



The Goddesses and Gods of Saul¹

As deusas e deuses de Saul

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Abstract

Recent studies considered the identification of the worshipped deities in the Central Hill Country Canaan at the end of Iron Age I an impossible task. The opinion was based on the difficulty of overcoming the multiple ideologies and textual layers of the late biblical texts that portray the region at the time. The present paper, from the conceptual framework called "Magical-Mythical Networks," tries to take up the challenge by integrating the data from local visual culture to the previous textual and archaeological studies in the analysis of Benjamin's Plateau in the Iron Age I-IIA. In using the social organization and the data from multiple sources, it is proposed two levels of deities that may have been part of the religious experience of the inhabitants, such as the possible identification of them.

Keywords: Benjamin. Goddesses. Gods. Saul. Bible. Archaeology.

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Resumo

Estudos recentes consideraram impossível a tarefa de identificar as deidades cultuadas na região montanhosa central de Canaã no final do Ferro I. A opinião se fundamenta principalmente na dificuldade de transpor as múltiplas ideologias e camadas literárias dos textos bíblicos que retratam a região no período. O presente artigo, partindo do quadro conceitual intitulado “redes mágico-míticas”, procura superar tais obstáculos ao integrar dados da cultura visual local aos estudos textuais e arqueológicos anteriores sobre o platô de Benjamim no Período do Ferro I-IIA. Utilizando a organização social e os dados de múltiplas fontes, propõem-se dois níveis de deidades que provavelmente fizeram parte da experiência religiosa dos habitantes, tal qual sua possível identificação.

Palavras-chave: Benjamim. Deusas. Deuses. Saul. Bíblia. Arqueologia.

Introduction

Saul’s biblical portrayal is compelling. The story of a godly chosen king that betrayed his deity and people, just to end up dethroned by an underdog shepherd boy (who slaughtered giants!), fueled the imagination of many throughout history (EHRlich, 2006).¹ Nevertheless, as most biblical texts, the historical grounds of the story are not easily detectable. Despite there are not many reasons to doubt on the existence of a Saul (DIETRICH, 2007, p. 166), the facts are buried under many layers of redactions and ideologies, that only readings against the grain can reconstruct (e.g., KNAUF; GUILLAUME, 2016, p. 62-71). The king’s role in the formation of the polity that became (the second? third?) Israel (FINKELSTEIN, 2019; KNAUF, 2016), and the chronology of his kingdom, made him a hotspot in research in the last decades. That resulted in reconstructions from archaeological (e.g., FAUST, 2006; FINKELSTEIN, 2015; cf. SERGI, 2017) and biblical grounds (e.g., FLEMING, 2012; GIFFONE, 2018; MILSTEIN, 2016). These histories diverge, but a convergence is their location.

The dawn of Iron Age’s Canaan saw a concentration of medium to large settlements flourishing in a small part of the Central Hill Country

¹ Due to extension’s constraints, the references were kept to the minimum. The works mentioned are either of seminal character or recent studies with update bibliography.

(FINKELSTEIN; MAGEN, 1993, p. 13-79, 447-452). The region that late texts linked to the legendary patriarch *binyāmîn* (heb. Benjamin, cf. Jos 18:11-18) presented a stronger gravity especially in the chasms of the region's political history in both biblical (Josh 2-9; 1 Sam 8-12; 2 Kgs 25:22-23; Jer 40:6; Ezra 4) and archaeological records (MILLER II, 2005, p. 20, 29-30, 81-82; LEHMANN, 2004, p. 158-164). If the region's socio-political preeminence is notable, its religious biblical portrait is even more appealing with at least five religious centers in the biblical texts (BLENKINSOPP, 1972, p. 68-69), a number so significant as atypical. Despite the appeal, the object was not thoroughly examined in a localized perspective, with few exceptions (e.g., LANGSTON, 1998; TOORN, 1996).

