature or item into a worldview, to accepting influence from the prevenient entity. De Souza described an interesting example of how the tradition of Pan-Grave burial assemblages in Egypt and Nubia in the 17th and 18th dynasties increasingly appropriated Egyptianized elements, but in non-Egyptian ways, reflecting a developing pan grave tradition rather than a simple Egyptianizing of the tradition (2020). Barrett has also written on how representations of *Nilotica*, the iconography of the Nile and Egyptian statuaries, in

[16] Bloch-Smith in particular has questioned the methods used to identify stones with "Masseboths" both as "cultic" and as "Israelite" (2006).

Pompeiian homes reflect a broad spectrum where inhabitants appropriated various levels of Egyptian elements within religion and daily life (2019).

This comes to show that to equate finds to the presence of people groups is quite essentialist and gets past the lived experience of the Iron Age inhabitants. The material culture at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi could illustrate any combination of the above scenarios for the presence of diverse and culturally ambiguous finds. Consequently, it is difficult to say which of the previously mentioned theories of intercultural engagement may apply here. Without clear cultural anchors in the material record thanks to the limited data set, the widespread nature of certain features, and the lack of standardization in the ritual spaces, it is difficult to clearly describe the material culture as "hybrid" or "entangled".

The closest framework is that of Franklin's use of daily cosmopolitanisms, where diverse context at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi could parallel her framework of where multiple worlds converge in one region on a wide spectrum of scales, where the local inhabitants adjusted their identity as the cultural crossroads shifted (2021). For example, as noted by the excavators at Abil el-Qameḥ, the Iron I A4 cultic building points to how the site may have continuously adjusted, shifted, and reinterpreted itself as the demographics and socio-political context changed. The building does not tie itself to any one ethnic identity due to its display of both shared regional features and its unique expressions in the architectural shape of the wall and placement of the standing stones (Yahalom-Mack et al. 2019, 243-247). I suspect this is also true for Tel el-Qadi, as it had its own anomalies at Area T with the size of the podium and the existence of the olive press. Both sites may have had inhabitants that expressed their own response to converging landscapes, resulting in a diverse yet ambiguous material culture. However, because of the reasons I explained above, particularly the data set challenges, it is beyond the scope of this discussion to explore the extent to which this process of constant readjustment affected the expressions of cultural identity.

However, despite these issues and evidence of cultural fluidity and cross-cultural engagement, some scholars try to assign a specific ethnic identity to these spaces and to the sites as a whole. At Tel el-Qadi, scholars like Greer directly argue for an Israelite identification for the Area T precinct, against other scholars who argue for an Aramean one such as Arie and Noll (2017; 2008; 1998). Greer argues not only for an Israelite but specifically a "Yahwistic" cult (2013; 2017). To make his point, Greer draws parallels between the material remains of feasting and the priestly writings on the consuming sacrifices; the shape of the altars and construction details with biblical description of sacred spaces; and Stratum III's bronze bowl and incense shovels from T west with the biblical "altar set" that priests used to handle sacrifices and care for the altar (2013; 2017; 2010). He also points to the "'Immadiyaw" seal as sign to the presence of an Israelite and possibly a Yahwistic cult (2017, 6).

Meanwhile Arie argues for Aramean control by pointing to the Tel Dan stele written in Aramaic and referencing Hadad, an Aramean leader, other Aramaic inscriptions, a bronze scepter head from stratum II resembling scepters pertaining to Aramean kings, and Finkelstein's assessment of the architecture as Aramean (2008). Yet these arguments do not eliminate the fact that some of these features at Area T may have been shared by multiple groups, not just "Israelite" or even "Aramean," and Area T may itself have represented a center where these groups crossed each other frequently. Greer himself admits that he or others cannot definitively assert that some of the features congruent with biblical descriptions of Israelite religion are Israelite or Yahwistic instead of originating from other groups (2013, 112)

I want to clarify that these writers on Tell el-Qadi are not interested in erasing the complex intercultural processes at the site or in the overall region. As mentioned above, Greer acknowledges Tel el-Qadi as containing a multiethnic population and the shared intercultural nature of some of Area T's remains noting "influences" from not only Aramean but also Phoenician and Egyptian

sources (2017). However, this type of acknowledgement does not reevaluate the cultural discussion of Area T overall. Even if unintentionally, these arguments still make Area T and, in some cases, Tel el-Qadi as a whole, seem to be a space that has to belong to one rather than multiple people groups. This does not have to be the case, as ritual practice does not always have to suggest ethnicity, much less a singular one. An example is the worship of Isis in the Roman Empire. Isis worshippers came from a diversity of backgrounds, and their shared identity did not center in ethnicity but in their shared interest of Isis (which existed on a wide spectrum) (Barrett 2019, 250-252, 302-17; Mazurek, 2022). Another is the so called "Temple of Indented Niches" at Ai Khanoum, which formed part of the "Greco-Bactrian Kingdom," yet displayed evidence of diverse Greek, foreign, and local features, suggesting a shared space that served as the sole temple for the entire local community (Mairs 2013 & 2014). With this in mind, Area T at Tel el-Qadi's discussion of identity could go beyond ethnic identification, as ritual practice does not always assert ethnicity, and there are other aspects of identity that may be intersecting at Area T which we should seek to uncover.

