

The Priestly Reminder Stones and Ancient Near Eastern Votive Practices*

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According to Exod 28:9–12, Aaron is to carry the names of the twelve sons of Israel (Jacob) on his shoulders and over his heart when he enters the sanctuary. The two shoulder-pieces of his ephod are to hold lapis stones with seal engravings of the sons' names in the order of their birth, six names per stone; Aaron is to carry these "Reminder (*zikkaron*) Stones for the sons of Israel . . . upon his two shoulder-pieces as a reminder before the Lord."¹ Similarly, the

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1 'Reminder', not 'remembrance' or 'memorial', is the best rendering of *zikkaron* in vv. 12 and 29 as well as Exod 13:9; 17:14; 30:16; Num 5:15, 18; 10:10; 17:5; 31:54; Josh 4:7; Zech 6:14. It is associated or interchanged with 'ot, 'sign', in Exod 13:9; Num 17:5 (see v. 3); Josh 4:7 (see v. 6), and with *venizkartem*, "that you may be remembered" in Num 10:10 (see v. 9), and is glossed with *mazkeret*, 'recalls', in Num 5:15. In most of these passages it refers to a concrete object that "evokes remembrance" (H. Eising, "zkr, zakhar," in *TDOT* 4:77); see B. S. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 66–70; M. V. Fox, "The Sign of the Covenant," *RB* 81 (1974): 584–85. According to Ziony Zevit, the *zikkaron* in Isa 57:8 "may have been some object that functioned as a pneumatic device for the deity, that helped an individual possessing it to draw the deity's attention to himself (cf. Exod 13:9; 17:14; 28:29–30; 30:16)" (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* [London and New York: Continuum, 2001], 529 n. 56). In a few passages it refers to a date or ceremony that serves such a function (Exod 13:9; Num 10:10; see also Lev 23:24). See also Palmyrene Aramaic *dkrm*, 'memorial (object which serves to call a person to mind, favorably)' (D. R. Hillers, *PAT* 357; see also 94, the bilingual *PAT* 472 line 1, where the Greek version has *μνημειον*, 'monument'); *CIS* 2.338.1 (Nabataean), cited in *DNSWI* 1:331; *KAI* 241.1 and 257.1 (Hatran). For "as a reminder" see

“breastpiece of decision” is to contain twelve gemstones with seal engravings of the twelve sons’ names, for the twelve tribes,² so that Aaron may “carry [their] names on the breastpiece of decision over his heart, when he enters the sanctuary, as a reminder before the LORD at all times” (vv. 15–29). The stones on the shoulder-pieces and those on the breastpiece are all to be framed in gold.

This is one of several priestly regulations that prescribe objects and practices to serve as a reminder of the Israelites to God. The others concern the “expiation money” (Exod 30:16), the gold booty taken from the Midianites (Num 31:54), and the blowing of trumpets when fighting off invaders and when making festival sacrifices (Num 10:9–10). In all these cases, the aim of the reminders is not to make God recall the Israelites, as if He has forgotten them, but to secure His favorable attentiveness to them and to their needs.³ This is made explicit in the case of Num 10:9: “that you may be remembered (*venizkartem*) before the LORD your God and be delivered from your enemies.”⁴

The desire to be remembered by God, to enjoy His favorable attention, is a natural one for the religious mind, and it is expressed regularly in the Bible and elsewhere. Samson, Hannah, and Jeremiah request God’s remembrance in specific situations of distress or need (Judg 16:28; 1 Sam 1:11; Jer 15:15), as do the petitioners in Ps 25:7; 74:2; 89:51; 106:4; 119:49; and Lam 5:1. In other passages God is asked to remember the past virtues or devotion of individuals

B. K. Waltke and M. P. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 209 no. 42.

2 Cf. Exod 24:4, where twelve uninscribed pillars represent the twelve tribes of Israel.

3 The sense of *favorably* attentive is conveyed by the Palestinian targums, which frequently render *zkr* and derivatives with *dkr ltb* (e.g. *d[w]krn ltb*, *Targum Neofiti* to Exod 28:12, 29); see A. Hurvitz, *Bên Lāšôn le-Lāšôn: The Transition Period in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1972), 54–56 (Hebrew; see below for further discussion). For *zakhar* and *zikkaron* meaning ‘be (favorably) mindful, attentive’ (rather than ‘recall someone forgotten’), see Hillers, *PAT*, 357 (cited in n. 1); Gesenius-Buhl, 198a (“an etw. denken, was einem schon bekannt ist, gedenken”); cf. Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 10f; Eising, “*zkr, zakhar*,” 67, 73 (‘be mindful of’), 79 (*zikkaron* = ‘favorable “consideration”’). Akkadian *ḫissatu*, ‘remembrance, reminder’, has the sense of “(divine) grace” (*CAD* H, 202b).

4 Fox, “The Sign of the Covenant,” 585, cites G. von Rad’s apt comment in connection with such regulations: “If we try to find in the cultic vocabulary of the Old Testament a general formula answering to the significance of the cult for Israel, we can say that the cult brings Israel to the remembrance of Jahweh. At least, the expression God’s remembrance (*zikkaron*) occurs frequently, and is brought into relationship with a great variety of cultic activities” (G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* [trans. D. M. G. Stalker; New York: Harper & Row, 1962], 1:242).

or of Israel as a whole (Exod 32:13; Deut 9:27; 2 Kgs 20:3; Jer 18:12; Ps 20:4; Ps 132:1; Neh 5:19; 6:14; 13:14, 22, 31; 2 Chr 6:42), or to remember His covenant with Israel (Jer 14:21; Neh 1:8). In still other passages God promises to remember His covenant (Gen 9:15–16; Lev 26:42, 45; Ezek 16:60). Numerous passages state that God does remember or has remembered a person or Israel (Gen 8:1; 19:29; 30:22; Exod 2:24; 6:5; 1 Sam 1:19; Jer 2:2; Ps 9:13; 98:3; 115:12; 136:23) or His covenant (Ps 105:8, 42; 106:45; 111:5). And of course in all such cases, God’s remembering means acting on behalf of those He remembers: blessing them (note Ps 115:12–15), granting their wishes (Ps 20:3–4), granting them children (Gen 30:22; 1 Sam 1:11), having mercy on them (Ps 106:45–46), protecting them or saving them (Jer 2:2–3; Gen 8:1).