This article aims to contribute with the discussion above, presenting the “goddesses and gods of Saul”². The term is, of course, just a rhetorical lure since it would be unfeasible with the present data to research this singular historical character in such detail. In contrast, it seems feasible to inquiry about the assumed region and time of Saul. The paper will thus address the deities in Benjamin's Plateau on Iron Age I-IIA, geographically limited to the bowl-shaped area between Nasbeh (N), el-Ful (S), Jeba (E), el-Jib (W); and chronologically, to the 11th-10th cent. BCE (c. 1125-950 BCE; FINKELSTEIN; PIASETZKY, 2011).

A Glimpse on Method

“Magical Mythical Networks”

The usefulness of a concept/category of religion in Antiquity is a current hot topic (ROUBEKAS, 2019). This is not the place to address the question minutely since other studies have dealt with the problem of “Ancient Israelite Religion/s” (e.g., CARDOSO, 2019, 2020; MANDELL; SMOAK, 2019). It should be mentioned, nevertheless, that this article shares the perspective that social reality, which shelters ‘religion,’ is constructed and

² “Religion” is not formed only by deities, as a typical western mind would assume (cf. *method*, below). The question is, however, genuine, due to the current state of knowledge.

evolves within communicative processes (cf. KNOBLAUCH, 2020). Due to idiosyncrasies in Biblical Studies and History of Religion, it is useful to recognize that these processes should not be reduced to a singular mediatic instance, e.g., written media. The fact grows in importance in an object that has not yielded written remains, except for three letters in a jar-handle of arguable dating (LEDERMAN, 1999, p. 139-142; SASS; FINKELSTEIN, 2016). Also, one should remind that religion does not happen abstractly, but materially (MEYER, 2020).

Besides materiality and media, the structures of communication also play a role in the construction of religion. The concept of “Magical-Mythical Networks” considers these structures on Iron Age I-IIA Benjamin’s Plateau. The region was organized as a complex chiefdom, i.e., a pre-state society with tribute mobilization, cycles between power levels, and sacralization of chiefs’ bloodlines (MILLER II, 2005). The interaction was in family ties within a radius of c. 10 km (LEHMANN, 2004; LEHMANN, 2012), a fact also hinted by the city planning (FINKELSTEIN, 2015; cf. CARDOSO, 2019, p. 179-181), and funerary spaces, also suggesting a rural aristocracy (LEHMANN; VARONER, 2018: 261, 263; cf. CARDOSO, 2019, p. 184-186). If these ties make useful a “[social-] network” perspective, the absence of a bureaucratic apparatus gives room for the “magical-mythical” concept. Despite resonant, the terminology does not reflect a religious-based concept, but a *communicological* one. Vilém Flusser (2014, p. 52-57) proposed that the communicational structures of pre-historical societies (i.e., societies without writing) present two features: (1) they are *mythical*, i.e., primarily oral, on which the sender is at the center and receivers around, in position to answer directly to the sender to form a dialogue; and (2) they are *magical*, i.e., the memory is intersubjectively transposed to material objects, which physically preserves the memory of gestures and usage.

In a nutshell, “Magical-Mythical Network” is the religious-symbolic system expressed in shared oral communication (e.g., myths, stories, legends) and materialized in objects (e.g., pottery, seals, talismans, figurines). Its communicative structure is circular, centered on ranked villages, whose peculiarities creates and were created due to the contact with the

environment and social dynamics. Two observations are needed. First, to be expressed in oral communication/artifacts means that these practices are not constrained to cultic structures, being pervasive in common life. Also, the network's asymmetry does not lead to chaos. Productive conditions generate systems of similar dispositions, i.e., as orchestrations without an orchestra leader, by the principle of common action (BOURDIEU, 2002, p. 169).

Concerning Sources

The critical understanding of sources must be at the center of the historical effort since, as Christoph Uehlinger (2001, p. 31) put it, “die Geschichte liegt nicht in den Quellen, aber sie braucht Quellen, um geschrieben werden zu können.” In that sense, Uehlinger (2001, p. 35) classifies sources by its relating position to historical events, the *primary* being those dated from archaeological standards (e.g., stratigraphy, typology) with relative accuracy, or created within a generation after the events³. The author warns, however, that this is not to say that primary sources cannot lie. José D’Assunção Barros’ (2019), in that sense, discerns different powers interacting on sources, classifying sources according to its: **(1) position**, which can be (1a) *temporal*, (1b) *spatial*, (1c) *ideological*, or (1d) *related to the problem*; **(2) quality**, which can be shattered in sources of content and material sources; **(3) intentionality**; and **(4) serialization**. The multiple possibilities in the same pool of historical evidence, emphasizes the importance of a well-designed research question.

