

Micah's Teraphim

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Determining the proper interpretation of the eight passages in the Hebrew Bible in which the term תְּרָפִים occurs (Gen 31:19–35; Judges 17–18; 1 Sam 15:23; 19:11–17; 2 Kgs 23:24; Ezek 21:26 [in most of the Bible's English versions, 21:21]; Hos 3:4; and Zech 10:2) has proven to be, in many respects, a vexing problem for scholars. For example, as well documented by K. van der Toorn and T.J. Lewis in their jointly authored “תְּרָפִים” entry in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, and in addition by van der Toorn in a 1990 article that appeared in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, no consensus has been reached regarding the etymology of תְּרָפִים,¹ although many suggestions have been put forward.² How

¹ K. van der Toorn and T.J. Lewis, “תְּרָפִים,” in G.J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H.-J. Fabry (eds.), *TDOT*, 15 (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2006), 777–89 (778–79); K. van der Toorn, “The Nature of the Biblical Teraphim in the Light of the Cuneiform Evidence,” *CBQ* 52 (1990), 203–22 (203–4). See further, in van der Toorn and Lewis, “תְּרָפִים,” n. 1 on p. 778, which refers readers to the extensive etymological discussion found in *HALOT*, 4, 1794–96. Also see Lewis's etymological discussion in “Teraphim,” in K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, and P.W. van der Horst (eds.), *DDD* (Leiden/New York/Köln: E.J. Brill, 1995), 1588–1601 (1588–90), and that of A. Jeffers, in her *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria* (Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East, 8; Leiden/New York/Köln: E.J. Brill, 1996), 223–25.

² Even in those cases, moreover, where a certain etymology has gained a modicum of support—most notably, H.A. Hoffner's suggestion, building on the work of B. Landsberger, that Hebrew תְּרָפִים might be related to the Hittite-Luwian word *tarpi*(š), meaning some sort of otherworldly spirit (H.A. Hoffner, Jr., “The Linguistic Origins of Teraphim,” *BSac* 124 [1967], 230–38; idem, “Hittite *Tarpiš* and Hebrew *Terāpīm*,” *JNES* 27 [1968], 61–68)—the proposed derivation “hardly advances our understanding of the role of the teraphim in ancient Israelite religion” (van der Toorn, “Nature of the Biblical Teraphim,” 204). Similar sentiments are expressed by J.S. Bray, *Sacred Dan: Religious Tradition and Cultic Practice in*

exactly to envision the תְּרָפִים has also been an issue that has resisted resolution, as the תְּרָפִים of Gen 31:34 atop which Rachel sits seem as though they must be markedly different in size than the תְּרָפִים that Michal puts in David's bed in 1 Sam 19:13 as a doppelgänger for her fugitive husband.³ These two passages also illustrate the ambiguity that the term תְּרָפִים can manifest in terms of number, referring both to plural תְּרָפִים (as in the story of the multiple תְּרָפִים on which Rachel sits) and to תְּרָפִים in the singular (as in the story of the lone תְּרָפִים that Michal uses to impersonate David). Even here, though, the matter is confused, since the seemingly singular תְּרָפִים of the David-Michal story has a wig of netted goat hair (כְּבִיר הָעֵזִים) placed מְרֹאשָׁתָיו, literally “at its heads” (1 Sam 19:13, 16).⁴

Still, as again has been well documented by van der Toorn in his *CBQ* article, by van der Toorn and Lewis in the *TDOT*, and in addition by both van der Toorn and Lewis in other publications,⁵

Judges 17–18 (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, 449; New York/London: T & T Clark, 2006), 119; Lewis, “Teraphim,” 1588; and van der Toorn and Lewis, “תְּרָפִים,” 779.

³ Although cf. R. Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, 1: *From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 254, n. 53, who argues—based on the work of H. Rouillard and J. Tropper (“*Trypym*, rituels de guérison et culte des ancêtres d’après 1 Samuel XIX 11–17 et les textes parallèles d’Assur et de Nuzi,” *VT* 37 [1987], 340–61)—that the תְּרָפִים of 1 Samuel 19 need not be life-size.

⁴ On the phrase מְרֹאשָׁתָיו, see K. van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life* (Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East, 7; Leiden/New York/Köln: E.J. Brill, 1996), 219, n. 59. On the interpretation of the rather enigmatic phrase כְּבִיר הָעֵזִים in 1 Sam 19:13, see, among others, P.K. McCarter, *1 Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 8; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 326, and van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 220, and the references there.

⁵ T.J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (HSM, 39; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 178 and n. 12 on that page; idem, “Teraphim,” 1588–1601; and idem, “Divine Images and Aniconism in Ancient Israel” (Review article of Tryggve Mettinger, *No Graven Image? Israelite Aniconism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context* [ConBOT, 42; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1995]), *JAOIS* 118 (1998), 36–53 (43–44). K. van der Toorn, *From Her Cradle to Her Grave: The Role of Religion in the Life of the Israelite and the Babylonian Woman* (The Biblical Seminar, 23; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 39–40; idem, “Ancestors and Anthroponyms: Kinship Terms as Theophoric Elements in Hebrew Names,” *ZAW* 108 (1996), 1–11 (9); idem, *Family Religion*, 218–25, translated with minor changes in “Ein verborgenes Erbe: Totencult im frühen Israel,” *TQ* 177 (1997), 105–20 (114–18); idem, “Israelite Figurines: A View from the Texts,” in B.M. Gittlin (ed.), *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 45–62 (54–56); and idem, “Recent Trends in the Study of Israelite Religion,” in G. Wieggers (ed.), in association with J. Platvoet, *Modern Societies and the Science of Reli-*

some things are clear. First, as demonstrated in Gen 31:19–35 and 1 Sam 19:11–17, as well as in Judg 17:5, where the Ephraimite Micah is said to have “made” (עָשָׂה) אֲפֹדוֹ וְתַרְפִּים, אֲתַרְפִּים are some sort of concrete objects. The witness of 1 Samuel 19 also suggests that because that story’s אֲתַרְפִּים has a human-like head and can be used to impersonate David, אֲתַרְפִּים are anthropoid in form. It further seems certain, based on texts such as Ezek 21:26 and Zech 10:2, that אֲתַרְפִּים were used for purposes of divination.⁶ In Ezek 21:26, for example, “consulting the אֲתַרְפִּים” is listed alongside two other well-known divination rites from the ancient Near East, belomancy and hepatoscopy. The terms “divination” (קָסָם) and אֲתַרְפִּים arguably stand paralleled in 1 Sam 15:23 as well.⁷

Both van der Toorn and Lewis further propose that the specific divinatory practice with which the אֲתַרְפִּים are to be associated is necromancy. They suggest this, first, because the particular term used for divination in the three passages just cited (1 Sam 15:23; Ezek 21:26; and Zech 10:2), קָסָם, can be used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in texts that refer specifically to the calling up of dead spirits (Deut 18:10–14 and, according to van der Toorn’s and Lewis’s interpretation, Mic 3:6, 11).⁸ In addition, van der Toorn and Lewis posit there is a relationship between King Josiah’s putting away of the אֲתַרְפִּים in 2 Kgs 23:24, as part of his massive project of religious reformation, and the condemnation of the consulting of the dead in Deut 18:11, so much so that “Deut 18:11,” according to van der Toorn and Lewis, “appears to be the program behind Josiah’s actions.”⁹ Indeed, the central point of van der Toorn’s 1990 *CBQ* article, which he and Lewis re-affirmed in the *TDOT*, was to argue in support of a proposal that went back to F. Schwally, writing in 1892, and that had recently been revived—in

gion: Studies in Honor of Lammert Leertouwer (SHR, 95; London/Boston/Köln: E.J. Brill, 2002), 223–43 (228–29).

⁶ Although cf. Rouillard and Tropper, “*Ṭṛṣym*, rituels de guérison et culte des ancêtres,” 340–61, and especially 346–51, who, while agreeing that אֲתַרְפִּים have a divinatory function, argue that 1 Samuel 19 presumes another use for אֲתַרְפִּים in healing rituals, with אֲתַרְפִּים functioning as a substitute image of an invalid onto which his or her illness is passed.

⁷ H.C. Brichto, “Kin, Cult, Land and Afterlife—A Biblical Complex,” *HUCA* 44 (1973), 1–54 (46); Lewis, “Teraphim,” 1598; van der Toorn, “Nature of the Biblical Teraphim,” 214; idem, *Family Religion*, 223–24; and van der Toorn and Lewis, “אֲתַרְפִּים,” 787.

⁸ Van der Toorn, “Nature of the Biblical Teraphim,” 215; idem, *Family Religion*, 224; and van der Toorn and Lewis, “אֲתַרְפִּים,” 787, in all three cases citing F. Stolz, “Der Streit um die Wirklichkeit in der Südreichsprophetie des 8. Jahrhunderts,” *WD* 12 (1973), 9–30 (22–25).

⁹ Van der Toorn and Lewis, “אֲתַרְפִּים,” 788; see similarly J. Blenkinsopp, “Deuteronomy and the Politics of Post-Mortem Existence,” *VT* 45 (1995), 1–16, especially 11–12; van der Toorn, “Nature of the Biblical Teraphim,” 215; and idem, *Family Religion*, 224.

1987—by H. Rouillard and J. Tropper:¹⁰ that the תְּרָפִים themselves are not household god figurines, as many twentieth-century biblical scholars had assumed,¹¹ but representations of deceased spirits. More specifically (so this proposal goes), תְּרָפִים are representations of a family's deceased ancestors.¹² As such, the תְּרָפִים are especially able and, in fact, perfectly suited to perform the necromantic function of transmitting oracular messages from the realm of the dead to their families' living descendants.