Another problem arises when scholars do not argue for a specific ethnic identity at Iron Age Tel el-Qadi, but rather assume Israelite identity. Davis notes in his writing that he draws his biblical parallels outside of 1 Kings 12 in regards to Area T, as he finds comparing Area T to passages (he uses 1 Kings 18; Amos 4,5,7, & 8) that describe cultic space and ritual in northern Israel more productive in reconstructing Israelite cult and religion (2013). He also argues that Tel el-Qadi should be in the center of discussion when reconstructing Israel's religion (1-3). This approach definitely discusses Tel el-Qadi beyond the question of political or ethnic identification, yet it ignores the likelihood that Tel el-Qadi represents something beyond Israelite religion when it comes to cultural practice.

The issue of assuming Israelite identity is especially notable with Avraham Biran, the director of the Tel Dan excavation from 1967-1999. In his writings he relates everything to biblical narratives

pertaining to the northern kingdom of Israel, to the point that he names the strata of the area T cultic precinct according to the specific biblical Israelite king who would have reigned at the time (Stratum IVa is assigned to Jeroboam I, Stratum III to Ahab, and Stratum II to Jeroboam II) (Biran, 1994: 147-210). In a way, area T becomes the basis to reconstruct a vision of the biblical text. This is problematic for a few reasons. First, assuming that the area T cultic precinct is "Israelite" erases the multicultural nature of Tel el-Qadi. Secondly, Biran goes ahead to associate the strata with these biblical kings without engaging the kings' historicity or persuasively asserting that the archaeological remains warrant that association. This assumption unnecessarily reduces Area T and Tel-el Qadi to not just the discussion of only one ethnic group but to the literary actions of very few people.

Arguably these discussions on ethnic associations at Tel el-Qadi's Area T come from the desire to reconstruct the context of biblical Dan. As mentioned earlier and as I will discuss later, Dan features prominently in passages such 1 Kings 12 and Judges 17-18, which reference the building of cultic spaces and/or the innovation of certain religious rituals by Israelite actors. Consequently, this prompts the questions of what those spaces and rituals may have looked like and whether something such as Area T could inform our understanding of those literary actions.

In addition to this, biblical Dan is entangled within the politics of establishing the kingdom of Israel in 1 Kings 12 where Israel abandons the royal house of David and where Dan becomes one of Israel's political and cultural centers. These narratives, plus other narratives where Dan falls under conflicts of political control for Israel, Judah, and Aram (See 1 Kings 15 and 2 Chronicles 16), incentivize archaeologists and scholars to use Tel el-Qadi as a way to reconstruct the political dynamics of biblical Israel, Aram, and others. As a result, the research at Area T has fed into attempts to reconstruct "Israelite religion" or to identify how the cultural expressions through cult at Area T can identify political dynamics. However, these interests sidestep the complicated nature of

Area T in terms of cultural identity. The omission of this cultural complexity reduces Tel el-Qadi to questions of political control based on ethnic categories rather than a reflection of lived experience.

Current scholars writing on Abil el-Qameḥ are less concerned with reconstructing an "Israelite" or any ethnic identity through the "cult spaces." For example, the directors of the Tel Abel Beth Maacah excavations have described how the diversity of the finds within Abil el-Qameḥ's spaces makes it difficult for them to answer questions about who may have controlled the region during the Iron Age (Yahalom-Mack et al. 2019; Yahalom-Mack et al. 2021). Furthermore, they have advocated for researchers to view Abil el-Qameḥ's history as a process where native inhabitants negotiated and renegotiated their identity with different sets of newcomers (Yahalom-Mack et al. 2019). This perspective definitely seems to embrace the multicultural context at Abil el-Qameḥ.

However, Abil el-Qameḥ's material culture is still vulnerable to the same issues as Tel el-Qadi. The excavators have noted that previous scholars such as Arie or Finkelstein have argued or assumed specific political and/or ethnic designations for Abil el-Qameḥ, such as Aramean, based on the biblical texts (Yahalom-Mack et al. 2021; Arie 2008, 35; Finkelstein 2013, 106).[17] The excavators themselves have discussed whether the site can be assigned to an Aramean or Israelite affiliation in regards to the texts or the archaeological findings such as the discovery of a jar inscription containing the theophoric Israelite name "Benyaw[18]" (Panitz-Cohen and Mullins 2016; Yahalom-Mack et al. 2021). However, in these discussions, which could parallel the approaches taken at Tel el-Qadi, the excavators instead continue to assert that even these types of findings may only provide a small piece of a larger complex picture where multiple groups intersected at Abil el-Qameḥ (Yahalom-Mack et al. 2021, 15-17). These discussions model a more nuanced approach, one that

[17] Na'aman also directly ascribed the Iron Age Abil el-Qameḥ as Aramean based on historical biblical analysis (2012).
[18] Name transliteration lifts from Yahalom-Mack et al.'s "The Iron Age IIA 'Benyaw Inscription' on a Jar from Tel Abel Beth Maacah" (2021).

allows scholars to engage with cultural identity, but discourages singular ethnic designations of the site.