From the vantage point, it is clear that the Benjaminite’s biblical narratives cannot be considered *primary sources* for the question. From a positional ground, the earlier Samuel manuscripts are from the third to second century BCE, on paleographic and text-critical grounds (LANGE, 2016), i.e., something about seven hundred years after the events portrayed and four hundred after earlier textual layers (on which, cf. DIETRICH, 2007, p. 272-284; MILSTEIN, 2016, p. 175-206). From an intentionality perspective, the

³ *Secondary* the ones without direct knowledge of events; *tertiary* with no access to primary sources; and *quaternary* with unchecked sources in a coherent, but acritical, narrative.

texts' genre is mainly composite and of legendary character and presents in the final form a plot with ideological and political ends (CARDOSO, 2019, p. 317-353).

In contrast, nine excavated sites can be assigned to the period: Beitin (Bethel), Tell el-Jib (Gibeon), Et-Tell (Ai?), Kh. Abū-Musarraḥ, Kh. ed-Dawwara, Kh. Nisieh, Kh. Raddana, Tell el-Fûl (Gibeah? Pharaton?), Tell en-Nasḥeh (Mizpah).⁴ A fruitful point of access is the onomastics and iconography. While anthroponomy has been extensively used for deities' names (e.g., NOTH, 1928; TIGAY, 1986; ZADOK, 1988), its use with toponymy, long-term structures (cf. ELITZUR, 2004), has demonstrated exciting possibilities (e.g., ZEVIT, 2001, p. 586-610). However, the scarcity of epigraphic finds from before the late ninth cent. BCE have led to claims that it would be impossible to name the deities of the highlands in the end of Iron Age I (FINKELSTEIN, 2015, p. 71, n. 6; but see ALBERTZ; SCHMITT, 2012, p. 245-386, 534-609; GOLUB, 2014). In this regard, the addition of the iconographic study of anepigraphic seals found in the region has the potential to contribute to the onomastic answer.

The Data *Visual Culture*

The visual culture comprises 67 seal-amulets, a figurine, and three other image-carriers. As an overview, one can analyze the artifacts by iconography, distribution, and typology. Considering iconography, three constellations are found, with symbols linked to: (1) fertility (29 seals = 43,2%); (2) protection (18=26,8%); (3) war / hunting (6=8,9%); (4) leadership (4=5,9%). There are 10 (14,9%) geometric or unreadable seals. The distribution of motifs

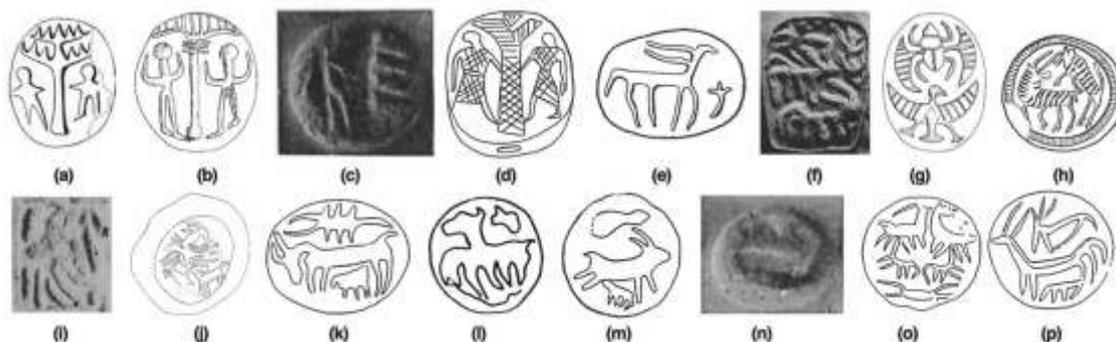
⁴ For the settlement's history, FINKELSTEIN, 2015, p. 57-84; MILLER II, 2005, p. 120-122; cf. CARDOSO, 2019, p. 177-196. Sites without Iron I layers: El-'Eizariya, El-Qubeibeh, Kh. Hayian, Nebi Samwil, Kh. Shilha. Kh. Qeiyafa, was not considered due to distance, Moza and Deir el-'Azar (Kh-Jearim) by the initial stage of excavations. On the later, FINKELSTEIN; RÖMER, 2019.