To be sure, in Gen 31:19, 30, 32, 34, and 35, the synonymous use of the terms תְּרָפִים and אֱלֹהִים (treated as a plural form, “gods”; see 31:32, 34) might suggest that the older identification of the תְּרָפִים as household gods is correct, and multiple texts from Nuzi have also been used to argue that the cognate term for אֱלֹהִים that is used within them, *ilānu*, means “household gods.” Yet at Nuzi, *ilānu*, because it is often coupled with *eṭemmu*, meaning “spirits of the dead,” is better interpreted as meaning deceased spirits in gen-

¹⁰ F. Schwally, *Das Leben nach dem Tode nach den Vorstellungen des alten Israel und des Judentums einschliesslich des Volksglaubens im Zeitalter Christi* (Giessen: J. Ricker, 1892), 35–37; Rouillard and Tropper, “*Trpym*, rituels de guérison et culte des ancêtres,” 351–57. Rouillard and Tropper (ibid, 357, n. 44) and van der Toorn, (“Nature of the Biblical Teraphim,” 204, n. 8; idem, *Family Religion*, 224, n. 83) also cite, among older scholars who promoted this same view: A. Lods, *La croyance à la vie future et les cultes des morts dans l'antiquité israélite* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1906), 236; R.H. Charles, *Eschatology: The Doctrine of a Future Life in Israel, Judaism and Christianity* (2nd ed. [1913]; reprinted New York: Schocken, 1963), 21–23; H. Wohlstein, “Zu den altisraelitischen Vorstellungen von Toten- und Ahnengeistern,” *BZ* 5 (1961), 30–38 (37–38); and J. Lust, “On Wizards and Prophets,” *Studies on Prophecy* (VTSup, 26; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 133–42 (138). For a catalog of more recent adherents, see n. 12.

¹¹ As van der Toorn (in “Nature of the Biblical Teraphim,” 204, and *Family Religion*, 222) and Lewis (in “Teraphim,” 1589) point out, this suggestion goes back to S. Smith, writing in 1926 (*apud* C.J. Gadd, “Tablets from Kirkuk,” *RA* 23 [1926], 49–161 [127]) and again in 1931 (“What Were the Teraphim?” *JTS* 33, 33–36). The premier presentation is A.E. Draffkorn (Kilmer), “*ILANI/ELOHIM*,” *JBL* 76 (1957), 216–24.

¹² Van der Toorn, “Nature of the Biblical Teraphim,” 204 and 215–17; van der Toorn and Lewis, “תְּרָפִים,” 783, 787–88. See similarly Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, 1, 38; Blenkinsopp, “Deuteronomy and the Politics of Post-Mortem Existence,” 12; M. Dijkstra, “Women and Religion in the Old Testament,” in B. Becking *et al.*, *Only One God? Monotheism in Ancient Israel and the Veneration of the Goddess Asherah* (The Biblical Seminar, 77; London/New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 164–88 (168); Lewis, *Cults of the Dead*, 178; idem, “The Ancestral Estate (נַחֲלַת אֱלֹהִים) in 2 Samuel 14:16,” *JBL* 110 (1991), 597–612 (603); idem, “Teraphim,” 1598–99; idem, “Divine Images and Aniconism in Ancient Israel,” 43; O. Loretz, “Die Teraphim als ‘Ahnengötter-Figur(in)en’ im Lichte der Texte aus Nuzi, Emar und Ugarit,” *UF* 24 (1992), 134–78, especially 152–68; van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 223–25; idem, “Israelite Figurines,” 54; and idem, “Recent Trends,” 228–29.

eral and a household's deceased ancestors in particular,¹³ and recently discovered texts from Emar, where *ilānu* is paralleled by *mētū*, "the dead," indicate this as well.¹⁴ In the Hebrew Bible too, אֱלֹהִים can refer to deceased spirits: in 1 Sam 28:13; Isa 8:19; Num 25:2, as quoted in Ps 106:28; and probably Exod 21:6.¹⁵ This in turn suggests an Israelite understanding of the אֱלֹהִים *cum* תְּרָפִים of Gen 31:19, 30, 32, 34, and 35 and elsewhere as representations of deceased spirits or, just as van der Toorn and Lewis have proposed, as ancestor figurines.

In this paper, it is our intention, first, to look closely at the story of Micah's תְּרָפִים in Judges 17–18 in the light of this proposal in order to argue that the identification of תְּרָפִים as ancestor figurines is well supported by the Micah account. Indeed, we maintain that this identification actually *clarifies* certain details of the Micah narrative, especially the heretofore unanswered question of what prompted Micah, in Judg 17:5, to make his תְּרָפִים in the first place. After presenting our explanation of this and a related matter—regarding an ambiguity in the interpretation of the term תְּרָפִים in Judg 18:14, 17, 18, and 20—we will turn, in Section 2 of our paper,

¹³ Although cf. B.B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 123–25, who rejects both the identification of the *ilānu* with the *etemmū* at Nuzi and their identification as deified ancestors. Also cf. Rouillard and Tropper, "Trpym, rituels de guérison et culte des ancêtres," 354, who follow A. Tsukimoto, *Untersuchungen zur Totenplege (kispum) im altern Mesopotamien* (AOAT, 216; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985), 104–5, to suggest a somewhat more complex relationship between the terms *ilānu* and *etemmū* at Nuzi: that the *etemmū* were a family's recent ancestors who, after a certain period of time, passed on to join a more ancient and deified set of ancestors, the *ilānu*.

¹⁴ D. Fleming, "Nābū and Munabbiatur. Two New Syrian Religious Personnel," *JAOs* 113 (1993), 175–83 (176–77); Loretz, "Die Teraphim als 'Ahnen-Götter-Figur(in)en,'" 166–67; K. van der Toorn, "Gods and Ancestors in Emar and Nuzi," *ZA* 84 (1994), 38–59; idem, "Nature of the Biblical Teraphim," 221–22; idem, "Ancestors and Anthroponyms," 6; idem, *Family Religion*, 55–56, 222–23; and Tsukimoto, *Untersuchungen zur Totenplege (kispum)*, 9–11. See also the summary of the Emar data provided by van der Toorn and Lewis, in "תְּרָפִים," 780, and by Lewis, in "The Ancestral Estate," 600, and in "Teraphim," 1590–92, 1598–99. Cf. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead*, 125–30, who, as in his analysis the Nuzi *ilānu* (n. 13 above), rejects the identification of the *ilānu* with *mētū* at Emar.

¹⁵ On this interpretation of Exod 21:6, see van der Toorn and Lewis, "תְּרָפִים," 783, and, as cited there, Schwally, *Das Leben nach dem Tode*, 37–39; H. Niehr, "Ein unerkannter Text zur Nekromantie in Israel: Bemerkungen zum religionsgeschichtlichen Hintergrund von 2 Sam 12,16a," *UF* 23 (1991), 301–6; and A. Cooper and B.F. Goldstein, "The Cult of the Dead and the Theme of Entry into the Land," *BibInt* 1 (1994), 285–303, especially 294 and n. 23 on that page. On Num 25:2 as quoted in Ps 106:28, see Lewis, *Cults of the Dead*, 167, and idem, "The Ancestral Estate," 602.

to engage another potential enigma in the Micah story: why Micah, upon the occasion of the Danites' theft of all his household's religious treasures (a significant compendium, as we will discuss further below), focuses exclusively on the loss of the תְּרָפִים that he had previously made (Judg 18:24). Our account regarding this issue will illuminate, we will argue in Section 3, the Bible's other story of the stealing of תְּרָפִים, Rachel's theft of her father Laban's תְּרָפִים in Gen 31:19–35. Finally, in our concluding remarks, we will return to the story of the thieving Danites in Judges 17–18 to ask if there are some last subtleties at play regarding their absconding with Micah's תְּרָפִים, which concern the value of the תְּרָפִים not just to Micah, which we will have discussed in Section 2, but the potential appeal of the תְּרָפִים to the tribesmen of Dan as well.

Before beginning this exposition, though, we must raise two cautions. The first concerns the difficulty that attends any analysis of Judges 17–18, given this text's well known polemical intent.¹⁶ More specifically, Judges 17–18 polemicizes against the Danite priesthood by ridiculing the integrity of its levitical founder, who was easily persuaded to abandon his contractual obligations to serve as Micah's household priest in order to take up a post among the Danites that carried greater power and prestige;¹⁷ the text derides as well the sanctuary at Dan that this levitical priest came to serve, by portraying it as centered upon a cult image with a copiously suspect heritage. The image had been cast from silver stolen from Micah's mother, for example, as well as having come to the plundering Danites by illicit means. In addition, the designating of this cult image using the phrase פֶּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה (in Judg 17:3, 4; and 18:14) or (in 18:20, 30, and 31) פֶּסֶל alone (more on this grammatical ambiguity below) carries negative connotations, given that פֶּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה is deployed pejoratively in Deut 27:15 and Nah 1:14 (cf. also

¹⁶ Our characterization of the polemic in Judges 17–18 that follows is taken primarily from van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 247–48; see somewhat similarly, regarding the story as a polemic against the levitical priesthood, M.Z. Brettler, “The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics,” *JBL* 108 (1989), 395–418 (409), following M. Noth, “The Background of Judges 17–18,” in B.W. Anderson and W. Harrelson (eds.), *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 68–85. Also, regarding the story as a polemic against the sanctuary at Dan, see J.D. Martin, *The Book of Judges* (CBC; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 182–83, 187; A. Rofé, “No Ephod or Teraphim—*oude hierateias oude delon*: Hosea 3:4 in the LXX and in the Paraphrases of Chronicles and the *Damascus Document*,” in C. Cohen, A. Hurvitz, and S.M. Paul (eds.), *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East, Qumran, and Post-Biblical Judaism* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 135–49 (148); and J.A. Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 268–69, 277–78.