Overall, some writers have pointed out that our knowledge at sites such as Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi in the southern Levant is severely limited, and argue that only with the biblical text can archaeologists contextualize the material record (Greer 2017). While this may be the case, we need to be very careful about how that text is used for interpreting these cultic/ritual spaces. When we know that a religious or cultural space is diverse yet seek to argue for a specific identity, are we not unnecessarily limiting our understanding? Does a sacred space even need to belong to a certain ethnic or political group in order to connect the remains to the biblical text? I will posit that this is not the case.

Chapter 2

Missing Peoples at Abel and Dan: The Disappearance of Multiculturalism in 2 Samuel 20 and 1 Kings 12

As mentioned previously in the introduction, I argue that the biblical authors are very much aware of the multicultural nature of Abel and Dan that can be seen in the material record at Iron Age Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi, yet deliberately exclude the discussion of this multicultural context. To argue this point I will carry out my discussion in the following ways. First, I will look at the connections between Sheba's rebellion in 2 Samuel 20 and Jeroboam's secession in 1 Kings 12 as internal bids to reject the Davidic Monarchy through a shared slogan. Second, I will discuss how both Abel and Dan as northern cities become imagined spaces for the biblical authors to redefine Israel's identity. Finally, I will explore how this internal negotiation of Israel's identity comes at the biblical exclusion of foreign cultural entities, and how this exclusion affects the discussion of historical Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi.

2.1 Whose Narrative is it? Scribal interest in Abel and Dan

As noted earlier, my reading and interpretation of 2 Samuel 20 and 1 Kings 12 in the following section is synchronic, since the representation of Abel and Dan as it stands is what interests me. That said, I want to reflect on who is representing Abel and Dan in 2 Samuel 20 and 1 Kings 12.

It is very likely that these biblical representations of Abel and Dan we have today come from a Judahite perspective, rather than an Israelite, much less a local, perspective. This view comes from a number of biblical scholars. For example, both Dan Fleming and Mahri Leonard-Fleckman have explored 2 Samuel 20, 1 Kings 12, and other texts concerning the emergence of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah in distinct ways (2012; 2016). Fleming in particular asserts that Judah is separate from Israel, but has a key vested interest in preserving some parts of Israel's tradition in order to

appropriate it (2012). Meanwhile, Leonard-Fleckman suggests that passages such as 1 Kings 12 among others preserve a tradition where Israel separates from the polity, the "House of David," which Judahite scribes inherited and adjusted for their own goals (2016). Discussions such as these reveal how texts on the emergence of Israel particularly 2 Samuel 20 and 1 Kings 12, are likely to have been curated by a Judahite scribe, whose perspective, while not native to the region (much less Abel and Dan), sees Judah as personally invested in Israel's history.

What makes Abel and Dan's representation all the more fascinating is that their most notable appearances, in 2 Sam 20 and 1 Kings 12, are within the context of events that led up to the separation of Israel from the House of David and the establishment of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah. These texts are highly polemical, in terms of political, religious, and cultural themes. The separation of Israel from the house of David provides scribes an opportunity to redefine Israel's identity and contextualize it for a Judahite narrative. These interests will come into play in the following discussion.

2.2 No Share in the House of David?

The slogan used to describe the rupture between Israel and the Davidic household in both 2 Samuel 20 and 1 Kings 12 represents an internal bid to redefine Israel's political identity. In 2 Samuel 20, as David is mourning the death of his son Absalom, Sheba, a Benjaminite and likely Saul loyalist, starts his own rebellion against David. The slogan first appears in 2 Samuel 20:1:

1ושם נקרא איש בליעל ושמו שבע בן־בכרי איש ימיני ויתקע בשפר ויאמר אין־לנו חלק בדוד ולא נחלה־לנו בבן־ישי איש לאהליו ישראל

And there, there happened to be a worthless man. His name was Sheba, son of Bichri, a Benjaminite man, and he blew the shofar and said, "We have no share in David, we have no inheritance in the son of Jesse, Every man to his tent, Israel!"

After making this rallying cry, Sheba arrives at Abel, which prompts David's commander Joab to pursue him there. When Joab reaches and lays siege to Abel, a wise woman comes out to negotiate in the interest of protecting the city. After affirming Abel's importance as "a mother and city in Israel," the city's inhabitants throw Sheba's head over the wall to Joab (19-22). This ends the revolt.

2 Samuel 20:1 represents Sheba as instigating a political separation that strikes at the very core of Israel's identity: the notion of inheritance (נחלה). The two most important words to note here are חלק (ḥeleq) and נחלה (naḥalah), translated above as "share" and "inheritance." These words appear most frequently in the context of the land allotment texts in the book of Joshua and in texts concerning Israel's pact with YHWH (Laird et al. 1981; Levine 1993). In Genesis 31:14 the terms חלק and נחלה appear together in a statement to instigate a separation. Here, Rachel and Leah agree to leave their father's household with Jacob, saying "Is there any share (חלק) or inheritance (נחלה) left to us in the house of our father?". The sisters say these words to affirm the futility of staying in their father's household and to redefine their identity by joining the house of Jacob. Sheba says something very similar about Israel's place in the House of David. If there is no חלק nor נחלה in the House of David, then Israel can justify leaving the monarchy and following Sheba. In both Genesis 31:14 and 2 Samuel 20:1 political identity is at stake. Interestingly, in both cases this negotiation takes place at the intersections of Israel and Aram. However, 2 Samuel 20 does not acknowledge this explicitly.