In the Priestly Tabernacle, however, there is no oral prayer such as those just cited. The priest’s verbal acts are limited to the Priestly Benediction (Lev 9:22f.; Num 6:22–27), confession of the Israelites’ sins on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:21), and the adjuration of a woman accused of adultery (Num 5:19–22). All the priest’s other acts are wordless.⁵ In the place of an oral prayer, as Benno Jacob recognized, the “Reminder Stones” constituted Aaron’s silent prayer, “his prayer to God for the Israelites, that God give them what they need” [“Gebet, an Gott für die Israeliten, dass Gott ihnen gebe, was sie bedürfen”], just as the trumpet-blast reminders in Numbers 10 constitute the prayer of the entire people.⁶ It is reasonable to assume that these “reminders” implicitly entreated God for the same favors that the Priestly Benediction invokes: blessing, protection, favor, and wellbeing (note Ps 115:12–15: “The LORD is mindful of us (*zekharamu*). He will bless us. . . . May the LORD increase your numbers, yours and your children’s also. May you be blessed by the LORD, Maker of heaven and earth”). Each of these reminders approaches

5 See Y. Kaufmann, *Toldot Hā’emūnā Hayisre’ ēlīt* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute; Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1955), 2:476–77 (= *The Religion of Israel* [trans. and abridged by M. Greenberg; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960], 303); I. Knohl, “Between Voice and Silence: The Relationship Between Prayer and Temple Cult,” *JBL* 115 (1996): 17–30.

6 B. Jacob, *Der Pentateuch: Exegetisch-kritische Forschungen* (Leipzig: Veit, 1905), 315 (cf. B. Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus* (trans. W. Jacob in association with Y. Elman; [Hoboken, N.J.: KTAV, 1992], 918); so, too, N. M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 179 at 28:12: the stones function “as an invocation of God to be mindful of his people Israel. . . .” Similarly J. Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 75 s.v. “you may be remembered.” C. Houtman, *Exodus* (3 vols.; Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 3:476, renders *lezikkaron* in Exod 28:12 as “to focus the attention (of YHWH) on the Israelites.”

God via different senses: the trumpet-blasts by His hearing and the priestly stones by His vision, stimulated by their inscriptions.

What I believe has not received attention is how the inscriptions on the Reminder Stones, carried into God's presence in the sanctuary, are related to certain votive and epigraphic practices in the ancient Near East. Two aspects of these inscriptions point to this connection: their function in seeking God's favorable attention and particularly their seal-like character.

Ancient Near Eastern Votives⁷

The connection between votive practices and epigraphy has been well described by W. W. Hallo. As Hallo notes, "the optimal dedicatory, or votive, offering" was "the statue of the worshiper set up in the cella of the deity and inscribed with his prayer, which was conceived thereby as proffered perpetually by the statue of the worshiper to the statue of the deity, both statues serving as images or surrogates of their originals" (in a footnote Hallo adds that "the result was often a chapel filled with statues").⁸ However, people could rarely afford votive statues, and "[l]ess costly votives were available: usually elaborate stone carvings and replicas of bowls, maceheads, seals and other tools and weapons of daily life." These objects bore inscriptions that either stated the objects' purpose—to secure the long life of the donor and/or his designated beneficiaries; prayed for success; or thanked the deity. They were typically left "on permanent deposit in the cella of the temple, close to the niche which held the statue of the deity. [They were] considered as taking the place of the suppliant, and relieving him of the need to proffer his prayer in his

7 Etymologically, the commonly-used term "votive" is appropriate only for objects or inscriptions offered in consequence of a vow (such as *KAI* 201). Its use in the context of Mesopotamia has been rightly criticized since there is little evidence that this is the case with most of the objects or inscriptions so described. A better term would be "dedicatory." See A. K. Grayson, review of A. Salonen, *Die Hausgeräte der alten Mesopotamier* . . . (1966), in *JAOS* 90 (1970): 529; G. van Driel, review of R. S. Ellis, *Foundation Deposits in Ancient Mesopotamia* (1968), in *JAOS* 93 (1973): 68. However, the widespread use of "votive" in scholarly literature makes its replacement impractical, and its continued use may be justified by the employment of the verb "devote" as a mere synonym of "dedicate" (despite the fact that this term, likewise, derives ultimately from Latin *vovere*, "to vow").

8 W. W. Hallo, "Letters, Prayers, and Letter-Prayers," *Proceedings of the Seventh World Congress of Jewish Studies* . . . 1977. *Volume 2: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1981), 25–26.

own person, orally and perpetually.”⁹ The votive seals, like the larger objects, were no doubt deposited in the sanctuary, in order to convey to the deity the prayers inscribed on them, in place of the donor himself or his statue.¹⁰ Some votive seals were placed on a deity’s statue, on the crown¹¹ or suspended from the neck.¹² Others were deposited at unspecified locations in sanctuaries.¹³ They are well represented in the “inventories of the divine garments and accoutrements.”¹⁴

- 9 Hallo, “Individual Prayer in Sumerian,” *JAOS* 88 (1988): 75.
- 10 For the seal serving “in effect as a symbolic representation of the individual,” see Hallo, “‘As the Seal Upon Thine Arm’: Glyptic Metaphors in the Biblical World,” in *Ancient Seals and the Bible* (ed. L. Gorelick and E. Williams-Forte; Malibu, Calif.: Undena, 1984), 8 (a revised version of this article appears as “‘As the Seal Upon Thy Heart’: Glyptic Roles in the Biblical World,” *BR* 1 [1985]: 20–27). A. L. Oppenheim described seals as “identifying marks” and “‘carriers’ of the individuality of the person who wears and uses them. . . .” (*The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* [Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1956], 277). Cf. E. A. Speiser: “The cylinder seal . . . served as the religious and legal surrogate for the person who wore it. . . .” (*Genesis* [AB 1; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964], 298; similarly in “Cuneiform Law and the History of Civilization,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 107 [1963]: 538). But note the dissent of M. Malul, *Knowledge, Control, and Sex: Studies in Biblical Thought, Culture, and Worldview* (Tel Aviv-Jaffa: Archaeological Center Publications, 2002), 47.
- 11 Cf. “Cylinder seals . . . suitable as gems for the crown of Anu,” *ABL* 498.16, cited in *CAD* A1, 154d.
- 12 F. Thureau-Dangin, “Une donation a la déesse Ušur-amassu d’Uruk,” *RA* 19 (1922): 86 (this and other examples are cited by Hallo, “‘As the Seal Upon Thine Arm,’” 12). For a necklace containing seals see Pritchard, *ANEP*, fig. 237.
- 13 The seal of Marduk-zakir-shumi mentioned above was found in the Esagila Temple of Babylon (B. L. Goff, “The Role of Amulets in Mesopotamian Ritual Texts,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 19 [1956]: 31). Many votive seals are listed in “inventories of the divine garments and accoutrements” (Hallo, “‘As the Seal Upon Thine Arm,’” 9). Why certain votive seals were found far from the statues of the deities to whom they are dedicated is unknown (see, e.g., A. F. Rainey, “The Cuneiform Inscription on a Votive Cylinder from Beer-Sheba,” in Y. Aharoni, ed., *Beer-Sheba I: Excavations at Tel Beer-Sheba, 1969–71 Seasons* [Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Institute of Archaeology, 1973], 65; for a suggestion as to how the seal reached Beer-Sheba, see N. Na’aman, “The Contribution of the Suḫu Inscriptions to the Study of the History of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah,” *Zion* 69 [2003/04] 138–139).
- 14 Hallo, “‘As the Seal Upon Thine Arm,’” 9. Since “even such objects proved too expensive for the masses,” the worshiper could also petition the deity by means of a letter “deposited at the feet of the cult-statue much as generations of worshipers have inserted their letters to God in the chinks of the Western Wall” (Hallo, “Letters, Prayers, and Letter-Prayers,” 2; “Individual Prayer in Sumerian,” 79 n. 74).