is asymmetric in the Plateau and region alike,⁵ what could be due to the in-between aspect. From the typological preferences for scaraboids (17=30,3%) and conoids (14=25%) and materials used (enstatite [12=24,4%], stone [10=20,4%]),⁶ is possible to argue for a local production in Iron IB/C. Scarabs (14=25%) and the few Egyptian motifs suggest a punctual Egyptian reinstallation, possibly between the reigns of Siamun and Sheshonq I (MÜNGER, 2005; KOCH, 2018).

From the data, it is possible to argue for the existence of five types of supernatural beings, which, in order of appearance, are: (1) mother-goddess; (2) weather-god; (3) warrior goddess; (4) warrior god; (5) desert god.

1. The mother-goddess

Figure 1 - Mother Goddess



Source: (a) Beitin (KEEL, 2010a, p. 28, n. 18), (b) el-Jib (KEEL, 2013, p. 466, n. 3), (c) Nasbeh (McCOWN, 1947, pl. 54.47), (d) Nasbeh (SCHROER, 2018, p. 566, n. 1581), (e) Beitin (KEEL, 2010a, p. 31, n. 22), (f) Nasbeh (McCOWN, 1947, pl. 55.75), (g) Nasbeh (SCHROER, 2008b), (h) Beitin (KEEL, 2010a, p. 22, n. 7), (i) Beitin (KEEL, 2010a, p. 24, n. 13), (j) el-Jib (KEEL, 2013, p. 472, n. 18), (k) Nasbeh (SHUVAL, 1990, p. 108, n. 84), (l) Nasbeh (SHUVAL, 1990, p. 106, n. 78), (m) Nasbeh (KEEL, 1985, p. 37, n. 14), (n) Nasbeh (McCOWN, 1947, pl. 54.29), (o) Nasbeh (KEEL, 1985, p. 36, n. 10), (p) Nasbeh (KEEL, 1985, p. 37, n. 15).

The most popular deity in the record is a goddess. The goddess may thus be linked to maternal care and worshippers' protection, as well as to livestock's prosperity and agriculture. Besides the cultic stand from et-Tell,

⁵ Agricultural motifs: Shephelah (Lachish, Beth-Shemesh, Gezer, Ekron), Benjamin/Judah (Beitin, Nasbeh, el-Jib, Jerusalem), country of Samaria (el-Far'ah North, Samaria, Rehov, Megiddo). Livestock motifs: Shephelah (Gezer, Beth-Shemesh), Benjamin (Nasbeh, Beitin). The "lord of animals" is present mainly in the Shephelah and also in Benjamin.

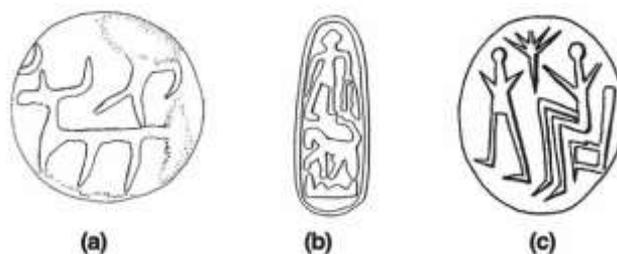
⁶ Autochthonous motifs suggest the same: (1) caprids under scorpion; (2) humans around a tree; (3) lord of animals; (4) female and male warrior deities. On distribution, see below.