To the contrary, the Bible represents Sheba's revolt as taking place entirely within Israel, without acknowledging Abel's complicated political context. The statement in 2 Samuel 20 sets up the internal negotiation of Israel's identity at Abel. The authors effectively draw the reader's focus to the polemic of Israel's potential abandonment of the House of David, through the questions of

"share" and "inheritance." Whatever happens at Abel has to resolve the issues of share and inheritance in verse 1. Consequently, Sheba's cry does not set up a representation of political or intercultural engagements with external polities.

As with Sheba, Jeroboam's story starts off in the context of conflict with the monarchy. When Solomon dies, Israel becomes discontent with his son Rehoboam, first pleading with him to "loosen their yoke" imposed by Solomon then expressing their anger at Rehoboam when he refuses to listen to their pleas (1 Kings 12:1-16). At this point the slogan from 2 Samuel 20 reappears.

1 Kings 12:16

16וירא כל־ישראל כי לא־שמע המלך אליהם וישבו העם את־המלך דבר לאמר מה־לנו חלק בדוד ולא־נחלה בבן־ישי
לאהליך ישראל עתה ראה ביתדוד וילך ישראל לאהליו
When all of Israel saw that the king had not listened to the people, the people responded to the king saying, "what share do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents Israel! See to your own house David." and Israel went to their homes.

Immediately following this, they invite Jeroboam to rule over them. Jeroboam then establishes and redefines Israel, in part through establishing cult centers at Dan and Bethel (verses 25, 29-31).

This statement is nearly identical in the syntax and phrasing to 2 Samuel 20:1. The main difference is that 1 Kings 12 adds "see to your own house David." Like 2 Samuel 20, 1 Kings 12 also points to the absence of חלק and נחלה to justify Israel's separation from the House of David. Note however, that use of the slogan in 1 Kings 12:16 comes out of the mouth of Israel collectively, not Jeroboam. Israel here has a bigger role in the rally cry than it does in 2 Samuel 20. Jeroboam does not control the decision, reflecting Israel's traditions of collective governance, as Dan Fleming has thoroughly explored (2012). חלק and נחלה represent Israel's sense of belonging in the house of

David. If Israel says that they have neither, they can reject the House of David and redefine their political identity.

Reading the text synchronically, the preservation of the slogan, attributing it to Sheba and reusing it for the secession of Israel under Jeroboam leads to a few conclusions. First, the texts reveal that the biblical authors mean to indicate that tensions within the Davidic monarchy are an ongoing issue in the text. Additionally, the tensions are internal. Both texts are asking the question of whether Israel, as represented by Sheba the Benjaminite, and Jeroboam, respectively, have a חלק and נחלה in a Davidic monarchy. The answer, from the perspective of the text, is, Israel does not.

At the level of the received narrative, both 2 Samuel 20 and 1 Kings 12 are using the shared rally cry to give an internal rationale for Israel's abandonment of the united monarchy. Without a חלק or נחלה in the House of David, the scribes not only give Israel power and agency to define their political identity, but also establish that Israel has no inheritance in the House of David. It serves a Judahite interest in rejecting Israel to leave room for Judah's stake in the House of David. In both cases this is an internal negotiation that involves northern cities that the material record has revealed to be among the region's most complicated, diverse and entangled in terms of political identity. I suggest that this is not accidental.

2.3 Abel and Dan as Centers of Redefinition

In these texts, the sites of Abel and Dan appear as centers for the internal negotiation of Israel's political identity. In fact, I propose that the text implies that Jeroboam and Sheba both explicitly chose these cities as centers or tools to reestablish the identity of Israel outside of the House of David and Judah, both politically and culturally.

In many ways the actions at the cities are a reaction to the absence of חלק and נחלה. In the case of 2 Samuel 20, this is explicit in the wise woman's response to Sheba's claim:

2 Samuel 20:18-19

18ותאמר לאמר דבר ידברו בראשנה לאמר שאל ישאלו באבל וכן התמו
19אנכי שלמי אמוני ישראל אתה מבקש להמית עיר ואם בישראל למה תבלע נחלת יהוה
Then she said, saying, "They would speak in the past saying 'go beg counsel in Abel' and so they'd resolve disputes"
I am among the whole and faithful in Israel. You are seeking to destroy a city and a mother in Israel. Why would you devour the inheritance of YHWH!?