¹⁷ As Brettler somewhat colloquially but aptly states (in “The Book of Judges,” 409), the Levite opts “to become a ‘big shot’ in Dan rather than remain a ‘hick’ priest” in Ephraim.

Isa 42:17; Hab 2:18) and that the making of a פִּסֵּל is condemned in the second commandment as articulated in Exod 20:4 and Deut 5:18. M.Z. Brettler moreover argues, following M. Noth, that the story implies a negative attitude about the Danites as a people, because of the way in which they “conquer the unsuspecting peaceful residents of Laish.”¹⁸

Such a polemically charged account cannot, of course, be treated as a straightforward depiction of Israelite cult. Nevertheless, we maintain that the text's polemics still must, in terms of their underlying portrayal of Israelite religious practice, present a picture that was generally believable to their ancient Israelite audience. This is because, like any polemic, the polemics of Judges 17–18 were generated in an attempt to persuade their listeners to take the side of the polemicists in very real and live arguments that were taking place within the Israelite community at the time of these polemics' production. Or, to put the matter somewhat more colloquially: polemics aren't about beating a dead horse. It therefore follows that while there is certainly room for exaggeration in Judges 17–18, and even parody and caricature that can be over the top, the polemics of this text would have needed to “ring true” to their audience in at least their broad outlines, regarding, for example, the possibility that a household such as Micah's might have employed its own levitical priest and that a female member of Micah's household (his mother) might have commissioned the fabrication of a cult figurine. More important for our purposes: the account in Judg

¹⁸ Brettler, “The Book of Judges,” 409; see similarly J.C. McCann, *Judges* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002), 123–24. Cf. however, R.G. Boling, *Judges: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 6A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), who, while he also sees the story as polemical, takes the thrust of the polemic to be directed against the “cultically selfish” (p. 255) and “delinquent” (p. 258) Micah, whose corruption of the “hero of the story” (p. 255), the Levite, is made right only by the Danites, who “execute Yahweh's judgment against the proud Ephraimite” (p. 259). V.H. Matthews, *Judges and Ruth* (NCBC; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 169, similarly finds Micah to be characterized as “self-centered” and “unruly”; see too L. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* (JSOTSup, 68; Bible and Literature Series, 14; Sheffield: Almond, 1988), 147–49, 151. Other scholars have described the story's polemical character in different terms still: e.g., Y. Amit, “Hidden Polemic in the Conquest of Dan: Judges XVII–XVIII,” *VT* 40 (1990), 4–20 (7–10); McCann, *Judges*, 120–25, especially 124; and P.E. McMillion, “Worship in Judges 17–18,” in M.P. Graham, R.R. Marrs, and S.L. McKenzie (eds.), *Worship and the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honour of John T. Willis* (JSOTSup, 284; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 225–43 (234), citing D.R. Davis, “Comic Literature—Tragic Theology: A Study of Judges 17–18,” *WTJ* 46 (1984), 156–63. E.A. Mueller, *The Micah Story: A Morality Tale in the Book of Judges* (Studies in Biblical Literature, 34; New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 26–35, surveys various interpretations and then turns, in pp. 51–128, to offer her own analysis.

17:5 of Micah's making **אָפּוֹד וְתַרְפִּים** must point to what an ancient Israelite audience thought was possible within Israelite household cult.

Yet herein lies the issue that is at the heart of our second caution: that what the ancient Israelite audience of Judges 17–18 thought was possible within Israelite household cult, and thus what they understood and assumed regarding this text's cultic resonances, is not necessarily information that Judges 17–18 explicitly articulates. As we have already noted, for example, Judges 17–18, like the seven other biblical passages that speak of the **תַּרְפִּים**, assumes its audience knows what **תַּרְפִּים** are, even though we today must resort to hypotheses developed from reasonable conjecture to determine the nature of the **תַּרְפִּים** and their significance. Likewise, and more germane for our purposes, the text leaves us in ignorance regarding the several matters (such as what prompts Micah to make his **תַּרְפִּים** in the first place) that we have identified above as our primary interest. Our explanations of these matters will thus by necessity be based on hypotheses and (we hope) reasonable conjecture, regarding, for example, the nuances we will propose ancient Israelite audiences would have heard in the Judges 17–18 account (and also in Genesis 31) and the ways in which these audiences would have filled in details that these stories tend to gloss over. Still, we must admit our inferences will become less secure as our essay progresses; indeed, our concluding comments, about the potential value of the **תַּרְפִּים** to the tribesmen of Dan who stole them, are the product of considerable supposition. Nevertheless, we have judged this matter to be worth considering, if for no other reason than the fact that, as we have mentioned briefly in the preceding paragraphs, biblical scholarship has generally focused its analysis of the Danites' thievery only on their taking of the cult figurine Micah's mother had commissioned.

Indeed, it is our contention that despite a degree of speculation, our discussion of the Danites' stealing of Micah's **תַּרְפִּים** provides a more coherent interpretation of this theft than is otherwise available in the literature. Similarly, we aim, in discussing the other aspects of the **תַּרְפִּים** accounts of Judges 17–18 and Genesis 31 that we will consider, to illuminate details of these stories that scholars have heretofore been unable adequately to explain.

1. “AND MICAH MADE **אָפּוֹד וְתַרְפִּים**”

In Judg 17:5, after an initial notice (to which we will return) that Micah had a **בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים**, or a shrine, we are told **וַיַּעַשׂ אָפּוֹד וְתַרְפִּים**, “and he made **אָפּוֹד וְתַרְפִּים**.” At one level, this seems a fairly simple and straightforward statement, almost as basic a declarative sentence as one can construct, in fact, according to the norms of Hebrew grammar. At another level, however, this declaration is rife with ambiguity. As is suggested, for example, by our having left the phrase **אָפּוֹד וְתַרְפִּים** untranslated, scholars disagree, and markedly,

on how to render this expression. For some, **אָפּוֹד וְתַרְפִּים** is to be understood as a hendiadys and thus refers to only a single object,¹⁹ perhaps a **תַּרְפִּים** image that was covered with an overlay, or **אָפּוֹד**, of silver or gold (the term **אָפּוֹד** is used in precisely this way—to describe the gold plating that covers an image—in Isa 30:22, where we read of the **אֶפְדֵת מִסַּכַּת זָהָב**). According to most commentators, however, **אָפּוֹד** refers to an object other than Micah's **תַּרְפִּים**. But what?²⁰ The overgarment, or **אָפּוֹד**, that is a part of the priestly vestments? Or a divine image of some sort, as the term **אָפּוֹד** might mean elsewhere in Judges (Judg 8:27)? Or is **אָפּוֹד** in Judg 17:5, and also in Hos 3:4 and several passages in 1 Samuel, a synonym for the term **אָרוֹן**, “ark,” as van der Toorn in *CBQ* and van der Toorn and Lewis in the *TDOT* have argued, meaning that **אָפּוֹד** in Judg 17:5

¹⁹ See, for example, van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 250. See also C.A. Faraone, B. Garnand, and C. López-Ruiz, “Micah’s Mother (Judg. 17:1–4) and a Curse from Carthage (*KAI* 89): Canaanite Precedents for Greek and Latin Curses against Thieves?” *JNES* 64 (2005), 161–86 (164, n. 13), who argue not only that the phrase **אָפּוֹד וְתַרְפִּים** is to be understood as a hendiadys but that it should be taken as referring to the **פְּסָל וּמִסְכָּה** of 17:4 (which they also interpret as a hendiadys; see further below, n. 23), with **תַּרְפִּים** referring specifically to the **פְּסָל** proper and **אָפּוֹד** to its molten plating or **מִסְכָּה**. Other commentators similarly take **פְּסָל וּמִסְכָּה** and **אָפּוֹד וְתַרְפִּים** to be equivalent, with **פְּסָל וּמִסְכָּה** stemming from one stratum in the history of Judges 17–18’s textual development and the variant **אָפּוֹד וְתַרְפִּים** from another. See, for example, C.F. Burney, *The Book of Judges, with Introduction and Notes* (2d ed.; London: Rivington’s, 1920), 409; E.C. LaRocca-Pitts, “Of Wood and Stone”: *The Significance of Israelite Cultic Items in the Bible and Its Early Interpreters* (HSM, 61; Winona Lane, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 60; and G.F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (2d ed.; ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1903), 378. However, while Judges 17–18 no doubt has a multi-layered redactional history (see n. 22 below), it seems to us that the plainest meaning of the text—and the one embraced by the final redactor of Judges 17–18, in 18:17, 18, and 20 (although we admit, as we will note at several points in this paper, that these verses are grammatically confused and thus less than clear)—is to see the **פְּסָל וּמִסְכָּה** and the **אָפּוֹד וְתַרְפִּים** as distinct objects. See further Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, 1, 37: “the teraphim [...] are here [in Judges 17–18] distinguished clearly from a cultic image of the god proper [i.e., the **פְּסָל וּמִסְכָּה**].”