Votive Inscriptions

The divine favors requested in the Priestly Benediction—blessing, protection, favor, and wellbeing—are typical of the types of favors requested in votive inscriptions. A few brief Hebrew inscriptions of this type are known:

- The stone bowl from Kuntillet Ajrud,¹⁵ with the owner's or donor's name (*ʾobadyau ben ʾadnah*) incised on its rim followed by the formula “may he be blessed by YHWH” (*brk hʾYHWH*).¹⁶ This bowl, too heavy (ca. 200 kg.,

15 Z. Meshel, *Kuntillet Ajrud: A Religious Centre from the Time of the Judaeen Monarchy on the Border of Sinai* (Israel Museum Catalogue no. 175; Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1978), 18 (Hebrew; English section, 12) and fig. 10.

16 Since the use of *l-* to introduce the agent of a passive verb is rare, “may he be blessed by YHWH” may not be a grammatically precise translation. D. Pardee and T. Muraoka have argued that *barukh PN l-DN* is simply the passive of *barekh PN l-DN*, “bless PN to DN,” i.e. to entreat the deity to bless someone, an idiom now well known in inscriptions. The passive would then mean “may people (constantly) ask the deity to bless so-and-so” or “the deity is (hereby) asked to bless so-and-so.” See D. Pardee, “The Preposition in Ugaritic,” *UF* 8 (1976): 221–23; T. Muraoka, “Hebrew Philological Notes,” *Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute* 5 (1979): 92–94; Joüon §132f note (1). This idea may have a parallel in the use of the comparable Aramaic formula *dkyr ltb* (see below) in Aramaic inscriptions; see J. Healy, “May He Be Remembered for Good . . .,” in *Targumic and Cognate Studies: Essays in Honour of Martin McNamara*, (ed. K. J. Cathcart and M. Maher; JSOTSup 230; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 183, 185f. (see also *COS* 2:165 n. 3). Healy argues that in some cases the formula means that whoever sees the inscription or the votive object in question should mention the named individual favorably; cf. the postscript to the Akkadian inscription of Idrimi (*ANET*, 558) and Ps 129:8. Or perhaps it is paralleled in the idea expressed in the *Birkat HaMazon* (the Jewish Grace After Meals) in which guests pray that God bless the host and his family and add: “In heaven may they (i.e., angels) plead for them and for us so that we may have enduring wellbeing (*šalom*) and receive blessing (*berakhah*) from the Lord. . . .” (cf. *b. Hul.* 92a and perhaps Job 33:23). In any case, despite its grammatical imprecision the translation “may he be blessed by YHWH” accurately conveys the point of the formula since the ultimate goal of such wishes is to induce God to favor the person on whose behalf blessing is invoked (cf. Gen 27:33). The formula seems to be the equivalent of such formulas as *birkat YHWH ʾaleikhem* (Ps 129:8) and especially *yevarekhekha YHWH* (Num 6:22–27; Ruth 2:4b, a greeting formula equivalent to *YHWH ʾimmakhem* in 2:4a and *barukh attah le-YHWH* in 1 Sam 15:13). See especially Ps 115:15 where *berukhim attem le-YHWH* is equivalent to *YHWH . . . yevarekh* in vv. 12–13); note also the active formulation (*ybrk* etc.) in which the subject is the deity, in several of the inscriptions cited below (NSI no. 7; *COS* 2:42 [S. Gitin, T. Dothan, and J. Naveh, “A Royal Dedicatory Inscription from Ekron,” *IEJ* 47 (1997): 12]; *KAI* 10.8; 18:8), the Ammonite stamp seal cited below (N. Avigad, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* [rev. and completed by B. Sass; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities; Israel Exploration Society; Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997], no. 876

or 440 lbs.) for utilitarian purposes, must have had a religious function. Although it is debated whether Kuntillet Ajrud was primarily a religious center,¹⁷ that the site had some religious significance seems assured by the fact that several of the inscriptions found there are of a religious nature.¹⁸ The blessing formula incised on this bowl, “may PN be blessed by DN,” was in later times sometimes inscribed in sanctuaries.¹⁹

- The first line of the so-called “Barley Letter” from Samaria is probably also a votive inscription and not really part of a letter. The surviving part of the line, *brk šlm* [. . .], “blessed be Shallum [. . .],” may be restored as “blessed be Shallum [by DN].” This line, incised near and parallel to the rim of a bowl, was probably inscribed when the bowl was still intact and therefore relates to the bowl or its contents.²⁰ The inscription was found in a trench at Samaria; whether it was actually donated to a sanctuary is uncertain.

[hereafter Avigad-Sass]); as well as *KAI* 26A iii, 2 and numerous other West Semitic inscriptions.