The wise woman's statement both sets up Abel's cultural significance and rejects the bid for redefinition, giving power back to the house of David. The phrase "Go beg counsel in Abel," is not speaking to a current but a past tradition of resolving disputes. More important, however, is the phrase "you are seeking to destroy a city and mother in Israel. Why would you devour Yahweh's inheritance (נחלה)?" This phrase constitutes a direct counter-claim to Sheba's insistence that Israel has no inheritance in the House of David. Sheba says that there is no חלק or נחלה for Israel, but the wise woman says that there is. Furthermore, to threaten Abel, a "city and mother in Israel,[19]" is to threaten the נחלה. Abel is more than the place Sheba meets his end. It has the cultural legitimacy to reject the bid for Israel's redefinition. To state the site's significance and נחלה is to remind Joab and the house of David that Abel and ultimately the rest of Israel belongs with the House of David, not Sheba. The wise woman takes away the power from Sheba. The authors give the wise woman and Abel as a whole the power to contradict the separatist sentiments, portraying a more complex image of Israel's dissent towards the House of David. This image represents an Israel that is not yet fully

[19] There has been some debate on whether "mother in Israel" refers to Abel itself or the wise woman (please see for example Malamat, 1979; and Panitz-Cohen and Yahalom Mack, 2019). I lean towards the former interpretation, however, the phrase either way engages the polemic of redefining of Israel's identity with the people of Abel.

unified in the determination to abandon the Davidic monarchy. It is entirely possible that had Sheba succeeded in the revolt, narratively speaking, he would have used Abel to cement his claim. Yet, if Abel claims the נחלה within David's rule, then Sheba's message is undermined and his revolt nullified. Abel determines Sheba's failure and a temporary end to the negotiation of Israel's identity outside the House of David.

In contrast, 1 Kings 12 does not give Dan the same agency and power that Abel wields. In fact, 1 Kings 12 appears to be more concerned with Bethel than Dan (Smith 2007; Monroe 2021). This has led some to state that the biblical authors added Dan later (Bartusch 2003; Arie 2008, 37-38). If this is the case, it raises the important question of what would have motivated its addition. As mentioned previously, the authors were very intentional in connecting 2 Samuel 20 and 1 Kings 12. Because of Dan's location being near Abel, the authors may be representing Dan as a northern point that can be claimed in contrast to the unobtainable Abel. In other words, the biblical authors use Dan to represent a more unified Israel determined to separate with a now legitimized northern point.

Unlike Samuel 20 where Abel rejects Sheba's revolt and enables the House of David to keep Israel, 1 Kings 12 has Dan legitimize Israel's political identity through Jeroboam. After Israel separates from the house of David and Judah, Jeroboam decides to redefine Israel through religious cult and ritual. Jeroboam essentially sets up his own boundaries of what religious and cultural traditions belong inside the northern Kingdom of Israel.

1 Kings 12: 27-29

27אם־יעלה העם הזה לעשות זבחים בבית־יהוה בירושלם ושב לב העם הזה אל־אדניהם אל־רחבעם מלך יהודה והרגני ושבו אל־רחבעם מלך־יהודה
28ויועץ המלך ויעש שני עגלי זהב ויאמר אלהם רב־לכם מעלות ירושלם הנה אלהיך ישראל אשר העלוך מארץ מצרים

29וישם את־האחד בבית־אל ואת־האחד נתן בדן
"If this people go up to offer sacrifice at the house of Yahweh in Jerusalem, the heart of this people will return to their lord, to Rehoboam, king of Judah, and then they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah"
And the king took counsel, and he made two calves of gold and he said to them, "It is much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Now here are your gods, Israel which have brought you out from the land of Egypt."
And he set one in Bethel and one he gave in Dan

Note the expression "the heart of this people will return to their lord, to Rehoboam." Heart, "לב (leb)" is used widely in the biblical text to indicate the human self in terms of emotion, mind, and will (Laird 1981, 466). Indeed, earlier in verse 26, the text represents Jeroboam's לב as he reflects on what to do. לב in verse 27 could be interpreted as Israel's inner self that Jeroboam has to control and keep away from Judah. When Jeroboam builds the centers at Dan and Bethel, he essentially discourages the population from having any religious and consequently political ties to Judah (De Vries 2003, 160-162). He not only builds the centers, but he constructs a cultural memory both by naming the golden calves as the gods who brought Israel out of Egypt and by instituting festivals. The people at Dan accepted these innovations, and the people of Northern Israel observed the religious customs Jeroboam instituted, "And it came to pass that this matter became a sin, and the people walked to [a calf] as far as Dan" (verse 30). This acceptance enabled Jeroboam's redefinition of Israel in a way that was not possible in 2 Samuel 20. Unlike Abel in 2 Samuel 20, 2 Kings 12 does not grant Dan or its inhabitants enough agency or power to reject the revolt. Instead, the authors make Dan into a passive center that represents a change in northern Israel's attitude to secession from 2 Samuel 20.

The text represents Abel and Dan as arbiters for the outcome of the internal negotiation of Israel's political identity. Sheba's failure can be seen as Abel's rejecting Sheba's right to redefine

Israel when the wise woman reclaims the city's allegiance to David and YHWH's inheritance. Dan's passive role as a ceremonial center represents Jeroboam's success in redefining Israel through religious innovation, particularly in northern Israel. Thus, the biblical scribes actively engage Dan and Abel as loci/sites for the (re)definition of Israel in light of its separation from the House of David.