with leonine imagery,⁷ five other groups compose the broader picture. The first is represented by worshippers flanking trees (**Fig. 1 a-d**). The typical 10th-9th century motif is linked to the cult with trees and implies maternal care and protection for the living and deceased (SCHROER, 2018, p. 326). The tree (palm?) can appear in vases (**Fig. 1 b?**) and represent dancing (SCHACHTER, 2010). The second group has caprids with a branch (**Fig. 1 e, f?**). The animal (caprid, gazelle) and branch (KEEL, 1995, p. 422f.) are both linked to the goddess imagery, evoking her fertility favors. The vulture appears since Bronze Age with lions, branches, and women, being linked to a tree-goddess (SCHROER, 2008a, p. 150-151, 216-219, n. 368, 450, 453). The figuration with the scarab (**Fig. 1 g**) hints to Nekhbet and the realm of death (SCHROER, 2008b).

Two other motifs are not exclusively linked to goddesses. The first is the lion attacking an animal (**Fig. 1 h-i**) that can have either sexual nuances (KEEL, 1995, fig. 360) or, after the conquest of Egypt, represent “victory” (KEEL; UEHLINGER, 1998, p. 120). Another motif linked to fertility is the [suckling] animals under Scorpius (**Fig. 1 j-p, f?**). The emergence of the Scorpius’ constellation in the sky marks the beginning of winter and is interpreted as an omen of flock prosperity and well-being (STAUBLI, 2009).

2. Weather God

Figure 2 - Weather God



Source: (a) el-Jib (KEEL, 2013, p. 474, n. 20), (b) Nasbeh (SHUVAL, 1990, p. 130, n. 35), (c) Nasbeh (KEEL; UEHLINGER, 1998, n. 181).

⁷ It is possible that the stand supported a tree, corroborating iconography (cf. Fig. 1 b?).

The Raddana krater and three seals suggest a weather-god. The first seal is the human figure above the bull (**Fig. 2 a**). The bull iconography emphasizes the fertility aspect of the weather god (ORNAN, 2001, p. 24-26), and at the Iron I, the menacing gesture represents his warrior nature (CORNELIUS, 1994, p. 262). The man on the lion and mountain (**Fig. 2 b**) is difficult to interpret. The lion and masculine figure suggest Baal, but the lack of wings, typical of Iron I, the Egyptian garment, and the undistinguishable object in the hand troubles the interpretation (SCHROER, 2018, p. 344). The god enthroned with lotus and worshiper (**Fig. 2 c**) can be seen as an enthroned weather-god typical from the transition between Late Bronze and Iron Age I (cf. KEEL; UEHLINGER, 1998, p. 58-59, fig. 56). The interpretation is possible if the so-called “tree” (KEEL; UEHLINGER, 1998, p. 154) was seen as a lotus flower, a more fitting solution.

3. Warrior Goddess

Figure 3 - Warrior Goddess

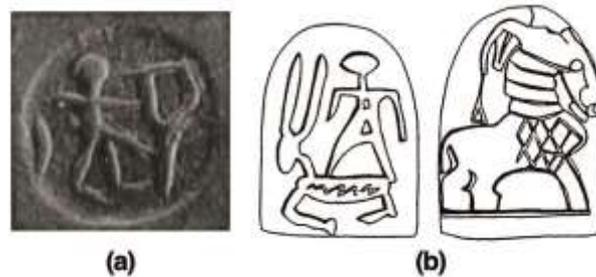


Source: (a) el-Jib 4 (KEEL, 2013, p. 466, n. 4), (b) el-Jib 8 (KEEL, 2013, p. 468, n. 8).

The human figures with non-threatening gestures above horses suggest that a warrior goddess was also in the imaginary of the region. The portrait is evident in two scaraboids with a worshipper and a human figure above a horse, the first one sits (**Fig. 3 a**), and the other standing (**Fig. 3 b**). The profile can be assigned to either Astarte or Anat (CORNELIUS, 2008, p. 44-45).