- 17 Meshel, *Kuntillet Ajrud*, 32–33 (Hebrew; English section, 19–20); idem, “Teman, Horvat,” in *NEAEHL* 4:1458–64; contrast J. M. Hadley, “Kuntillet ‘Ajrud: Religious Centre or Desert Way Station?” *PEQ* 125 (1993): 116–24.
- 18 See *COS* 2.47A–B and 2.47D; the request in *COS* 2.47C that the deity “prolong (their) days” is a component of many votive inscriptions (see below). The Ajrud *pithoi* include letters that may be abbreviations of terms for types of offerings; see Meshel, *Kuntillet Ajrud*, 18 (Hebrew; English section, 11); J. Renz and W. Röllig, *Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik* (3 vols.; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995–2002), 1:53 n. 2.
- 19 M. Lidzbarski, *Ephemeris für semitische Epigraphik* (Giessen: Ricker, 1915), 3:93–116; and TAD 4:266–285 (Abydos [Osiris temple] and other sites in Egypt, Persian period); *KAI* nos. 244:1 and 246:1, from Hatra, Iraq, end of the first through the middle of the third century C.E.; J. Naveh, *‘Al Pesefas va-Even (On Stone and Mosaic)* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Carta, 1978), 66, a sixth century C.E. synagogue votive inscription from Husifah (“may they be blessed” [minus “by DN”]). Cf. also the Palmyrene dedicatory inscription on a relief, *PAT* 1719.4.
- 20 R. Hestrin and M. Dayagi-Mendels, eds., *Inscriptions Reveal* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1978), 49 no. 41. As I have noted, this line is independent of the lines written below it and it was probably the only thing inscribed on the bowl when it was still complete, indicating the votive nature of the bowl. See J. Tigay, *You Shall Have No Other Gods: Israelite Religion in the Light of Hebrew Inscriptions* (HSS 31; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 26 n. 28. The other two lines are written in a smaller script and are not parallel to the first line, from which they are separated by a space; they were probably written on the surviving sherd of the bowl after it was broken. For the separateness of the lines (though understanding the inscription differently), see S. Birnbaum, “The Sherds,” in J. W. Crowfoot et al. *The Objects from Samaria* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1957), 12–15; A. Lemaire, *Inscriptions hébraïques: introduction, traduction, commentaire. 1: Les Ostraca* (Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient 9; Paris: Cerf, 1977); Renz and Röllig, *Handbuch*, 1:136–37.

- The inscription on a bowl from Samaria reading *brk 'hz* is probably another example of the same formula, meaning “blessed be Ahaz [by DN].”²¹

That this handful of Hebrew examples belongs to the genre of ancient Near Eastern votive inscriptions is clear from their many counterparts in non-Hebrew votive inscriptions. To cite but a few typical examples:

- In the 7th century Philistine inscription of Akhayus, ruler of Ekron, from the sanctuary of that site, Akhayus states that he built a temple for the goddess and prays that she “may bless him and protect him and prolong his days and bless his land” (*tbrkh. wtšm[r]h. wt'rk. ymh. wtbrk. [']ršh. (COS 2.42).*²²

- The inscription on a 3d–2d century B.C.E. stele from Sidon states that the donor gave “this offering” (*mnht*) to the deity and asks for his blessing (*ybrk*). (NSI no. 7 = RES 930). The 2d century B.C.E. stone inscription of Abd-Ilim from Umm el-Awamid (between Tyre and Acco) records the gift of a gate and doors to Baal-shamem so that he (Abd-Ilim) may have a remembrance (*skr* = *zkr*) and a favorable reputation “at (lit. under) the feet” of Baal-shamem forever, and that the deity may bless him (*ybrkn*; *KAI* no. 18). Punic votive inscriptions from North Africa likewise include requests that the deity bless the donor and hear his or her prayer (*KAI* nos. 77, 78, 84, 88, 98; NSI no. 48).

- The 5th–4th century Phoenician stele of Yehawmilk, found in the ruins of the sanctuary of the goddess of Byblos, refers to an altar and other objects donated by Yehawmilk to the goddess and asks her to “keep him alive . . . prolong his days and his years upon Byblos . . . and give [him] favor in the eyes of gods, and in the eyes of the people of this land” (*COS 2.32* = *KAI* no. 10).

21 E. L. Sukenik, “Inscribed Potsherds with Biblical Names from Samaria,” *PEQ* 65 (1933): 203. Birnbaum, “The Sherds,” considered such an interpretation but dismissed it because, at the time, no other Hebrew votive inscriptions were known (20), though he noted that this ostrakon and the first line of the preceding one must be interpreted similarly (12). For other views see Lemaire, *Les Ostraca*, 250; Renz and Röllig, *Handbuch*, 1:142 n. 2.

22 See Gitin, Dotan, and Naveh, “Royal Dedicatory Inscription,” 12. For the prayer “may she bless and protect him” cf. *ybrkk YHWH wyšmrk* in the Priestly Benediction and the similar phrase (*ybrk.wyšmrk wyhy m. d[n]y*) in Pithos B from Kuntillet Ajrud (Meshel, *Kuntillet Ajrud*, 20 (Hebrew [page facing pl. 10]; English section, 13).

Other examples request similar blessings, but without using the verb *brk*:

- In the bilingual Assyrian-Old Aramaic inscription on the statue of Hadad-Yith'i from Tell Fekheriye, Hadad-Yith'i states that he donated this statue of himself to his deity, Hadad of Sikan, so that "his life/health be preserved, and his days be long, and to increase his years, and so that his house . . . and his descendants . . . and his people may flourish, and to remove illness from him, and for making his prayer heard, and for accepting the words of his mouth," "for exalting and continuing his throne . . . and so that his word might be pleasing to gods and to people" (*COS* 2.34, lines 13–18, 23–27). The hands of the statue are clasped in prayer like the typical Mesopotamian votive figurines and, like them, it was intended to keep Hadad-Yith'i's epigraphic prayer before the deity at all times.²³
- The 5th century stele inscription of the Troop Commander from Syene (Aswan), Egypt, tells of his making a shrine for a deity and prays for "peace" or "welfare" (*drwt*, Old Persian *druvatat-*) (*COS* 2.41).

The goal of securing the deity's attention or remembrance, which is explicit in the biblical passages cited above and implicit in all these inscriptions, is also explicit in later Aramaic and Hebrew blessings, in votive inscriptions and otherwise, which request that the individuals named in them be "remembered—that is, be thought of, kept in mind—favorably/for good" (*zkr/dkr* [or *zkwr/dkyr*] *lṭwb[h]* /*lṭb*).²⁴ The earliest examples appear in Nehemiah's prayers

23 For the statue see A. Abou-Assaf, P. Bordreuil, and A. R. Millard, *La statue de Tell Fekheriye et son inscription bilingue assyro-araméenne* (Paris: Sur Les Civilisations, 1982), plates I–V; *CANE* 2.1288 fig. 2. On votive figurines see A. Spycket, "Reliefs, Statuary, and Monumental Paintings in Ancient Mesopotamia," *CANE* 4.2589 and figs. 8, 9, 12–15, 18 ("The most common pose has clasped hands, for these statues were to perpetuate the prayers of the worshipers in temples," 2589; see examples in *ANEP*, figs. 18–24, 428–429); Hallo, "Letters, Prayers, and Letter-Prayers," 25. The purpose of such statues is explicitly stated by Assurbanipal: "I had a statue of me as king made (and) placed (it) before the gods to constantly request well-being for me" (*CAD* S, 81a); see also the nearly identical statements quoted in *CAD* E 283b sub 13'; *CAD* S, 394c; the letter from Mari referring to a statue of the king paying homage in front of the image of Amurru (G. Dossin, "Les archives épistolaires du palais de Mari," *Syria* 19 [1938]:125, cited in *CAD* K 197b, C, 80d); similar descriptions in *CAD* S, 80d–81a; and Nabonidus setting up an inscription with his name and a statue of himself in a temple before Shamash and Aya (*CAD* S, 81b).