²⁰ For discussions of the term **אָפּוֹד** that go beyond the brief comments we offer here, see Bray, *Sacred Dan*, 112–18; S. Rudnig-Zelt, “Vom Propheten und seiner Frau, einem Ephod und einem Teraphim—Anmerkungen zu Hos 3:1–4, 5,” *VT* 60 (2010), 373–99 (385–87); M. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 166–68; P.J. King and L.E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville/London: Westminster/John Knox, 2001), 10; C. Meyers, “Ephod,” in D.N. Freedman (ed.), *ABD*, 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 550; and P.D. Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (Library of Ancient Israel; London: SPCK; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2000), 56.

designates a wooden box, like the ark, in which, van der Toorn and Lewis further propose, תְּרָפִים were kept?²¹

Fortunately for our purposes, it is not necessary that we resolve—or even attempt to resolve—this debate, since all of these interpretations agree that whether the אֶפֶד of Judg 17:5 overlaid Micah’s תְּרָפִים or was independent, Micah did make the תְּרָפִים on which it is our intention, as we noted above, to focus. More specifically, as we have also noted above, it is our attention to focus, at least initially, on a further point of ambiguity that we find in Judg 17:5: the question of what motivated Micah, at this particular point in the narrative, to make his תְּרָפִים. The text’s silence on this issue does seem to us curious, given that we are told in some detail in the preceding verses exactly what motivated a different member of Micah’s family, Micah’s mother, to consecrate two hundred pieces of silver to Yahweh and commission a metallurgist to fabricate from these פָּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה.²² This is, incidentally, another ambiguous phrase within Judges 17, which is perhaps to be taken, as is perhaps אֶפֶד וּתְרָפִים, as a hendiadys, meaning a “cast-metal figurine” (the grammar of 17:4, which refers to the פָּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה using a singular verb, וַיְהִי, argues for this interpretation).²³ Or the phrase פָּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה might be understood, as might אֶפֶד וּתְרָפִים, as referring to two separate objects, “an image,” פָּסֶל, and “a molten image,”

²¹ Van der Toorn, “Nature of the Biblical Teraphim,” 211–13; van der Toorn and Lewis, “תְּרָפִים,” 784–87. See also K. van der Toorn and C. Houtman, “David and the Ark,” *JBL* 113 (1994), 209–31 (212–19, 230). But cf. Lewis, “Teraphim,” 1598, who writes, “the full picture of the ephod [...] remains somewhat murky,” and van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 250, who states that “an ephod refers to an image of the god.”

²² To be sure, some scholars have proposed that Judg 17:1–4 was an originally separate tale from the next major episode that follows in Judges 17, Judg 17:7–13 (as is indicated by the fact that Micah’s name is rendered as מִיכָהוּ in Judg 17:1–4 and as מִיכָה in Judg 17:7–13). Verses 5–6, according to this reconstruction, were added by a redactor to unite the two pericopes. See, e.g., Boling, *Judges*, 258–59; van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 247; also the somewhat similar proposal advanced by Matthews, *Judges and Ruth*, 168, 170. If these scholars are correct, one could perhaps argue that the contrast we seek to draw here between the description of the mother’s motivations for making her פָּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה in 17:1–4 and the absence of any discussion of Micah’s motivations for making his אֶפֶד וּתְרָפִים in 17:5 is the result only of authorial idiosyncrasy: one author chose to articulate his subject’s motivation, another did not. But one might more readily maintain—as is our preference—that even if a redactor did add 17:5–6, he would have shaped these verses according to the model of 17:1–4 and thus would seek to intimate a motivation for Micah’s craftsmanship. This motivation we will propose presently.

²³ Scholars who read this phrase as a hendiadys include Boling, *Judges*, 256; Martin, *Judges*, 185; Rudnig-Zelt, “Vom Propheten und seiner Frau,” 377, 382; Soggin, *Judges*, 265; van der Toorn, “Nature of the Biblical Teraphim,” 211; and idem, “Israelite Figurines,” 49, n. 16, with additional references.

מִסְכָּה (the wording of Judg 18:17 and 18, and perhaps of 18:20, 30, and 31, where the term פְּסָל appears independent of מִסְכָּה, argues for this).²⁴ Yet whatever the מִסְכָּה וּפְסָל, it is clear what has motivated its/their fabrication: after the mother has had stolen from her a cache of eleven hundred pieces of silver, she utters a curse that seemingly condemns the thief but that she seeks to reverse on discovering that the miscreant was her own son. To effect this reversal, she blesses the son in the name of Yahweh and then consecrates a part of the silver to Yahweh as she seeks to evoke the deity's favor (Judg 17:2–3).²⁵

Conversely and curiously, as we have previously suggested, no explanation is given for Micah's fabrication of his תְּרָפִים. Note also another curious feature of—and yet another ambiguity we find in—the Judg 17:1–5 pericope: that although this tale of family drama is filled with Micah's kin (Micah himself, his mother, and the son whom Micah is said to appoint to serve his household as priest at the end of 17:5), nowhere in this text, nor anywhere else in the longer Judges 17–18 narrative, is any reference made to Micah's *father*. Our hypothesis is that this is because the story presumes the father to be dead and, moreover, quite recently dead. We further suggest, inspired by the proposition that the תְּרָפִים are to be identified as ancestor figurines, that the father's recent death explains why Micah felt prompted, according to the narrative's conceit, to make his תְּרָפִים in Judg 17:5: that shortly after his father's demise, Micah is appropriately depicted as fabricating a תְּרָפִים as a representation of this newly deceased ancestor.

To be sure, Judges 17–18 never explicitly claims that Micah's father is dead. Nevertheless, we propose that the story has within it

²⁴ Scholars who interpret in this way include D.M. Gunn, *Judges* (Blackwell Bible Commentaries; Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 231; LaRocca-Pitts, "Of Wood and Stone," 60–61; S. Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville/London: Westminster/John Knox, 2008), 172, n. g on p. 177, 181; Rofé, "No Ephod or Teraphim," 148; and T.J. Schneider, *Judges* (Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 233. See also Bray, *Sacred Dan*, 64, who revives an old suggestion made by Moore, *Judges*, 375–76, and by Burney, *Judges*, 409, 419, by reconstructing an original account in which only the term פְּסָל appeared, supplemented later by a glossator who added מִסְכָּה.

²⁵ On the general nature of this sort of אָלֵה curse and its ability to be reversed through blessing, see Sheldon H. Blank, "The Curse, Blasphemy, the Spell, and the Oath," *HUCA* 23 (1950/51), 73–95 (87–92), and Josef Scharbert, "אָלֵה," in G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds.), *TDOT*, 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 261–66. On Micah's mother's curse more specifically, see Faraone, Garnand, and López-Ruiz, "Micah's Mother (Judg. 17:1–4) and a Curse from Carthage," 161–86, and C. Meyers, "Judg 17:1–4, Mother of Micah," in C. Meyers (ed.), with T. Craven and R.S. Kraemer, *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 248.

several hints that point in this direction. We note first that our narrative consistently and repeatedly refers to Micah, and not his father, as the head of his household. Indeed, eleven times within Judges 17–18—in Judg 17:4, 8, 12; 18:2, 3, 13, 15, 18, 22, 25, and 26—we find the household in question referred to as the *בֵּית מִיכָה*, the “house of Micah,” or the “house of *מִיכָהוּ*” (a longer form of the same name). Perhaps one could argue that the reason the household is always assigned to Micah, and that the father is never mentioned, is a narrative assumption that Micah, after he came of age, moved away from his father’s house and established a home-stead separate from his father’s. But this hypothesis is highly unlikely: first, because such a scenario contradicts the model of ancient Israelite family life best indicated by both our archaeological and textual evidence, in which sons do continue to reside, even upon reaching adulthood, within their father’s households;²⁶ second, because such a scenario cannot explain the presence of Micah’s mother in her son’s home. Were her husband still alive, she should be resident with him in his household. Or, if her husband had divorced her, she would have returned from his household to resume living in her father’s house. The fact that she instead lives with her son could only suggest to an ancient Israelite audience that the father had died and that Micah had succeeded him as the household’s *paterfamilias*.

That the father is dead is additionally suggested by the fact that, as we have already seen, the mother, as our story opens, lays claim to the ownership of eleven hundred pieces of silver. Unfortunately, because our story begins *in medias res*, we are not told how the mother came into possession of her silver riches. We can, however, be sure of some ways in which she did not. For example, because it was overwhelmingly the norm in Iron Age Israelite tradition for marriages to be contracted not by the bride’s family bestowing a dowry upon her, but through the groom’s family transferring bridewealth (*נְהוּרָה*, usually translated as either “marriage present” or “marriage fee”) to the bride’s father,²⁷ it cannot be

²⁶ The premier presentation of this reconstruction of ancient Israelite household and family structure is L.E. Stager, “The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel,” *BAIOR* 260 (1985), 1–35. Other helpful discussions include O. Borowski, *Daily Life in Biblical Times* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 13–21; W.G. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2003), 102–7; idem, *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2005), 18–29; King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 9–19, 28–43; C. Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 128–38; J.D. Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 135–83; and van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 194–99.