2.4 Missing peoples: Where did "the other" go?

The representation of Abel and Dan as centers for the internal negotiation over Israel's political identity deliberately excludes the multicultural context of the cities. The first thing to note is that neither 2 Samuel 20 nor 1 Kings 12 use Abel or Dan to set up a strict border. This is quite strange, especially if taking in mind the geographical locations of the modern-day archaeological Tel Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi. These passages could use either or both sites to draw an explicit northern geographic boundary of Israel and define its place among the Iron Age polities. Yet, neither 1 Kings 12 or 2 Samuel 20 ever uses the word "border" or any terms for geographic boundaries between peoples. At best, the text renders any intent that Sheba or Jeroboam may have had for Abel and Dan based on geography as implicit rather than a point of discussion.

Additionally, both passages are even less interested in defining the relationships between Israel and any entities outside its sphere. One would expect that entities such as Aram, Phoenicia, or Canaan to appear as adversaries or allies to an emerging redefined Israel or as "foreign" influences on Dan's Northern Israelite cult. Defining or redefining cultural identity often involves distinguishing it from "other" cultures or ethnicities (Bloch-Smith 2003). However, there is no "other" in this narrative. Neither passage explicitly includes or excludes people outside of Judah or Israel. Even Judah plays a very minor role in 1 Kings 12 and 2 Samuel 20, referenced as the one

group that stays loyal to the house of David, prompting Leonard-Fleckman to suggest that Judah's appearance is a late addition (2016). It is puzzling that the authors do not make any reference to how Sheba or Jeroboam may have formed alliances with other entities to support their claim against David's house nor how such relationships could influence the redefinition of Israel. The exclusion of explicit foreign political or cultural groups as players in the narrative removes any room to comment on Israel's relationship with entities or identities outside of the Davidic Monarchy.

I suggest that the biblical authors were aware of the complex multicultural context at Dan and Abel yet they deliberately suppressed this context. In 2 Samuel 20 for example, there may be an implicit acknowledgment of the Aramaean cultural horizon at Abel, through inconsistencies in the site's name in the text.

2 Samuel 20:14-15, 18

14ויעבר בכל־ שבטי ישראל אבלה ובית מעכה וכל־ הברים ויקהלו ויבאו אף־ אחריו
15ויבאו ויצרו עליו באבלה בית המעכה וישפכו סללה אל־ העיר ותעמד בחל וכל־ העם אשר את־ יואב משחיתם להפיל החומה
18ותאמר לאמר דבר ידברו בראשנה לאמר שאל ישאלו באבל וכן התמו
And [Sheba] passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel and the House of Maacah and all of the Berim. They gathered together and went with him
They came and gathered against him in Abel of the House of Maacah. They built a siege ramp against the city standing in the outer rampart. All the people who were with Joab were battering the wall to cause it to fall.
Then she said, saying, "They would speak in the past saying 'go beg counsel in Abel' and so they'd resolve disputes"

Each time the text presents the name, something changes in the spelling or the syntax. Verse 14 separates Abel from "House of Maacah" with the *vav*. I have rendered this construction "Abel and the House of Maacah." Verse 15 connects all parts of the name but as a genitive construct, "Abel of the House of Maacah." Finally, verse 18 excludes "House of Maacah" altogether, rendering only "Abel."

The one thing that is consistent in all of these verses is that Abel and the House of Maacah are separate entities. The element בית מעכה likely refers to a political group - the "House of Maacah," that occupied the city of Abel. Such a construction would follow the "House of X" pattern seen in Aramean and Assyrian sources, which refers to a polity or people based around one ancestor (Leonard-Fleckman 2016). In other words, the text attaches בית מעכה to indicate the political affiliation of the city. Some scholars believe the name "Maacah" to be Aramean, linking biblical Abel to an Aramean polity (Panitz-Cohen & Mullins 2016; Anderson 1989). If the place name's association with Aram is correct, then the text is explicitly preserving the name of an Aramean polity alongside that of Israel in 2 Samuel 20. In fact, it would be an Aramean polity that aligns with the House of David as seen in Abel's rejection of Sheba's revolt. The authors likely inserted this on purpose, especially since 2 Samuel 3 references the marriage between David and Maacah, daughter of the king of Geshur. However, the text still treats Abel as the city of Israel, in particular with the phrase "a city and mother in Israel," which could describe a complex intercultural Abel that had Aramean and Israelite ties, but the text is not concerned with exploring that relationship. The בית מעכה becomes part of the internal struggle over Israel's identity and inheritance rather than an explicit commentary on Aramean-Israelite relations.

1 Kings 12 likewise leaves implicit references to cross cultural entanglement that have been excluded from the narrative at Dan. First is the fact that Jeroboam sets the centers at Dan and Bethel, giving the impression of a northern and southern point to contain the cultural and religious traditions of Israel (verse 29). This would fit with the archaeological context of the associated Iron age Tel el-Qadi being at the crossroads of multiple polities, making Dan a key location to secure. In addition, the representation of calves itself points to the multiculturalism of Jeroboam's political

milieu. Other biblical narratives such as Exodus 32 and 1 Kings 17-19 consider the images of calves as "foreign" and "illegitimate" in Israel's worship, leaving the impression that Jeroboam's calves may also reflect a "foreign" component (Cogan 2001, 358). However, 1 Kings 12 does not name any foreign gods or rituals Jeroboam is instituting at Dan or Bethel nor does it bring in other political players who may have assisted in the creation of the cult center at Dan. Rather, the authors minimize the references to multiculturalism at Dan in order to preserve Israel's agency in breaking from the house of David, and independently transgressing cultic law.