24 As Hurvitz notes (*Bên Lāšôn le-Lāšôn*, 55–56), the frequent (though not invariable—e.g. Neh 13:22) tendency to add *lṭb/lṭ(w)b* to *dkr* and *zkr* in Hebrew and Aramaic sources of the fifth century B.C.E. and later is echoed in the targums, which frequently (though not

to God, in Hebrew, to “remember favorably to my credit” (*zkrh ly . . . lṭwbh*) all his deeds on behalf of the Jews (Neh 5:19; 13:31; cf. 13:22).²⁵ In epigraphic sources the formula appears most commonly in Aramaic inscriptions, in the form *dkyr PN lṭb* (or *lšnpyr, lšlm*), “may PN be thought of favorably” (or “for wellbeing”).²⁶ A Hebrew equivalent, *zkwr lṭwb(h)* and related phrases, appears in rabbinic sources.²⁷

always) render *zkr* and derivatives with *dkr lṭb* (e.g. *d(w)krn ṭb*, *Targum Neofiti* to Exod 28:12, 29). This tendency is not present in the Torah.

- 25 This phrase could be a calque on Akkadian *ḥasāsu ana damiḫti*, “think of for good/favorably,” which appears in Neo-Babylonian sources, including (according to a probable restoration) the concluding prayer in one of Nebuchadnezzar’s inscriptions in which he makes a similar request; see *CAD H*, 122bc; S. Langdon, *Die neubabylonischen Königsinschriften* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912), 176 x 25–26 (cf. *ANET*, 307c, though the translation is not quite precise). Note that in an Amarna letter from Hazor, Akkadian *ḥasāsu* is glossed with West Semitic *zakāru* (EA 228:19, cited in *CAD Z*, 22b). (Conceivably Heb. *zakhār le-ṭovah*, *zakhūr le-ṭov*, and their Aramaic equivalents are related to the Akkadian *zakāru ana/ina damiḫtim*, but the latter means “mention favorably,” “bless”; see *CAD Z*, 22b; *CAD A2*, 397d, end of sec. 2’.)
- 26 According to J. Naveh the earliest epigraphic examples are in the Aramaic inscriptions from Hatra (end of first through middle of third century C.E.), such as: *dkyr wbryk qdm b’šmyn ’lh’ wqdm ’lh’ klhyn PN lṭb wlšnpyr*, “May PN be kept in mind and blessed for good and prosperity before DN the god and before all the gods” (*KAI* no. 244 [see also no. 246]; see Naveh, “Graffiti and Dedications,” *BASOR* 235 [1979]: 28). Such formulas also appear in Nabataean (*COS* 2.44), Syriac, Palmyrene, and Jewish Aramaic (in synagogue inscriptions). See A. Hurvitz, *Bēn Lāšōn le-Lāšōn*, 54–56; J. Naveh, *’Al Pesefas va-’Even*, 7–8, 150 s.v. *dkr* (Hebrew); Healy, “May He Be Remembered for Good . . .” For Samaritan sources see M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (2d ed.; Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 150a; R. Macuch, “A New Interpretation of the Samaritan Inscription from Tell Qasile,” *IEJ* 35 (1985): 184.
- 27 *T. Soṭah* 6(7):2 (*zakhūr ba’al habayit leṭovah*) // *y. Ber.* 9.2 end, 13c (*brwk b’l hbyt, zkwr b’l hbyt lṭwbh*); a variant reading, inconsequential for present purposes, is quoted by S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Kifshuta: Seder Zeraim* [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1955], 105; for an Aramaic equivalent see *y. Sanh.* 23c and *y. Hag.* 77d, cited by Sokoloff, *Dictionary*, 149d. With very few exceptions, down through Talmudic times the phrase was used of the living, not of the dead as it is today. See S. Lieberman, *Greek and Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1962), 54 n. 22 (Hebrew); Healy, “May He Be Remembered for Good . . .,” 180f.; for examples see Hurvitz, *Bēn Lāšōn le-Lāšōn*, 54–55; Naveh, *’Al Pesefas va-’Even*, 7–8 and passim (see 150 s.v. *dkr*). For an exception see *b. B. Bat.* 21a top; on the seeming exceptions of Elijah and Harbonah, see Lieberman *Greek and Hellenism*, 54 n. 22. A similar phrase is used of the deceased Moses in Ben Sira 45:1: *mšh zkrw lṭwbh* (for the last word Greek has εὐ εὐλογίας in agreement with the Syriac, which reads *lbrkh*).

In conformity with this phraseology, a votive object can be called a *dkrn*(') 'reminder,' the Aramaic cognate of *zikkaron*. A votive inscription from Dura-Europos reads: "A favorable reminder (*dkrn' ṭb'*) of PN . . . who offered 100 denarii (as) a part of this construction to the god Shamash, for his life, forever."²⁸ A stone tablet from Palmyra has the following votive inscription: "(As) a favorable reminder (*dkrn ṭb*) before Blessed-Be-His-Name-Forever, the good and merciful, [PN] made this vaulted room and all its ornament."²⁹

Closer to the inscriptions on the priestly Reminder Stones, which consist only of names, there are also inscriptions in sanctuaries that lack explicit requests for blessing or remembrance. In such cases, the object brings the donor's name to the deity in the sanctuary, but the prayer for blessing is only implicit. Graffiti of the 5th century B.C.E. in the temple of Osiris at Abydos, Egypt, read simply 'nk PN, "I am PN" (*KAI* no. 49).³⁰ Aramaic votive bowls of the same century, probably from Tell El-Maskhuta, also have no blessing formula.³¹ One just mentions the name of the goddess to whom it is dedicated (l-DN),³² while three have the formula *zy qrb* PN (alternatively, *zy* PN *qrb*) l-DN, "that which PN offered to DN." A fifth, from ca. 300 B.C.E., contains only the name of the donor.³³ According to Meshel, another bowl found at Kuntillet Ajrud also contains only the name of the donor, *šm'yw bn 'zr*.³⁴ In later times, ca. the second century C.E., the author of *The Syrian Goddess* reports that in Hierapolis (Syria), young men and women leave offerings of, respectively, their beards and their hair, in silver or gold containers at the

28 *KAI* 257 (cf. *KAI* 241). See J. Naveh, "Remarks on Two East Aramaic Inscriptions," *BASOR* 216 (1974): 9–10.