²⁷ T.M. Lemos, *Marriage Gifts and Social Change in Ancient Palestine, 1200*

supposed that Micah's mother's eleven hundred pieces of silver were brought by her into her marriage. Nor does it make sense to suppose that Micah's mother came to possess her eleven hundred pieces of silver during the course of her married life, given that typically within an Iron Age Israelite household, property would have been held by a woman's spouse.²⁸ Yet if Micah's mother could not have come into possession of her cache of silver pieces during her marriage, and if the norms of Israelite marital practice dictate that she did not bring this silver with her to her nuptials, then it necessarily follows that the mother could have only acquired the silver after her marriage to Micah's father had come to an end: that is, she has taken over possession from the silver's previous owner, the father, because he is, as we have suggested, dead.²⁹

The father, we have further proposed, must be understood not only as dead but also as *recently* dead. Again, we must be clear that this is nowhere indicated explicitly in the text. Yet the evidence that points to the father's recent death is again, we maintain, promoted by several hints found within the Judges 17–18 account. Some of these hints, indeed, seem to us even more forceful than those that pointed to the supposition that the father was no longer living.

We begin by noting the fact that others among the father's generation are still alive (the mother). This suggests the father's death is at least somewhat recent, given that, on average, men outlived women in ancient Israel.³⁰ That the father's death, moreover, is not just somewhat, but instead quite recent is suggested by the several details in our story that present Micah's family in the state of household upheaval that a new death would entail. Striking in this regard is the insistence of Judg 17:5 that once the mother's פְּסָלָהּ and Micah's אֲפֹד וְתַרְפִּים are made, Micah installs one of his sons to serve his household as priest.³¹ This seems yet another curi-

BCE to 200 CE (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²⁸ B. Levine, *Numbers 21–36* (AB, 4A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 435.

²⁹ This interpretation is also urged by G.I. Emmerson, "Women in Ancient Israel," in R.E. Clements (ed.), *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives: Essays by Members of the Society for Old Testament Study* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 371–94 (381).

³⁰ C. Meyers estimates, for example, that the average life expectancy for women in ancient Israel was about thirty years of age, as opposed to forty for men; see her *Discovering Eve*, 112–13; eadem, "The Family in Early Israel," in L.G. Perdue *et al.*, *Families in Ancient Israel* (The Family, Religion, and Culture; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1997), 1–47 (28).

³¹ Boling argues that the identification in 17:5 of one of Micah's sons as the family's priest is meant to be read metaphorically and also as foreshadowing (*Judges*, 259). It is metaphorical, as Boling sees it, in that "son" refers not to a biological son at all but to "son" as an unrelated affiliate of

osity within our story, given that Judg 17:5 begins, as we have previously mentioned, by noting that “the man Micah had a shrine” (וְהָאִישׁ מִיכָה לוֹ בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים). So why is this already extant shrine only now, at the end of 17:5, getting a priest? Some scholars explain by comparing Gen 28:22 to suggest that Micah’s בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים or “shrine” was a simple מַצֵּבָה, or standing stone, which would not have required a priest to attend it;³² the presence of a priest, whose primary function in our story is to serve as an oracular specialist (Judg 18:5),³³ only becomes necessary, according to this account, after the fabrication of Micah’s אֶפֶוד וְתַרְפִּים, when a divinatory expert, or priest, would be required to make inquiries using this (or these) item(s).³⁴ As we will discuss further below, however, we do think our text indicates that Micah’s בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים or “shrine” is better understood as an actual shrine building, or at least a dedicated sacred space. We also think it most logical to presume that this sort of dedicated building or space must have had furnishings in it that would have called for the services of a divinatory specialist prior to the making of either the פֶּסֶל וּמַסָּכָה or the אֶפֶוד וְתַרְפִּים. So again we ask: why, in Judg 17:5, is Micah’s previously extant shrine only now getting a priest?

Our suggestion is that the shrine is *not* getting a priest in 17:5 for the first time; rather, we propose the shrine is getting a *new* priest in 17:5 because the previous priest had somehow been separated from his post. More specifically, we suggest that just as Micah appointed his son to serve as priest of his household’s shrine in 17:5, the man who preceded Micah in the role of paterfamilias had previously appointed his son to serve as the shrine’s priest. More simply put: we suggest that Micah’s father appointed Micah to

Micah’s family. More specifically, the reference to “son,” according to Boling (and here is the foreshadowing), anticipates the story of the levitical priest who becomes “like a son to Micah” in 17:7–13. The priest referred to in 17:5, that is, is the Levite who is not actually installed until 17:12. This interpretation seems, though, unnecessarily to override the plain meaning of the text, which we, along all other commentators, would take to mean that Micah’s original priest was his biological son who was then replaced by a priestly specialist of the levitical guild. See likewise Albartz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, 1, 100; J. Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (NCB Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Basingstoke, UK: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1986), 341; Gunn, *Judges*, 231; Martin, *Judges*, 186; Matthews, *Judges and Ruth*, 169; McCann, *Judges*, 120; Niditch, *Judges*, 182; and Soggin, *Judges*, 270.

³² T.N.D. Mettinger, *No Graven Image: Israelite Aniconism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context* (ConBOT, 42; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1995), 141, citing A. de Pury, *Promesse divine et légende culturelle dans le cycle de Jacob. Genèse 28 et les traditions patriarcales* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1975), 427–28.

³³ Bray, *Sacred Dan*, 89, 95, 126, 138; M.S. Moore, “Role Pre-Emption in the Israelite Priesthood,” *VT* 46 (1996), 316–29 (326).

³⁴ Such an argument is put forward by Rofé, “No *Ephod* or *Teraphim*,” 148.

serve as priest of the shrine while the father was still alive. But among the transitions that ensue upon the occasion of the father's death, Micah, according to our story's logic, was required to assume leadership over the family and thus to pass the priestly role onto a son of the next generation.³⁵ The implication that follows is crucial for our argument regarding timing: that it is the recent death of Micah's father and the change in Micah's household role that stems from that death that drives the change in the priestly office.

Still, there is an event that precedes even the changes in household leadership that Judg 17:5 presumes: Micah's theft of his mother's silver, her curse of the thief, the silver's restoration, and the fabrication of the **פֶּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה** that results. Unlike the leadership transitions of Judg 17:5, this incident can hardly be said to be normative upon the occasion of a paterfamilias's death. Nevertheless, we argue that the silver's theft too is best explained as a consequence of the father's just prior demise. More specifically, the father's just prior demise could explain why Micah, at this particular point in his life, is said to try to take the silver to which his father, we have argued above, had previously laid claim. Perhaps, for example, we are meant to reason that as the household's new paterfamilias, Micah felt that the silver should by rights belong to him rather than his mother. Alternatively, we may be meant to think that Micah perceived that an opportunity to seize the silver more easily became available when its guardianship passed from his father and into female hands. In either case, however, it is the presumption of the father's quite recent death and the transitions and even turmoil that ensue that explain most convincingly why Micah is said in 17:2 to have made a play for his mother's silver hoard.

This brings us back to the **תְּרָפִים** that Micah is said to have made in 17:5, an action that we propose is part and parcel with all the other acts that we have just argued follow closely on the heels of Micah's father's death: the mother's taking possession of her husband's silver hoard; Micah's attempting to claim that silver hoard for himself; Micah's appointing his son to replace him, as we interpret, as the family's priest; *and*, we now add, Micah fabricating of a **תְּרָפִים** image to serve as a representation of his recently dead father. To put the matter another way: understanding **תְּרָפִים** in general as representations of a family's deceased ancestors, as van der Toorn and Lewis have most recently argued, and understanding Micah's **תְּרָפִים** in particular as a representation of his lately deceased father, elucidates in a compelling way an otherwise unexplained detail of Judges 17—what prompts Micah in 17:5 to make a **תְּרָפִים** in the first place? According to our interpretation: on the occasion of his father's demise, Micah fabricated a **תְּרָפִים** as a rep-

³⁵ See similarly Brichto, "Kin, Cult, Land and Afterlife," 46, who writes—citing Judg 17:5—that "there is ample evidence that the role of priest in the Israelite family had at one time been filled by the firstborn."

resentation of his newly deceased ancestor.³⁶ We might even suggest that Micah fabricated this **תְּרָפִים** as the transitional period that his father's death had occasioned comes to a close: first, after the initial turmoil entailed by the silver's theft had been resolved, but more important, after the initial rites of burial and mourning prescribed by Israelite ritual had come to an end and the dead father is finally ready to be enshrined as one of his family's deceased ancestors.

This leads us to consider the issue of Micah's shrine. We suggest, first, that Judges 17–18 means us to envision Micah as placing the **תְּרָפִים** that he made of his recently deceased father in his **בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים**, or shrine, that is mentioned in Judg 17:5 and that the **אֲפֹד**, if it is a separate object from the **תְּרָפִים**, was placed in this shrine as well. In addition, we propose that the shrine should be taken to hold Micah's mother's **פְּסָל וּמִסְכָּה**. All this is somewhat indicated by the fact that the account of Micah's mother's commissioning of her **פְּסָל וּמִסְכָּה** in 17:4 and the account of Micah's making of his **תְּרָפִים וְאֲפֹד** in Judg 17:5b bracket the phrase **וְהָאִישׁ מִיכָה לֹו בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים** in 17:5a, a juxtaposition that could readily suggest that all of these cultic appurtenances—the **פְּסָל וּמִסְכָּה**, the **בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים**, and the **אֲפֹד וְתְרָפִים**—are to be associated in terms of physical location. Likewise, in Judg 18:14, 17, 18, and 20, the terms **אֲפֹד וּמִסְכָּה פְּסָל**, and **תְּרָפִים** (once rendered in their composite forms, **פְּסָל וּמִסְכָּה** and **אֲפֹד וְתְרָפִים** [18:14] and otherwise as up to four seemingly independent items [18:17, 18, and 20]) appear together, which again could readily suggest that they were envisioned as housed together: more specifically, in the **בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים**, which, as we suggested briefly above, we would take to be a dedicated shrine room or shrine building that was within Micah's household compound.