4. Warrior God

Figure 4 – Warrior God

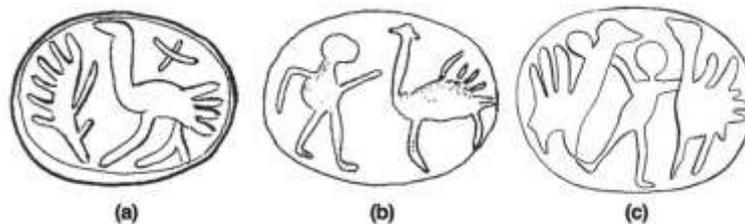


Source: (a) Nasbeh (McCOWN, 1947, pl. 54.30), (b) Nasbeh (SHUVAL, 1990, p. 143, n. 44).

The anthropomorphic figure on an (horned) animal with threatening gesture could hint the presence of a warrior god. That may be the case in **Fig. 4a**, because of the menacing gesture (CORNELIUS, 1994, p. 25-57), and **Fig. 4b** that is usually assigned to Resheph (CORNELIUS, 1994, p. 117-118; SCHROER, 2018, p. 342-343; cf. KOCH 2018, p. 643). The chthonic deity was popular in third and second mills. and was lowered to a supporting role to main deities (e.g., Ba'al, Haddad, El, Shamash) in the first mill. BCE. In the Hebrew Bible, he is first a deity that brings plague, then a demonic executor, but survived in the post-exilic texts attached to pestilence (Deut 32:24; Ps 78:48) (MÜNNICH, 2013).

5. Desert God

Figure 5 – Desert God



Source: (a) Beitin (KEEL, 2010a, p. 24, n. 12), (b) El-Jib (KEEL, 2013, p. 468, n. 5), (c) Nasbeh (KEEL, 1978, p. 104, n. 39).

The three appearances of ostriches suggest a desert god. The first is a representation of an ostrich with a plant and mark (**Fig. 5 a**), the second is a

human figure in front of an ostrich (**Fig. 5 b**), and the third is a human figure between ostriches (**Fig. 5 c**). The motif of human figures between menacing animals is found since the middle of the third mill. BCE, and possibly represents a hero facing powers of chaos (KEEL, 1978, p. 86-125; cf. SCHROER, 2018, p. 332). The ostriches of the first two seals can be interpreted against the later seal, which is usually linked to desert-gods (Job 39:13-16; cf. KEEL; UEHLINGER, 1998, p. 385). If one assumes the desertic setting, its identity may represent either an Edomite god Qôs or Yahweh (KNAUF, 1999a, 1999b).

*Textual Culture*⁸

Starting from biblical literature three toponyms were possibly originally connected to deities' shrines in the plateau: (1) *bêt 'el* (heb. House/Shrine of El, Josh 18:21); (2) *ba'al ḥāšōwr* (heb. Palace/Shrine of Baal, 2 Sam 13:23); (3) *bêt 'azmāwet* (heb. House/Shrine of Strong-Mot, Neh 7:28). Anat does not appear explicitly linked to a shrine, but *'ānātōwt* (heb. Anat is great) could denote a cultic preference. If one adds the anthroponomy to comparatively analyze the data, it is possible to find in the prefixes and suffixes of personal names predicate or epithets of worshipped deities. The relational terminology (*'āḥ*, heb. brother; *'āb* heb. father; *rp'*, heb. healer?; *mlk*, heb. king) and *šahar* (heb. Shahr; dawn) fell in the first category,⁹ while

⁸ The main contribution to Benjaminite onomastics is hitherto Zevit's (2001, p. 586-610). While his reconstruction is assumed, the data were reconsidered, and Sheshonq's list added.

⁹ Occurrences: **(1) 'āḥ**: *'āḥîrām* (heb. my [divine] brother [is] exalted, Num 26:38); *'āḥîšāḥar* (heb. my [d.] brother [is] dawn, 1 Chr 7:10); *'āḥiyyâ/ahyōw* (heb. my [d.] brother [is] yhwh, 1 Chr 8:7, 14, 31); *'āḥînō'am* (heb. my [d.] brother [is] pleasant, 1 Sam 14:50). **(2) 'āb**: *'ābîhûd* (heb. my father [is] glory, 1 Chr 8:3); *'ābîšûa'* (heb. my father [is] help, 1 Chr 8:4); *'ābî'el* (heb. my father [is] 'el, 1 Sam 9:1). **(3) mlk** as epithet (*malkî-šûa'*. heb. my king [is] help, 1 Sam 14:49), predicate (*melek*, heb. king, 1 Chr 8:35). **(4) šahar**: *'āḥîšāḥar* (heb. my [d.] brother [is] šahar, 1 Chr 7:10), *šēḥaryâ* (heb. šahar [is] yhwh, 1 Chr 8:26).