29 *PAT*, 32 (*PAT* 0060; segments translated by Hillers, 350, 357, 403); see also *PAT* 0346; 0339; 1670A; 1917; 1918.

30 See TAD 4:267.

31 Isaac Rabinowitz, "Aramaic Inscriptions from a North-Arab Shrine in Egypt," *JNES* 15 (1956): 1–9; *COS* 2:51B–D; TAD 4:231–33. Cf. also the Aramaic seal inscription *CIS* 2.75, cited below: *l'kdbn br gbrd srs' zy hqrb lhdd*, "(Seal) of 'kdbn son of Gbrd, which he presented to Hadad."

32 Cf. the inscribed vessels from Khirbet el-Qom, Megiddo and Samaria discussed in J. Tigay, *No Other Gods*, 24–25. For other vessels with inscriptions indicating a religious purpose see G. Barkay, "A Bowl with the Hebrew Inscription *qds*," *IEJ* 40 (1990): 124–29.

33 TAD 4:233.

34 Meshel, *Kuntillet Ajrud*, 18 (Hebrew [page following plate 8]; English section, 12). Meshel says that a third bowl mentions the name *helyaw*. See also the Safaitic and Nabataean inscriptions on the votive bowl published by J. Naveh, "Ancient North-Arabian Inscriptions on Three Stone Bowls," *Eretz-Israel* 14 (1978; *H. L. Ginsberg Volume*): 180–81, bowl B (Hebrew; English Summary, 129*); see also Naveh, "Graffiti and Dedications," 28.

temple, “and they depart after each inscribes his name.” The author did so, too, “and even now my locks and name are in the sanctuary.”³⁵

All of these inscriptions confirm that seeking God’s benevolent attention, mindfulness, and hence blessing, by means of an inscription placed in a sanctuary, bearing the name of the beneficiary, as the priestly Reminder Stones seek to do, is a well-attested ancient Near Eastern practice.³⁶

This connection between the priestly Reminder Stones and votive inscriptions placed in sanctuaries dovetails with the fact that Aaron is to wear the stones “when he enters the sanctuary” (Exod 28:29), that is, when he offers sacrifices.³⁷ Wearing the inscriptions while offering sacrifices indicates that the sacrifices are gifts to God from the Israelites. The practice essentially declares that the sacrifice is “that which the twelve tribes offered to the Lord,” just as the Aramaic inscriptions on the votive bowls from Tell El-Maskhuta declare that the bowls on which they are written are also gifts to the deity. The fact that the regular times for sacrifice were morning and twilight may also dovetail with the implicit character of the stones as prayers, since these were also times of prayer.³⁸

Votive Seals

The seal-like nature of the Reminder Stones connects them to a specific type of votive inscription, namely votive seals that were placed in the presence of the

35 *The Syrian Goddess (De Dea Syria): Attributed to Lucian* (trans. H. W. Attridge and R. A. Oden; SBLTT 9; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press for the Society of Biblical Literature, 1976), 58–61, §60.

36 The description of uninscribed objects, i.e., the sockets, hooks, overlay, and bands (Exod 38:27–28) made from the “expiation money” (Exod 30:16), as *zikkaron* implies that they, too, could call the donor to God’s attention. These items will stand in the sanctuary “as a reminder before the Lord, as expiation,” that is, for favorable remembrance, which, by expiating, will prevent a plague. Cf. Num 31:50, 54.

37 Aaron does not wear the stones when he enters the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement because he does not sacrifice there (the blood that he sprinkles on the Ark there is not a sacrifice but a purgation rite).

38 Ps 5:4; 59:17; 88:14; 92:2–4; Dan 9:21; Ezra 9:5 (individuals praying in the morning or evening or both); 1 Chr 16:40–42; 23:30–31; 2 Chr 29:20, 27. If the practice reflected in these passages was also current when P was composed, Aaron’s epigraphic prayer was carried before God at the same time that individuals prayed and the Levites recited psalms.

deity.³⁹ As noted above, these were placed in sanctuaries, often on a deity's statue. Like the Reminder Stones, seals were often made from lapis lazuli and other gemstones.⁴⁰

The prayers on votive seals are formulated like those in other votive inscriptions. The following cylinder-seal inscriptions are typical:⁴¹

- A seal from Ishchali, in Iraq: "Mattatum, daughter of Ubarrum, for her health to the divine Kititum has presented (this seal)."⁴²
- A seal of unknown provenance, perhaps Neo-Assyrian: "A seal of lapis lazuli—Nabu-apla-iddina, son of Shamash-eresh, for the well-being of his life, the length of his days (and) for (her [Gabra's]) intercession on his behalf, to the divine Gabra the spouse of the divine Apil-Adad his lord he dedicated" (*COS* 2.125B).⁴³
- An extremely large seal from Babylon, ninth century: "For the divine Marduk, the great lord . . ., his lord—Marduk-zakir-shumi, king of the world, the prince who worships him—for the well-being of his life, the safety (*šalam*) of his offspring, the length of his days, the stability of his reign, the overthrowing of his enemies, and that he may live peacefully (*šalmiš*) before him—(this) seal of shining lapis lazuli which is artfully set in ruddy gold as the ornament of his (Marduk's) neck he had made and donated it" (*COS* 2.125C).⁴⁴

39 See H. Pittman, "Cylinder Seals and Scarabs in the Ancient Near East," *CANE* 3:1596–97; cf. 1599–1600. For further discussion see B. L. Goff, "The Role of Amulets in Mesopotamian Ritual Texts," 1–39, esp. 30–34; Hallo, "As the Seal Upon Thine Arm," 8–9, 12.

40 For Mesopotamia, see the materials mentioned in *CAD* K 544d–545a, b. For West Semitic seals, including photographs, see Avigad-Sass, *passim*; R. Hestrin and M. Dayagi-Mendels, *Hôtâmôt Mimê Bayit Rîšôn* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1978; Eng. trans.: *Inscribed Seals: First Temple Period* [Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1979]), *passim*; and R. Deutsch and A. Lemaire, *Biblical Period Personal Seals in the Shlomo Moussaieff Collection* (Tel Aviv: Archaeological Center, 2000), *passim*.