To be sure, and as we have also already mentioned, some scholars have argued, based on Gen 28:22, that Micah's **בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים** is to be understood as a **מַצֵּבָה** or standing stone—and consequently as a sacred object in and of itself, rather than being a repository for other sanctified items.³⁷ But this argument has not found much support in the literature, and it makes no sense if we are to understand Micah's **בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים**, as we have just proposed, as housing at least two and up to four items. Nor is it really plausible to think that Micah's **בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים**, or shrine, might refer to the sorts of small pottery shrines known from Syro-Palestinian archaeological excavations, such as the small, box-shaped pottery shrines that

³⁶ But cf. van der Toorn, "Nature of the Biblical Teraphim," 212, and van der Toorn and Lewis, "תְּרָפִים," 787, who offer a different account of Micah's motivation: that since Hos 3:4 intimates that **אֲפֹד וְתְרָפִים** are among the "standard furnishings of an ancient Palestinian temple," Micah's desire was to set up a "real" shrine as opposed to the more modest "family chapel" already extant in his household.

³⁷ Above, n. 32.

were meant to represent, in miniature, shrine buildings,³⁸ or the small, cylinder-shaped pottery shrine such as was found among the remains of Middle Bronze Age Ashkelon.³⁹ The scale of these pottery shrines argues against identifying Micah's **בֵּית אֱלֹהִים** with these artifacts. For example, a tenth-eighth century BCE exemplar of the box-shaped pottery shrines that represent miniature shrine buildings that comes from Tell el-Far'ah North stands only 20.8 cm high and is only 12.5–13.9 cm wide and 10.5 cm deep.⁴⁰ The cylinder-

³⁸ For exemplars and discussion, see, preeminently, J. Bretschneider, *Architekturmodelle in Vorderasien und der östlichen Ägäis vom Neolithikum bis in das 1. Jahrtausend: Phänomene in der Kleinkunst an Beispielen aus Mesopotamien, dem Iran, Anatolien, Syrien, der Levante und dem ägäischen Raum unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der bau- und der religionsgeschichtlichen Aspekte* (AOAT, 229; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag; Kevelaer: Butzon and Bercker, 1991), and B. Muller, *Les "maquettes architecturales" du Proche-Orient Ancien: Mésopotamie, Syrie, Palestine du III^e au I^{er} millénaire av. J.-C* (2 vols.; Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique, 160; Beirut: Institut Français d'Archéologie du Proche-Orient, 2002); also O. Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 162 and Figs. 221 and 222; idem and C. Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 162–63 and Figs. 188a–b; and Z. Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallaxic Approaches* (London/New York: Continuum, 2001), 328–43.

³⁹ L.E. Stager, "The House of the Silver Calf of Ashkelon," in E. Czerny, I. Hein, H. Hunger, D. Melman, and A. Schwab (eds.), *Timelines: Studies in Honour of Manfred Bietak*, 2 (OLA, 149; Leuven/Paris/Dudley, MA: Uitgeverij Peeters en Departement Oosterse Studies, 2006), 403–10 (404–9); see also idem, "The Canaanite Silver Calf," in L.E. Stager, J.D. Schloen, and D.M. Master (eds.), *Ashkelon, 1: Introduction and Overview (1985–2006)* (Harvard Semitic Museum Publications: Final Reports of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 577–80 (577), and idem, "When Canaanites and Philistines Ruled Ashkelon," *BAR* 17/2 (Mar/Apr 1991), 24–37, 40–43. The shrine is illustrated as well in King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 173 (Ill. 84).

⁴⁰ This shrine was originally published by A. Chambon, *Tell el-Far'ah 1: L'âge du fer* (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1984), 77–78 and Pl. 66:1; the measurements given here are taken from Muller, *Les "maquettes architecturales" du Proche-Orient Ancien*, 1, 53, 341. For further discussion (with drawings and/or photographs), see Bretschneider, *Architekturmodelle in Vorderasien und der östlichen Ägäis*, 129, 233, and Plate 90 (Fig. 79a–b); Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?* 114–15, 117; idem, "A Temple Built for Two: Did Yahweh Share a Throne with His Consort Asherah?" *BAR* 34/2 (March/April 2008), 54–62, 85 (62); Keel and Uehlinger, *God, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 162 and Figs. 188a–b; Muller, *Les "maquettes architecturales" du Proche-Orient Ancien*, 1, 53–54, 339–42, and also 2, Fig. 142–44; E.A. Willett, "Women and Household Shrines in Ancient Israel" (Ph.D. diss., University of Arizona, 1999), 123, 127; and Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 337–38. The date of the shrine is debated in these sources: Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?*, 115, gives a tenth-century BCE date, as does Willett, "Women and Household Shrines in Ancient Israel," 118. Keel and

shaped pottery shrine found at Ashkelon is likewise quite small—it stands 25.2 cm tall and is 13.8 cm wide at its greatest diameter.⁴¹ But this small size seems a problem if Micah’s shrine is to hold, as we have suggested above, multiple objects, including Micah’s mother’s פֶּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה and Micah’s אֵפוֹד וְתַרְפִּים. Of course, just how significant this problem might be depends on how one interprets the פֶּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה and אֵפוֹד וְתַרְפִּים: as two, three, or four items. Still, we note that the Ashkelon shrine was specifically manufactured to hold only *one* piece,⁴² an 11 cm long and 10.5 cm high cast-metal figurine of a bull-calf.⁴³

The small size of the pottery shrines known from archaeological excavations also signals them as portable. Were Micah’s בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים portable, however, we would have expected this shrine to have been included among the list of religious treasures that the men of Dan are said to have stolen from Micah in Judges 18. Yet, although the list of Micah’s religious treasures is confused across its multiple iterations (and so, for example, as we have already mentioned, פֶּסֶל and מִסְכָּה are treated as separate objects in Judg 18:17 and 18 while seemingly as a single figurine in Judg 17:4 and 18:14), in *none* of the four lists of Micah’s stolen treasures (18:14, 17, 18, and 20) is the בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים included. This suggests again that Micah’s בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים was not a small and thus easily heisted pottery shrine—and in addition suggests yet again that the בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים was not a מִצְבֵּה, or at least not the sort of small-scale (pillow-sized) מִצְבֵּה that the phrase בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים is used to describe in Gen 28:22. Rather, Micah’s בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים is better interpreted as a fixed, dedicated, sanctified *space*. This is, in fact, precisely how בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים is used in every biblical text other than Gen 28:22 in which the term appears, including a verse that is almost immediately antecedent to Gen 28:22, Gen 28:17. There, Jacob specifically describes the *place* (מְקוֹם) of Bethel as a בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים. Likewise in Ps 55:15 (in most of the Bible’s English versions, 55:14), the Psalmist is said to walk *into* (בְּ) a בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים, and in 2 Chr 34:9, בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים is used as a synonym for the Jerusalem temple.

Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of Gods*, 162, assign the shrine to the late tenth century BCE. Muller, *Les “maquettes architecturales” du Proche-Orient Ancien*, 1, 53, proposes the tenth to ninth century BCE; Bretschneider, *Architekturmodelle in Vorderasien und der östlichen Ägäis*, 233, suggests a date of c. 900 BCE; Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 337, dates the shrine to the ninth or eighth century BCE.

⁴¹ These dimensions are taken from Stager, “The House of the Silver Calf of Ashkelon,” 405.

⁴² Stager, “The House of the Silver Calf of Ashkelon,” 405, writes, “a doorway cut into the side of the cylinder [...] is *just large enough* for the calf to pass through” (emphasis ours). See similarly idem, “The Canaanite Silver Calf,” 577.

⁴³ These dimensions are taken from Stager, “The House of the Silver Calf of Ashkelon,” 405; idem, “The Canaanite Silver Calf,” 579.

As to the specific nature of Micah's dedicated and sanctified shrine space: we could perhaps think of a "cult corner" or "cult niche," a "part of a room or courtyard" within a house that was designated for religious purposes and that thus contained a constellation of religious objects and furnishings⁴⁴—such as, say, the **פֶּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה** and **אֲפֹד וּתְרָפִים** of Judg 17:4–5. These "cult corners" or "cult niches" have been identified within the archaeological remains of several ancient Israelite houses.⁴⁵ Yet while it is certainly

⁴⁴ This definition of "cult corner" or "cult niche" is taken from Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 123.

⁴⁵ A fragment of a second model house shrine from Tell el-Far'ah North, for example, was discovered in that site's House 440 (see Muller, *Les "maquettes architecturales" du Proche-Orient Ancien*, 1, 53, 339–40, and 2, Fig. 142; Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 337), in conjunction with several arguably cultic artifacts that belonged to that household's "cult corner," which was located in the house's central courtyard (Loci 440 and 460). These artifacts included a figurine body of a nursing woman, the head of a horse figurine, and a figurine of the "woman holding a disk" type (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 241). The date of these domestic cult remains is debated: they are from the tenth century BCE according to Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?* 115, 117; to Muller, *Les "maquettes architecturales" du Proche-Orient Ancien*, 1, 53–54 (with regard to the model-shrine fragment); and to Willett, "Women and Household Shrines in Ancient Israel," 118. But they date from the ninth century BCE according to Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 241.