six names of divinities can be seen in anthroponyms (Baal, El, Mot, Anat, Shemesh, Yahweh).¹⁰

Using the relation between anthroponyms and toponyms (cf. Table 1), and assuming that they could provide higher historical accuracy, it is possible to name four divinities in the record: (1) *ba'al* (heb. Baal; lord); (2) *'el* (heb. El; god); (3) *mwt* (heb. Mot; death); (4) *'nt* (Anat). While the absence of *šmš* (heb. Shemesh; sun) is expected, Yahweh's is not. Zevit (2001, p. 595) provides three alternatives for the absence: (1) places named before Yahwism; (2) Yahwism was never widespread; (3) Yahweh was not linked to territorial sanctuaries, but to personal sanctuaries and shrines (e.g., heb. *yhwh yērā'e*, Gen 22.14)

Table 1 – Biblical Anthroponyms and Toponyms

| | <i>ba'al</i> | <i>rp'</i> | <i>mwt</i> | <i>'āh</i> | <i>mr</i> | <i>'nt</i> | <i>šmš</i> | <i>'el</i> | <i>yhwh</i> | <i>'āb</i> | <i>šahar</i> | <i>mlk</i> |
|--------------------------|--------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|------------|--------------|------------|
| Anthr.: Gen-Josh | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Anthr.: Judg- Sam | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 10 | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| Anthr.: 1Sam - | 2 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Toponyms | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 6 | 3 | 4 | 8 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 16 | 15 | 6 | 3 | 2 |

Source: Author (2020).

Besides biblical data, Sheshonq I's Bubastite Portal presents a hub of sites in its Southwestern name's group¹¹. The toponyms belong to three categories (RAINEY, 1978), topography, flora, and human production. Despite Kh. Jearim, Aijalon, and Zemaraim reinforce natural aspects and a connection with the aforementioned goddess, the only shrine-like term is Beth-Horon

¹⁰ Occurrences: (1) *ba'al*: *'ešba'al* (heb. Baal exists / Baal's man, 1 Chr 8:33, cf. 2 Sam 2:8); *mēpiba'al* (heb. Baal's beloved, 1 Chr 8:34). (2) *'el*: *yēdī'ā'el* (heb. knower of 'el, 1 Cron 7:6); *'elpā'al* (heb. 'el have done, 1 Chr 8:11); *mīkā'el* (heb. who [is] like 'el?, 1 Chr 8:16); *'ēlī'el* (heb. my 'el [is] 'el, 1 Chr 8:20). (3) *mwt*: *yērēmōwt* (heb. *mwt* [is] exalted, 1 Chr 7:7, 8; 8:14). (4) *'nt*: *'ānātōwt* (heb. Anat is great, 1 Chr 7:8); *'antōtiyyā* (heb. Anate [is] *yhwh*, 1 Chr 8:24). (5) *šmš*: *šamšēray* (heb. *šemeš* keeps, 1 Chr 8:26).

¹¹ **col. II**: 23. Gibeon (eg. *Qb'āḥ*); 24. Beth-Horon (eg. *Bšḥwāḥwn*); 25. Qiryathaim (eg. *Qāḏtm*); 26. Aijalon (eg. *'lywrrwn*). **col. V**: 57. Zemaraim (eg. *Dā[m]rwm*); 58. Migdol (eg. *[Mg]drw*) (RITNER, 2009).

(Column II, n. 24; cf. Josh 18:13-14). The Canaanite god Horon was a chthonic deity invoked in curses in Ugarit and worshipped in different forms in Egypt (RÜTERSWORDEN, 1999), and may appear as a falcon¹² in Tanis with Ramses II.

A Benjaminite Pantheon?