41 For the typology of votive seal inscriptions see I. J. Gelb, "Typology of Mesopotamian Seal Inscriptions," in *Seals and Sealings in the Ancient Near East* (ed. M. Gibson and R. C. Biggs; Bibliotheca Mesopotamica 6; Malibu, Calif.: Undena, 1977), 117–126, Types XX, XXX; W. W. Hallo, "The Royal Inscriptions of Ur: A Typology," *HUCA* 33 (1962): 12–17; K. Watanabe, "Votivsiegel des Pān-Aššur-lāmur," *Acta Sumerologica* 16 (1994): 245–57. For similar requests in blessings and prayers see examples in *CAD* Š1, 255bc; etc.

42 Cited in Goff, "The Role of Amulets in Mesopotamian Ritual Texts," 34, and Gelb, "Typology of Mesopotamian Seal Inscriptions," 121, the eighth example on the page.

43 Hallo, *COS* 2.125B, translation slightly modified (see *CAD* Š, 24d, citing VAS 1 61:6).

44 Translation slightly modified. See also G. Frame, *Rulers of Babylonia: From the Second Dynasty of Isin to the End of Assyrian Domination (1157–612 BC)* (The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Babylonian Periods 2; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 103–

- The cylinder seal of an Assyrian official found in excavations at Samaria: “Seal of Nabu-zabi[!?] the [. . .] servant of [. . .], the apprentice scribe. May the divine [Nabu] Tashmetum, Marduk (and) Sarpanitum bless (*likrub*) the owner of the seal.”⁴⁵

Like certain inscriptions described above (such as the Aramaic votive bowls from Tell El-Maskhuta), sometimes no prayer is expressed in the inscription, as in the following cuneiform cylinder-seal inscriptions:

- A seal of unknown provenance: “(To) Nabu, chief priest of wisdom (??), Ibgari the physician (donated this cylinder seal).”⁴⁶
- A late eighth century seal: “To his lord, Marduk-apla-iddina (i.e., Merodach-baladan II), offspring of Yakin, donated (this cylinder seal).”⁴⁷
- An Iron Age seal from the mid-Euphrates region found at Beer-Sheba: “To the divine Apil-Adad, the great lord, his lord, Rimut-Ilani, son of (H)adad-idri, made and donated (this cylinder seal)” (*COS* 2.125A).⁴⁸

5. Hallo, “As the Seal Upon Thine Arm,” 9, mentions the greater size of votive seals in Sumer.

45 J. W. Crowfoot, “Scarabs, Seals, and Seal Impressions,” in J. W. Crowfoot, G. M. Crowfoot and K. Kenyon, *The Objects from Samaria* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1957), 87 no. 18; pl. xv.

46 H. H. von der Osten, *Ancient Oriental Seals in the Collection of Mrs. Agnes Baldwin Brett* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936), 59 and pl. VI, no. 58.

47 Watanabe, “Votivsiegel des Pān-Aššur-lāmur,” 243 no. 3.2; B. Wittmann, “Babylonische Rollsiegel des 11.–7. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.,” *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 23 (1992): 263 no. 66 and pl. 25 no. 66.

48 A. F. Rainey, “The Cuneiform Inscription on a Votive Cylinder from Beer-Sheba,” in Y. Aharoni, ed., *Beer-Sheba I: Excavations at Tel Beer-Sheba. 1969–71 Seasons* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Institute of Archaeology, 1973), 61–70. In this seal and many others the absence of a prayer is more apparent than real since the scene accompanying the inscription shows a human praying to a god, and it may express the donor’s prayer in the same way that votive statues do. For the scene, see P. Beck, *Imagery and Representation Studies in the Art and Iconography of Ancient Palestine: Collected Articles* (Tel Aviv: Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, 2002), 429 fig. 1, 433 (there is also a photograph in *NEAEHL* 1:172). For the meaning of the human’s gesture Beck cites H. and M. Tadmor, “The Seal of Belu Ašaredu, Major-domo,” in *Yedi’ot* 31 (5727/1967): 74, who in turn cite B. Landsberger, “Das ‘gute Wort,’” in *Altorientalische Studien: Bruno Meissner zum sechzigsten Geburtstag am 25. april 1928 gewidmet von Freunden, Kollegen und Schülern* (MAOG 4.1; Leipzig, Harrassowitz, 1928–29): 297–98. However, there are votive seals lacking prayers on which the scene is not one of prayer, such as the two cited immediately before this one (see Osten, *Ancient Oriental Seals*, 9–10, 23; Wittmann, “Babylonische Rollsiegel,” 263 no. 66 and pl. 25 no. 66).

Unlike functional seals, which were normally written in the negative (mirror writing) so that their inscriptions could be read from the seal impression, votive seals were usually inscribed in the positive so that the inscription could be read directly from the seal.⁴⁹ This is true, for example, of the seals of Marduk-zakir-shumi, Nabu-Zabil, Rimut-Ilani, and Belu-Ašaredu just cited. This is not in itself, however, an unfailing indication that an inscription is votive, since some seals written in the positive were used for normal sealing purposes.⁵⁰ It would not be unreasonable to suppose that Aaron's Reminder Stones were written in the positive, but the text does not address this issue.

There are a few seals from Iron Age Syria-Palestine with alphabetic inscriptions that have been considered votive. The most likely are the following:

- A stamp seal with the Ammonite inscription: . . . 'bndb šndr l'št bšdn tbrkh, "[Belonging to/from) PN son of] Abinadab, which he vowed to the goddess 'št (=Astarte? Asiti?). May she bless him."⁵¹ Since this seal is engraved in the negative like a regular, functional seal, Avigad supposes that it was made for repeated use to stamp the owner's donations to the goddess; it could have been used to stamp the clay sealings of donated jars of wine, oil, and grain, or bullas affixed to bales of donated goods.⁵² In Avigad's view, it is the stamped donations, rather than the seal itself, that are votive.⁵³

49 Holly Pittman, in *CANE* 3:1597; Hallo, *COS* 2:319, introduction to 2:125; also in "As the Seal Upon Thine Arm," 9; others listed in H. and M. Tadmor, "The Seal of Belu Ašaredu," 75 n. 35 (cf. Rainey, "The Cuneiform Inscription," 61 n. 1). See also N. Avigad, "Two Phoenician Votive Seals," *IEJ* 16 (1966): 243–57 (although the first seal discussed in this article is classified as a forgery in Avigad-Sass, 453).