Similar materials from household "cult corners" or "cult niches" were also found in other houses at Tell el-Far'ah North (B. Alpert Nakhai, "Varieties of Religious Expression in the Domestic Setting," in A. Yasur-Landau, J.R. Ebeling, and L.B. Mazow [eds.], *Household Archaeology in Ancient Israel and Beyond* [Culture and History of the Ancient Near East, 50; Leiden/Boston: E.J. Brill, 2011], 347–60 [354]), and remains from household "cult corners" or "cult niches" have been found as well at other sites, for example: (1) the twelfth- and eleventh-century BCE village of Khirbet Raddana (Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?* 115; B. Alpert Nakhai, *Archaeology and the Religions of Canaan and Israel* [ASOR Books, 7; Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2001], 173–74); (2) tenth-century BCE Megiddo (Nakhai, *Archaeology and the Religions of Canaan and Israel*, 177, citing Y. Shiloh, "Iron Age Sanctuaries and Cult Elements in Palestine," in F.M. Cross [ed.], *Symposia Celebrating the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the American Schools of Oriental Research (1900–1975)* [Zion Research Foundation Occasional Publications, 1–2; Cambridge, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1979], 147–57 [149]); (3) ninth- and eighth-century BCE Beersheba (Willett, "Women and Household Shrines in Ancient Israel," 142, 150; Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 175–76); (4) Level A (ninth- to seventh-century BCE) at Tell Beit Mirsim (J.S. Holladay, Jr., "Religion in Israel and Judah Under the Monarchy: An Explicitly Archaeological Approach," in P.D. Miller, P.D. Hanson, and S.D. McBride [eds.], *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 249–99 [276]); (5) eighth-century BCE Tel Halif (J.W. Hardin, "Understanding Domestic Space: An Example from Iron Age Tel Halif," *NEA* 67 [2004], 71–83 [76–77, 79]); and (6)

possible that Judg 17:4–5 means for us to envision that Micah’s mother’s פֶּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה and Micah’s אֲפֹד וּתְרָפִים were stationed in this sort of “shrine corner” or “shrine niche,” we believe a close reading of the larger Judges 17–18 pericope suggests Micah’s בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים, or shrine, was actually a designated shrine room or shrine building, separate from Micah’s house proper.

Two aspects of the Micah story in particular indicate this to us. The first is that the entity that our Judges text calls “the house of Micah,” or בַּיִת מִיכָה/בַּיִת מִיכָה, was undoubtedly made up of more than just Micah’s personal domicile. This is indicated in Judg 18:13–14, for example, in which we are told that the six hundred members of the tribe of Dan who are passing by בַּיִת מִיכָה (v 13), or “the house of Micah,” on their way to conquer and take as their tribal fiefdom the northern city of Laish, are urged by the five advance scouts who journey with them—and who in their previous scouting journey had stayed with Micah—to steal the אֲפֹד וּתְרָפִים וּמִסְכָּה וּפֶסֶל located בַּבָּתִּים הָאֵלֶּה (v 14), literally “in these *houses*” (plural), or, more idiomatically, at least as we (along with several other commentators) would interpret, “in these buildings” that make up an extended household compound that comprises “the house of Micah.” After the Danites do indeed steal this household’s religious treasures, moreover, they are pursued (unsuccessfully) by “the men who were in the houses that were with the house of Micah” (הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר בַּבָּתִּים אֲשֶׁר עִם־בַּיִת מִיכָה; Judg 18:22), or, more idiomatically (at least, again, as we and several other commentators would interpret), “the men whose homes were within the extended household compound of Micah.”⁴⁶ These men we take to be Micah’s sons, possibly his grandsons, and possibly unrelated servants, slaves, and other sojourners—although not the Levite whom Micah is said to have appointed in Judg 17:7–13 to replace his son as his family’s priest. Rather, this Levite flees with the Danites in 18:20, having been persuaded by them that it would profit him more to serve as priest for an entire tribe than it has serving as priest for only one household.

We further propose that there are indications within our story that among the multiple buildings that comprise Micah’s household compound is a dedicated shrine room or shrine building—Micah’s בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים—although we must admit that the text is not definitive in this regard. Still, we argue that this makes the best sense of sev-

eighth-century BCE Hazor (Holladay, “Religion in Israel and Judah Under the Monarchy,” 278–79). A short but very good summary of the most recent discussions of these various data can be found in L.A. Hitchcock, “Cult Corners in the Aegean and the Levant,” in A. Yasur-Landau, J.R. Ebeling, and L.B. Mazow (eds.), *Household Archaeology in Ancient Israel and Beyond* (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East, 50; Leiden/Boston: E.J. Brill, 2011), 321–45 (321–22).

⁴⁶ See similarly Meyers, “The Family in Early Israel,” 17; Stager, “The Archaeology of the Family,” 22; van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 197–98; and Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 626.

eral otherwise enigmatic verses within Judges 17–18. In Judg 18:3, for example, we are told that the five advance scouts who were passing through Ephraim during their journey to the far north to seek land for the Danites were in “the house of Micah,” *בֵּית מִיכָה*, when they heard the voice of the Levite who had become Micah’s priest in 17:7–13 and recognized it—probably because the Levite is said to have come to Ephraim from Bethlehem and so spoke, like the Danites, with the accent and speech patterns of the South rather than those of the North.⁴⁷ The five Danite scouts then “turn aside” (*וַיִּסּוּרוּ*) to speak to the Levite “there” (*שָׁם*). But where is “there,” or to where, specifically, would the Danites have turned, given that the Levite is said in Judg 17:12 to have been, like them, in “the house of Micah” (*בֵּית מִיכָה*)? Our suggestion is that the Levite was indeed in “the house of Micah” in the sense that he was resident in one of the several buildings that made up Micah’s household compound and that it was there that Micah’s Danite visitors encountered him when they turned aside from the actual “house of Micah”—meaning Micah’s personal domicile—to speak to him. We interpret similarly the grammatically difficult passage found in 18:15, in which the company of the six hundred Danite men on their way to capture Laish follows the advice of the original scouts to detour toward the *בֵּית־הַנְּעָר הַלְוִי בֵּית מִיכָה*, literally “the house of the Levite youth, the house of Micah.” Because this phrase approaches the nonsensical, some commentators delete the second half of it, the reference to “the house of Micah,” as an extraneous gloss.⁴⁸ But we might better imagine a point in the scribal transmission of this verse in which a *בְּ*, meaning “in,” that preceded the phrase *בֵּית מִיכָה*, or “the house of Micah,” was mistakenly dropped.⁴⁹ If so, then the original text would be rendered *בֵּית־הַנְּעָר הַלְוִי בְּבֵית מִיכָה*, “the house of the Levite youth that was in the house of Micah,” or, as we interpret, the house of the Levite youth that was one of the buildings that made up the multi-building household compound of Micah.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ G.A. Rendsburg, *Linguistic Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990); idem, *Israelian Hebrew in the Book of Kings* (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2002).

⁴⁸ So, e.g., the editors of the *BHS*, note on Judg 18:15; Martin, *Judges*, 193; and Moore, *Judges*, 397.

⁴⁹ This emendation is also suggested by Boling, *Judges*, 264; Niditch, *Judges*, 175, seems to embrace such a reading as well. However, Boling’s overall understanding of what is meant by *בֵּית מִיכָה* differs significantly from ours.

⁵⁰ See likewise J. Blenkinsopp, “The Family in First Temple Israel,” in L.G. Perdue *et al.*, *Families in Ancient Israel* (The Family, Religion, and Culture; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1997), 48–103 (52), and L.G. Perdue, “The Israelite and Early Jewish Family,” in *ibid.*, 163–222 (175). See also M.W. Bartusch, *Understanding Dan: An Exegetical Study of a Biblical City, Tribe and Ancestor* (JSOTSup, 379; London/New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 175 (note on v. 15), who suggests that “it

When this verse in Judges 18:15 is read in conjunction with 18:17, moreover, what is implied is that it was the “house of the Levite youth” that the Danites entered in order to steal the compound’s religious treasures. Yet we have already suggested, based on the juxtapositions of the phrases **בֵּית אֱלֹהִים**, **פֶּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה**, and **אֶפֶוד וְתַרְפִּים** in 17:4–5 and based on the occurrence of the terms **פֶּסֶל**, **מִסְכָּה**, **אֶפֶוד**, and **תַּרְפִּים** in conjunction in 18:14, 17, 18, and 20, that Micah’s household’s religious treasures were housed within Micah’s **בֵּית אֱלֹהִים**, or “shrine.” Therefore, we now propose that Judg 18:15’s “house of the Levite youth” and Micah’s **בֵּית אֱלֹהִים** were one and the same: that Micah’s **בֵּית אֱלֹהִים** where the **פֶּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה** and **אֶפֶוד וְתַרְפִּים** were kept was a dedicated shrine room or shrine building that was the Levite’s domain within Micah’s larger household compound.⁵¹ Indeed, from at least one premonarchic Israelite village, early twelfth- through mid-eleventh-century BCE Ai (et-Tell), we have archaeological evidence of precisely this sort of dedicated shrine room—a space that was, like Micah’s **בֵּית אֱלֹהִים**, or shrine, associated with a multi-building household compound and that held religiously precious objects.⁵² Among the Iron Age II remains of Tell en-Naşbeh (Stratum III), A.J. Brody has somewhat similarly identified a room—Room 513—that, although it was also used as a storeroom, held a shrine that Brody theorizes would have served the members of its extended family’s five-building household compound.⁵³

But to suggest this answer to the interpretive question of how, exactly, we are to understand the nature of Micah’s **בֵּית אֱלֹהִים**, or shrine, is to raise immediately another interpretive problem, one that is somewhat analogous to the interpretive problem we discussed above regarding Micah’s appointing his son as priest at the

may also be possible to understand ‘Levite’ as a construct form” and thus to read “to the house of the young man, the Levite of the house of Micah.” This rendering would seemingly suggest, as we do here, a separate “house” for the Levite within the household compound of Micah.