Ultimately neither 2 Samuel 20 or 1 Kings 12 are concerned with representing how different cultural and political groups affect or influence Israel's acceptance or rejection of the House of David. 2 Samuel does not engage with what the בית מעכה means for Sheba's revolt, and the revolt itself is not reliant on outside support. Jeroboam's actions at Dan cannot be understood as influenced by outside entities, when the text does not mention them. The biblical text is ultimately attempting to preserve Israel's agency to self-determine by ignoring the multiculturalist context of Abel and Dan. To minimize or erase foreign players is to centralize Israel's responsibility over the dissolution of the monarchy. Overall, both 2 Samuel 20 and 1 Kings 12 use Sheba, Jeroboam, Abel, and Dan to open a window into the internal dilemma of Israelite identity in light of the failure of the Davidic monarchy.

The accounts of Jeroboam's secession and Sheba's revolt cannot illuminate intercultural dynamics at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi, much less define what it is to be "Israelite," in contrast to other ethnicities. Neither 1 Kings 12 or 2 Samuel 20 draw a political, geographical, or cultural line between Israel and foreign groups. If we were to place 1 Kings 12 and 2 Samuel 20 in conversation with the archaeological and historical Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi, we need to acknowledge the

text's erasure of multiculturalism and discussions of ethnic groups in service of internal identity negotiation.

However, the material record may inform the process of cultural and political redefinition that 1 Kings 12 and 2 Samuel 20 try to represent. The text represents the renegotiation of Israel outside the house of David. The authors neglect a key piece of cultural definition; the texts have effectively erased the "other." The only way we can understand the broader political context that these narratives engaged at Abel and Dan is to look at the complex culturally fluid material record. The cultural and political complexity of the material record and the biblical text's silence on this issue provides an opportunity to better understand the complicated relationship between lived landscapes and textual production. The biblical text in its final form, even in minimizing cultural complexity, reveals identity negotiation as a process. It is one perspective we can discuss in the search for a nuanced picture of the many intersecting perspectives of multiple past identities. Rather than use the biblical text to assign a specific ethnic designation at Abil el-Qameḥ or Tel el-Qadi, we should seek to uncover their complex multicultural contexts.

3

Epilogue

The Importance of Multiculturalism in Material Culture and Textual studies

3.1 The Transformation of Lived Experience into Textual Memory

With the contrast between the cultural ambiguity of Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi's material record to the biblical text's erasure of any discussion of intercultural engagement for northern Israel, why even connect the biblical text with these sites? I suggest that understanding how the physical past reality is transformed and changed into a narrative representation is vital to understanding the construction of identity. As Assmann writes, writing perpetuates memory and bonds groups beyond simple knowledge with new opportunities to foster, forget, and preserve tradition (2006). A transformation did happen with the biblical text. The scribes recontextualized and minimized the lived complex cross-cultural experience at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi in the service of preserving the narratives concerning the separation of Israel from the Davidic dynasty which the scribes may have found important for preserving Judahite identity and memory. Consequently, this would be much harder to argue without the knowledge of the culturally ambiguous remains at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi.

This knowledge reveals a truth I mentioned above. To redefine Israel's identity, the authors did not use "the other." Arguably, the likely Judahite authors did not even represent Israel itself as an "other" in 2 Samuel 20 and 1 Kings 12. They did not take the time here to compare and contrast Israel's differences to Judah, much less its relationship to any "other" political/cultural groups. Jonker writes how Judahite scribes within Chronicles both viewed their neighbor Israel as sharing in their own identity while still trying to distinguish Judah as unique through the Davidic affiliation (2009; 2016). This contradictory yet complex perspective on Israel may also be the case in these two passages, giving a reason why the Judahite authors do not explicitly participate in the "one vs other"

polemic. Israel's relationship to the House of David takes precedence over other aspects in terms of identity construction/reconstruction in 2 Samuel 20 and 1 Kings 12. On the front of ethnicity, particularly in terms of inter-group distinctions and relationships, the authors chose to minimize if not erase the complexity, both in terms of Israel and Judah, and Israel and other nations at Abel and Dan. Israel's relationship to the House of David takes precedence over other aspects in terms of identity construction/reconstruction in 2 Samuel 20 and 1 Kings 12.

3.2 Space for Multiculturalism

Just because the biblical author(s) may exclude the discussion of multiculturalism within narratives does not mean they were not aware of it, nor should we exclude it in our own thinking. Why are we obsessed with the "Israeliteness" or lack thereof at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi to begin with? We can accept the multiculturalism at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi as is rather than force a specific ethnic identity out of it even when trying to interpret them in the light of the biblical narrative. For Abil el-Qameḥ, as pointed out by the Abel Beth Maacah Excavation directors, even the biblical text hints at a possible Aramean affiliation to Abel in 2 Samuel 20 which is entirely concerned with Israel's identity. As for Tel el-Qadi, we do not even need Area T to be Yahwistic, much less identifiably Israelite, to correlate with biblical records of Dan. Even if we were to take the polemical text of 1 Kings 12 at face value, the site could have been Israelite, Aramean, Phoenician, or any combination of multiple groups to still be relevant. The scribes denigrated the cult at Dan and Bethel, using tropes of foreignness found in passages such as Exodus 32. The authors seem aware that they were dealing with a complex cultural society at Abel and Dan. They still left the few implicit references to that complexity.

