Religion of Israel
Religion of the Bible

September 20, 2006

- Electronic Reserves, one last time
- Definitions: Religion of the Bible vs. Religion of Israel
- Multiplicity of voices in biblical texts: textual sources in the Bible
- Religion of Israel: Women as a point of departure

One Last Time:
Electronic Reserves

Let’s go to the web and try it again.

Definitions: Religion of the Bible vs. Religion of Israel

- Religion: the practices, beliefs, and stories that underlie a community’s understanding of the world and give it coherence

  **For present purposes**
  - Religion of the Bible: The set of *proper* acts, rituals, and dispositions (e.g., “loving” God) demanded by the authors and editors of the Bible
  - Religion of the Israelites: The variety of acts, experiences, beliefs, etc., *practiced by* Israelites. May include (e.g.)
    - “Improper” acts, etc. (from perspective of Bible)
    - Other *ranges* of acts (e.g., the religious lives of women)
Multiplicity of Voices in Biblical Texts: Textual sources in the Bible

- Judges 1 and Joshua (acc. to Callaway): Biblical authors may differ on perspective toward major events.
- Authorship of Torah/Pentateuch: Documentary Hypothesis (theory of multiple, differing authors within a book).
  - See handout (p. 1).
  - Will apply this idea later in Semester.
- Method/perspective applies to other books as well.
  - Also applies to Biblical law.
  - Handout p. 1 gives example Passover sacrifice.
  - P. 2 summarizes calendars. Note e.g., Leviticus includes more festivals, more concerned with precise dates.

Documentary Hypothesis

- Four sources: J, E, P, and D.
- Two sources identified by names for God in Genesis:
  - J for Jehovah (Yahweh) (usually trans. “LORD”)
  - E for Elohim (usually trans. “God”)
- D identified by language, themes; also generally corresponds with Deuteronomy.
- P (for “Priest”), is the framework into which J, E embedded in making up Genesis-Numbers.

Religion of the Bible: Some Major Themes

- Acts: Sacrifice or other dedication, donation of property. Donors may be pilgrims (Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits/Weeks (Shavuot), Sukkot/Tabernacles)
- Persons: Priests assigned the role of performing, mediating sacrifices, divination.
- Locations: Sacred locations; may involve pilgrimage. For much of the Bible, only one sacrificial place, Jerusalem Temple (e.g., Deut 16 in handout).
- Stories: In particular the Exodus is the central story, especially in Torah. (Note: agricultural festivals—become commemorations of the Exodus).
- Time: Performance of acts in their appointed times. But time can be relative (e.g., at/after harvest) or fixed (15th day of 7th month).
Religion of Ancient Israel: Women as a Point of Departure

- Religion of the Bible is exclusive—male priests preside—and focuses on male heads of household
- Women are markers of "improper" (offering cakes to the Queen of Heaven) or "unofficial" (e.g., virgins bewailing the fate of Jephthah’s daughters) religion
- Interact with sacred places, personalities in cases generally relating to (in)fertility
- Suggests: a range of practices, concerns, outside the specific interest of Biblical law or narrative. (E.g., We know that people married, and how it was conceived as a matter of households and property, but not how/whether it was celebrated)

Drawings, inscriptions from Kurillet Ajrud, 8th C. BCE