The wide array of visual culture attributes and names of textual culture may appear chaotic at first sight. However, once relying on the assumption that different media conceals different shared conceptions of an ancient society, it is possible to set up the puzzle. Even considering the devoid of names of primary data, the different roles performed are evident. Despite not being possible to talk about a *pantheon*, by the lack of hierarchy and by the sources' nature, one should assume that societies often project social conceptions into heavenly spheres, producing sociomorphic frameworks of interaction between deities. The society's organization as a chiefdom, on which the leaders are divinized, may thus represent the organizing concept.

The assumption would lead to two maybe three levels of deities. At the first level, the main figures of the society are probably represented in the form of a divine couple. The most influential was the mother-goddess, who ensured sustenance, harvest (**Fig. 1 a-d**), and fertility of animals (**Fig. 1 e, f, j-p**) and human beings alike (**Fig. 1 h-i**). It is not possible to name the goddess from textual evidence, but from the context one may suggest Asherah. The father figure was a weather-god, as head of the clan, which over his throne (**Fig. 2 c**) ensured nutrition and the good weather to the harvest and livestock (**Fig. 2 a, b**). The textual record is not clear on the name of this deity, which can be either El or Baal. In this regard, one can consider the contested names of the sons of Saul as evidence of some sort of *damnation memoriae*, e.g., 'ešba'al (1 Chr 8:33) // 'iš-bōšet (2 Sam 2:8). In that case, Baal option would be

¹² The repertoire yielded a falcon amulet at Nasbeh (HERRMANN, 1994, p. 591) and a seal in el-Jib (KEEL, 2013, p. 468, no. 6), but from an iconological basis, they were linked to Horus.

the best fit, which may have presented himself in a hybridized form with EI (**Fig. 2 c**).

The second sociomorphic level is represented by the children and second in command of the chieftom. The goddess of war and hunt is the main figure (**Fig. 3 a-b**), and by her side, the chthonic deity of war and plague (**Fig. 4 a-b**). From the textual record, it is possible to name Anat as the warrior goddesses, while the warrior is not easily linked with Mot, whose iconography is debated. The desert deity, as an outsider, was responsible for fighting against chaotic forces and appeared in his heroic (**Fig. 5 c**), and benevolent aspects (**Fig. 5 b**). The deity's name is difficult to assert but may represent Yahweh by the broader biblical context (e.g., 1 Sam 13:16; 1 Chr 8:35-37).

Conclusions

The present article presented the “goddesses and gods of Saul,” i.e., the supernatural beings supposedly worshipped in Benjamin's Plateau in the Iron Age I-IIA. The task of identifying deities in a specific part of the Central Hill Country at the end of Iron Age I was described in the past as an impossibility due to distortions in biblical portrayal (FINDELSTEIN, 2015, p. 71, n. 6). To take up the challenge, a theoretical framework was proposed that considered the structures of communication and media of the object, entitled “magical-mythical networks.” From this starting point, the research investigated the object's iconographic constellations and pertinent onomasticon, leading to the suggestion of a sociomorphic organization of these gods.

One should emphasize that the data presented does not represent a comprehensive reconstruction of the beliefs of Iron Age Benjamin's Plateau. In the first place, the sources do not represent all social strata since the archaeological remains are possibly linked to a rural aristocracy. Also, one should have in mind the different uses of the artifacts, a question not addressed here. Secondly, the statistical choice left aside other figurations

that were considered less representative.¹³ Nevertheless, the higher echelon of the data can arguably provide a glimpse of the chiefs' cultural imagination.

From these grounds, two levels of deities were suggested. In the first tier, a divine couple of a mother-goddess (?), and an enthroned weather-god, Baal. The second echelon was built with functional roles, on which there was the presence of a goddess of war and a chthonic warrior deity that probably attended by the names of Anat and maybe Mot. While the reproductive aspect was in charge of the pantheon heads, the other components ensured the chieftdom survival in the face of danger. In this regard, the outsider deity, of desertic origins, was in charge of chaos and may have attended by Yahweh.

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¹³ E.g., one amulet of Bes and one of Horus (HERRMANN, 1994, p. 365, 591, nos. 416, 861).

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