Depending on the biblical Abel and Dan to describe the complex history at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi is at best limiting and at worst destructive. This has little to do with biblical accuracy or historical reliability of texts such as 2 Samuel 20 and 1 Kings 12, but everything to do with the

ephemeral complexity of these archaeological sites. The authors were not trying to describe a cultural or even political reality. The scribes were trying to wrestle with Israel's separation from the House of David when the scribes supported the House of David. Insisting to find an ethnic identity to recreate political dynamics is to erase the complexity of the culture within the material record and limits even biblical interpretation. The texts of 2 Samuel 20 and 1 Kings 12 were highly polemical, expressing themes of inheritance, political identity, betrayal, and the anxieties of separation. Ethnicity, much less the distinction between ethnic groups is not the emphasis here. To focus on using the texts to ascertain whether a temple precinct is Israelite or not is to also eliminate that textual complexity. I would say this does not just apply to ideas of "Israelite Identity" but also ideas that any one ethnic group had full cultural, not just political, control of either Iron Age Abil el-Qameḥ or Tel el-Qadi. At the very least, I would hope that when scholars engage with these sites, they acknowledge the entanglement of cultures and ethnicities, as the excavators at Abil el-Qameḥ have sought to do.

3.3 Impacts on Today's Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi

The most vulnerable victim to the erasure of complex intercultural experiences within the region is arguably the cultural heritage of Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi. The obsession with the biblical parallels reduces these sites just to whether the texts can be connected with the biblical sites or not, and at worst demands whether an "Israelite" or another identity can be assigned and reconstructed out of the material remains through minimizing cross-cultural engagement. However, Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi have an extremely long cultural history before and after the events the biblical texts seek to represent.

This erasure feeds into issues such the Israeli-Palestinian conflict where historical sites such as these become the battleground for a war over modern heritage and identity. Israel has a vested interest in not only claiming sites but in also having those sites be designated an "Israelite" identity.

This ranges from the replacement of Arabic placenames with Hebrew or biblical ones, to erasing or minimizing traces of Palestinian heritage to present a site that can be claimed for a nationalist Israeli identity and only that identity (Masalha 2015; Mizrachi 2011).

The sites, in effect, transform from repositories that can reveal the diverse history significant to various past and present cultures, into a battleground for exclusionary identity politics. This issue applies to the former Palestinian and Syrian towns of Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi. As of now, there is little to no published material on archaeological remains past antiquity for either site. They are both vulnerable, if not subject to the narratives of erasure, for the multicultural and multiethnic past inhabitants of the sites, both modern and ancient. For example, to assume that a site such as Tel el-Qadi was an "Israelite" city because of parallels between Stratum IVA of Area T and 1 Kings 12, is to participate in this erasure ourselves by forgetting the cross-cultural elements of Area T and by narrowing our view only to Iron Age Tel el-Qadi. It is imperative both for Iron Age Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi, and even their modern-day counterparts, for us to avoid the erasure of multicultural identities when participating in the discussions of ancient cultural identity.

3.4 Conclusion

Placing Iron Age Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi in discussion with biblical Abel and Dan reveals much to us. It reveals that the transformation of physical reality into textual representation concerning a multicultural region does not need to center "one vs other" ethnic or even cultural dynamics. It also demonstrates how we can continue to transform the extremely complicated relationship between text and material record into a more nuanced and productive one. Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi's sacred spaces are complex, unique, and exist beyond simplified categories of ethnicity and political groups. To force an ethnic identification onto any of these spaces is to erase a large facet of their story. Additionally, the biblical text does demonstrate awareness of the intercultural complexity that it erases. To use the text to assert ethnic identification at Abil el-Qameḥ

and Tel el-Qadi may also erase the text's discussion of inheritance and the monarchy as it pertains to identity, a discussion which ignores multiculturalism and ethnic comparison. We do not need to force any specific identification, much less assume an "Israelite" one, to connect Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi to biblical Abel and Dan.

Finally, centering the multicultural complexity within the material record and the text allow us to deconstruct the ways in which archaeological sites become a cultural and political battleground. Sites such as Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi have always existed on the crossroads, and it is important and valuable to not only acknowledge that, but explore and lean into that knowledge. This, I argue, is healthier for the material culture which holds a lived experience beyond the reach of any one ethnic categorization, healthier for the biblical material that narrativizes one changing and developing identity, and healthier for the cultural heritage that still builds meaning for multiple groups in the modern Levant. I encourage future researchers not only to explore the Iron Age intercultural complexities at Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi further, but also those of Bronze Age, Hellenistic, Roman, Late Antiquity, Medieval, and modern Abil el-Qameḥ and Tel el-Qadi.

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