50 Tadmor and Tadmor, "The Seal of Belu Ašaredu," 75–76; Hallo points out that Old Assyrian functional seals were often carved in the positive (Hallo, "Introduction" to B. Buchanan, *Early Near Eastern Seals in the Yale Babylonian Collection* ([New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981]), 462 no. 1146).

51 Avigad-Sass, no. 876. For this translation of šndr l'št (rather than ". . . who vowed to 'št"), see the similar votive formula (zy . . . qrb . . . lhn' lt) in the inscriptions published by I. Rabinowitz, "Aramaic Inscriptions," 2, inscriptions B and C, and Rabinowitz's observation that the votive object "is syntactically the understood antecedent of the relative pronoun" (4). See also the comments of B. Porten in *COS* 2:176 n. 8, 186, 2:60 n. 1. The same formula appears in a fragmentary alphabetic inscription from Nimrud (A. R. Millard, "Alphabetic Inscriptions on Ivories from Nimrud," *Iraq* 24 [1962]: 43).

52 N. Avigad, "Two Phoenician Votive Seals," 250.

53 Avigad-Sass, 329, classify this seal as votive, but add: "Engraved in the negative, the seal is not *stricto sensu* votive, and this not the only remaining problem."

- A cylinder seal inscribed in West Semitic script: *l'kdbn br gbrd srs' zy hqrb lhdd*, "(Seal) of 'kdbn son of Gbrd, which he presented to Hadad."⁵⁴ This seal is also engraved in the negative and is presumed by Avigad to have been used to stamp votive gifts.⁵⁵

Avigad's conclusions are not unreasonable, but since there were some votive seals inscribed in the negative,⁵⁶ it remains possible that these two seals were themselves votive.

Many other West Semitic seals with alphabetic inscriptions have been thought votive, or possibly so, because they are engraved in the positive like cuneiform votive seals (even though their inscriptions are not explicitly votive),⁵⁷ because they are unusually large, like the seal of Marduk-zakir-shumi cited above,⁵⁸ or for other reasons,⁵⁹ but none of these reasons is compelling.

54 *CIS* 2.75 = NSI 360, Pl. XI, 2; see also J. Naveh and H. Tadmor, "Some Doubtful Aramaic Seals," *AION* 18 (1968): 448–52. For this translation of *zy hqrb lhdd* see the comments on *šndr l' št*, above, n. 51.

55 Avigad, "Two Phoenician Votive Seals," 250. Naveh and Tadmor identified one copy of this seal as a forgery, and expressed some doubts about *CIS* 2.75 itself. They concluded; "These doubts, though not sufficient for disqualifying the 'kdbn seal as a copy from another votive object (such as an ivory plaque or even another seal) justify further investigation" ("Doubtful Aramaic Seals," 452). (The doubts were apparently enough for Avigad-Sass to omit this seal.)

56 J. Naveh and H. Tadmor, "Doubtful Aramaic Seals," 452.

57 The following seals in Avigad-Sass are written entirely or, in a few cases, mostly in the positive: nos. 27 (positive on one side only), 172, 197, 716, 725, 733, 734, 757, 758, 767, 788, 798, 807, 821, 841, 936, 1081, 1088, 1095, 1138, 1144, 1185, 1206, 1207. As noted above (n. 49), positive seals were sometimes used simply for sealing. The limestone stamp seal reading *gZR* (Avigad, "Epigraphical Gleanings from Gezer," *PEQ* 82 [1950]: 46–49 and fig. 2), from Gezer, is also written in the positive. For its function see the next note. Avigad observes that many of the Yerushalem and Yehud seal *impressions* are in the negative, indicating that the seals from which they were made were carved in the positive ("Epigraphical Gleanings," 47; see also *NEAEHL* 4:1265, which indicates that the impression of the city stamp *msh* from Ramat Rahel is also in reverse ["mirror writing"], indicating that the seal itself was positive). Avigad assumes that these were done erroneously by the craftsman. That craftsmen sometimes erroneously carved letters in the positive is clear from cases in which only a few letters in an inscription are positive, such as Hestrin and Dayagi-Mendels, *Inscriptions Reveal*, 120, 121; see also the Ammonite seal in Avigad-Sass, no. 936.

58 Cf. Hallo, "As the Seal Upon Thine Arm," 9. Cf. Avigad-Sass, nos. 172 and 661. The first is written in the positive and both are too large to have been used for sealing documents. The second is an impression, not a seal, so the seal from which it was made was clearly used for stamping. Avigad's suggestion regarding the Ammonite seal of the son of Abinadab

For now, at least, our case will have to rest on the cylinder seals with cuneiform inscriptions.

* * * *

Aaron's seal-inscriptions are not explicitly votive and, unlike Mesopotamian votive seals, they are not left permanently in God's presence. But they do bring the tribes' names, inscribed on seals, into His presence in His sanctuary twice each day, to seek His attention and blessing. Thus they constitute an Israelite variation of the ancient Near Eastern use of votive inscriptions, particularly on votive seals, for this purpose.

could apply to these seals as well. According to Avigad, the limestone stamp seal reading *gZR* mentioned in the previous note was, at ca. 6 cm. in diameter, too large to have been used in stamping jar handles; Avigad thinks it was used for stamping jar stoppers.

- 59 In six Phoenician seal inscriptions (Avigad-Sass, nos. 717, 718, 720–723; cf. 721) the owner's name is followed by the term *hbrk(t)*, "the blessed;" hence they are listed under the heading "Blessing and Votive Formulae" (266–69). However, since *hbrk(t)* is an epithet or title and not a *request* for blessing, it is not a votive formula (cf. also the individual characterized as *bryk 'lh*, *KAI* 243.2); it also appears in the non-votive bilingual Azitawadda inscription from Karatepe (*KAI* 26.1; *ANET*, 653–54; *COS* 2.31); cf. Gen. 24:31; 26:29. Some take *hbrk(t)* as a noun meaning "steward," but the Hieroglyphic Hittite part of the Azitawadda inscription (see *COS* 2.21, §1) supports the translation "the blessed." See J. C. Greenfield, "The Zakir inscription and the Danklied," in *'Al Kanfei Yonah: Collected Studies of Jonas C. Greenfield on Semitic Philology* (ed. S. Paul et al.; 2 vols; Leiden: Brill; Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2001), 1:80 n. 17; see also A. Lemaire, "Essai sur cinque sceaux phéniciens," *Semitica* 27 (1977): 38.