

Isreal

Practices

Evidence points towards the existence of a Pagan Yahwism in ancient Isreal. During the time of the ancient Israelites it was not uncommon for individual cities to identify themselves as the subjects of a chief divinity. For the ancient Israelites this divinity was Yahweh. However El, Ahserah and Baal-Hadad were also worshiped.

Two types of burials were commonly practiced by the ancient Israelites. The first, found along the coast, was an agglomeration of burial types which included pit, cist and jar burials. In which typically one to three clothed and cloaked individuals were buried together. These burials were typically equipped with pottery from local surrounding cultures (Mycenean and Cypriot pottery during the twelfth and eleventh centuries B.C.E; and Phoenician, Cypro- Phoenician and Assyrian pottery during the tenth and eleventh centuries B.C.E.). Earlier burials contained a wide range of provisions including amuletic jewelry, pendants, bangles, rings, eyes of Horus, scarabs and Bes figurines as well as tools.¹

The second burial practices reflected influence from the Amorites and Canaanites burial practices which consisted largely of family tombs dug into the bedrock, often constructed below the house or cut into a hillside adjacent to the city. Such large communal tombs, which are known to have served extended patrimonial households, functioned for many generations. Similarly, the Israelis built a central subterranean tomb complex intended for an extended family, featuring a central room off which smaller chambers opened to accommodate individual family members. Due to physical restrictions most tombs were built in the adjoining hillsides.

There is no direct evidence of feasting associated with early funerals. However it was common practice that following the deposition and decomposition of the body, the bones were gathered within special repositories within the tomb, often below the benches upon which bodies could be laid.

Additionally, the burials commonly included ceramic vessels (presumably with their contents), amulets, and other items suggesting a range of interpretations from preparation and adornment of the body after death.

Nourishment in the afterlife seems to have been of paramount importance. Undisturbed tombs yielded bowls of foodstuffs, jugs for liquid, lamps for light and jars and juglets for scented oils, perfumes, spices, and oil for lamps. Additionally, it was common practice to give food to the dead who were viewed as deified beings.²

During the end of the Middle, and throughout the Late Bronze Age, pendants adorned the bodies of buried females. They consistently depicted a female goddess, not unlike the ceramic figurines commonly found during this same period, with emphasis on breasts and the pubic area (adopting Egyptian artistic tradition associated with Hathor) suggesting the identification of the goddess with Asherah or Astarte.³

Deities and Important Concepts

- Yahweh
A typical ancient Near Eastern "divine warrior" who leads the heavenly army against Israel's enemies. He and Israel are bound by a covenant (a feature unique in ancient Near Eastern religion) under which Yahweh will protect Israel, and Israel in turn will not worship other god. The name translates into "he causes to be" or "he creates."⁴

¹ Bloch-Smith, Elizabeth M. "The Cult of the Dead in Judah: Interpreting the Material Remains." Web. 7 June 2013. <http://cnes.cla.umn.edu/courses/pdfs/3070%20Web%20files/Web13.pdf>

² Ibid.

³ "The Archaeology of Ritual and Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant and the Origins of Judaism | Aaron A. Burke - Academia.edu." Web. 05 June 2013.

http://www.academia.edu/1074403/The_Archaeology_of_Ritual_and_Religion_in_Ancient_Israel_and_the_Levant_and_the_Origins_of_Judaism

⁴ "Yahweh." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 06 Jan. 2013. Web. 05 June 2013. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yahweh>

- El
The supreme God, the Father of humankind and all creatures and the husband of the Goddess Asherah.
- Baal-Hadad
The Syrian god of storms and thunder, called "lord of thunder" worshiped in the Levant region. His symbol is the bull. Evidence of his worship is found in monumental temples and the royal mortuary cult during the Amorite dynasties.
- Ahserah or Astarte
"Queen of Heaven". Mother goddess and female consort to Yahweh. Originally wife of El.

Modern Adaptations

- Bury the person wrapped in a cloak, which represents the experiences of their life.
- Bury offerings of food such as grain with the deceased, with the idea that the deceased memory will be cared for by speaking of them not only at Samhain, but when friends and family gather together. Say something like the following.

We offer this food as a token that you shall be remembered.
We will speak of you at the feast for the dead.
We will share stories of you when we gather together.
We will raise a glass in your name.
We will feast and reminisce.

- For a female include an amulet depicting the goddess, for a male include an amulet depicting the god.

Sample Readings

*Inscription on a tomb*⁵

Blessed will be Ariyahu to Yahweh and his Asherah

This blessing was found in a tomb. It demonstrates the inclusion of pagan elements in ancient Israeli worship.

Resources

- The Archaeology of Ritual and Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant and the Origins of Judaism
http://www.academia.edu/1074403/The_Archaeology_of_Ritual_and_Religion_in_Ancient_Israel_and_the_Levant_and_the_Origins_of_Judaism
- The cult of the dead in Judah: Interpreting the material remains
<http://cnes.cla.umn.edu/courses/pdfs/3070%20Web%20files/Web13.pdf>

⁵ Stern, Ephraim. "Pagan Yahwism: The Folk Religion of Ancient Israel." Pagan Yahwism: The Folk Religion of Ancient Israel. Web. 5 June 2013. <http://members.bib-arch.org/publication.asp?PubID=BSBA&Volume=27&Issue=3&ArticleID=1>