⁵¹ See similarly Bray, *Sacred Dan*, 63; Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel*, 68; and especially Soggin, *Judges*, 272, 274.

⁵² Although excavated by the French archaeologist J. Marquet-Krause in the 1930s and labeled by her as “un lieu saint” or a cult room (*Les fouilles de ‘Ay (et-Tell), 1933–35* [Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique, 45; Paris: Geuthner, 1949], 23), this room’s religious character has only recently been thoroughly analyzed, especially by Zevit, in his *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 153–56. See also the brief discussions of Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?* 113, and Nakhai, *Archaeology and the Religions of Canaan and Israel*, 173 (Nakhai is in addition responsible for bringing to our attention the quote from Marquet-Krause cited above).

⁵³ A.J. Brody, “The Archaeology of the Extended Family: A Household Compound from Iron II Tell en-Naşbeh,” in A. Yasur-Landau, J.R. Ebeling, and L.B. Mazow (eds.), *Household Archaeology in Ancient Israel and Beyond* (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East, 50; Leiden/Boston: E.J. Brill, 2011), 237–54, especially 252–54.

end of Judg 17:5. Recall that in considering that issue, we noted the need to identify who had served as Micah's household's priest prior to the son's installation, since the statement that begins Judg 17:5, "the man Micah had a shrine" (וְהָאִישׁ מִיכָה לוֹ בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים), supposes an extant shrine that, as we have now demonstrated, was an actual dedicated space to which some priestly attendant must have been assigned preceding the son's appointment. It seems in turn logical to presume that this already existent shrine must have had something already in it—and more specifically, we have proposed, extant furnishings that required this previous priest's ministrations. Yet, if Judg 17:4–5 intimate that the only furnishings of Micah's בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים, or shrine, were the פְּסָל וּמִסְכָּה that Micah's mother had commissioned according to Judg 17:4 and the אֲפֹד וְתַרְפִּים that Micah made according to 17:5, then what was in this shrine building *before* the fabrication of these objects?

The most plausible answer, we submit, rests on the grammatical ambiguity of the term תַּרְפִּים that we noted already in our opening remarks: the fact that תַּרְפִּים can have both a singular and plural meaning. In Judges 17–18, we suggest, both are used, at different points in the story.⁵⁴ In Judg 17:5, as we would interpret, Micah makes a single תַּרְפִּים and an associated אֲפֹד (however one wants to interpret that term), which he places in his household shrine, alongside his mother's פְּסָל וּמִסְכָּה. In Judges 18, the Danites abscond not only with this single תַּרְפִּים, its associated אֲפֹד, and the פְּסָל וּמִסְכָּה, but also with several other תַּרְפִּים that stood, as we would interpret, in Micah's shrine prior to Micah's making of his single תַּרְפִּים in Judg 17:5. These other תַּרְפִּים we take to be representations of Micah's previously deceased ancestors, including, presumably, individuals such as Micah's great-grandfather, his grandfather, perhaps some great-grand-uncles and grand-uncles. In fact, because Judg 18:14, 17, 18, and 20, in listing the treasures that the Danites stole from Micah's shrine, invoke nothing other than the terms פְּסָל, מִסְכָּה, אֲפֹד, and תַּרְפִּים, we cannot help but conclude—assuming we accept that the shrine must have had furnishings antecedent to its becoming the repository for the mother's פְּסָל וּמִסְכָּה and Micah's אֲפֹד וְתַרְפִּים—that תַּרְפִּים in 18:14, 17, 18, and 20 has a plural referent. Such a suggestion, moreover, could plausibly explain why, in at least 18:17, 18, and 20, the terms אֲפֹד and תַּרְפִּים are rendered separately, as opposed to the composite phrase אֲפֹד וְתַרְפִּים that is found in 17:5, for while אֲפֹד וְתַרְפִּים in 17:5 refers, as we have interpreted, to the single תַּרְפִּים Micah appropriately made upon the death of his father, along with its associated אֲפֹד, 18:17, 18, and 20 refer to that or perhaps some other אֲפֹד in conjunction with תַּרְפִּים with which it is *not* as directly associated.

⁵⁴ Somewhat analogous is the way בַּיִת in the Judges 17–18 story carries both a singular and plural meaning, as the personal "house" or domicile of Micah that stands within the multi-building, "house of Micah" compound. See van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 197–98.

These are the multiple תַּרְפִּים that represent Micah's previously deceased ancestors.

Note, however, that Micah's making of a תַּרְפִּים in 17:5 to augment the תַּרְפִּים that, according to our interpretation, are already extant in the shrine only makes sense if we are to understand the תַּרְפִּים as ancestor figurines and not as household gods. After all, why, in a household already in possession of a collection of gods, would Micah need to fabricate another? Only if we interpret Micah's תַּרְפִּים to be the latest in a series of ancestor figurines, each produced upon the occasion of a household patriarch's death, can we elucidate in a compelling way that the contents of Micah's בֵּית אֱלֹהִים, or shrine, prior to the addition of the items Micah and his mother made in Judg 17:4–5, would have been: the ancestor figurines of the household's past patriarchs. Indeed, it may be that while, above, we have consistently translated בֵּית אֱלֹהִים as “shrine,” a better translation would be the “house [בַּיִת] of the אֱלֹהִים,” with אֱלֹהִים serving here, as elsewhere in the Bible (preeminently in Gen 31:19, 30, 32, 34, and 35), as a synonym for תַּרְפִּים and denoting a family's representations of its deceased ancestors. Interesting to note in this regard are the comments of E. Bloch-Smith, who has drawn on the work of B. Halevi to suggest that Jacob's בֵּית אֱלֹהִים in Gen 28:22 might not be consecrated to God/Elohim, as commentators usually assume, but rather a marker for Jacob's deified ancestors, located on his family's ground.⁵⁵ The בֵּית אֱלֹהִים of Micah's household, as we interpret, might be similarly understood: as a repository for (among other things) several generations of Micah's household's ancestor figurines, to which Micah—upon the death of his father—added that paterfamilias's image.

2. “YOU HAVE TAKEN MY אֱלֹהִים”

Yet as we have seen, Micah's housing of his paterfamilias's תַּרְפִּים in his household's בֵּית אֱלֹהִים, along with his mother's פְּסָל וּמִסְכָּה and his family's תַּרְפִּים of past generations, is, by Judg 18:16–17, disrupted, as the men from Dan who pass through Micah's Ephraimite homestead on their way to take Laish plunder Micah's household shrine and take its treasures. Of these, the most precious from the Danites' point of view is surely the פְּסָל וּמִסְכָּה. After all, it is this object (if we interpret פְּסָל וּמִסְכָּה in the singular) or one of these two objects (if we interpret פְּסָל וּמִסְכָּה in the plural) that

⁵⁵ E. Bloch-Smith, “The Cult of the Dead in Judah: Interpreting the Material Remains,” *JBL* 111 (1992), 213–24 (220), citing B. Halevi, “עקבות נוספים לפולחן אבות,” *Beth Mivra* 64 (1975), 101–17 (114); see also E. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (JSOTSup, 123; JSOT/ASOR Monograph Series, 7; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 122. Bloch-Smith's comments become even more interesting were one to follow B. Halpern (“Levitic Participation in the Reform Cult of Jeroboam I,” *JBL* 95 [1976], 31–42 [36–37]) and identify Bethel as the location of Micah's בֵּית אֱלֹהִים.

becomes the focus of the sanctuary that the Danites, once they have taken Laish, establish for themselves (presuming here, with almost all commentators, that the פֶּסֶל the Danites enshrine for themselves according to Judg 18:30–31 is somehow equivalent to what is described elsewhere in Judges 17–18 using the compounded phrase פֶּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה). Indeed, if for no other reason than material worth, the פֶּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה would seem to be by far the most valuable of the objects that the Danites purloined (as metals like silver were relatively scarce in ancient Israel and hence remarkably precious).

Nevertheless, as Micah and his household entourage pursue the thieving Danites, he does not challenge them regarding the פֶּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה that his mother had commissioned. Instead, Micah accuses the Danites of stealing “my אֱלֹהִים that I made” (Judg 18:24). Most logically this is a reference to the תְּרָפִים of his deceased father that Micah manufactured in 17:5 after the father’s demise (and perhaps the associated אָפוּד, depending on how one understands that term), given, we can once more note, the way in which אֱלֹהִים, arguably with the meaning deceased spirits in general and a family’s deceased ancestors in particular, is used elsewhere in the Bible as a synonym of תְּרָפִים. Note moreover that the term אֱלֹהִים, like תְּרָפִים, can have either a singular or plural referent. Thus, while אֱלֹהִים as a synonym of תְּרָפִים in Gen 31:19, 30, 32, 34, and 35 refers to multiple תְּרָפִים (the grammar of 31:32, 34 requires this), אֱלֹהִים in Judg 18:24 can just as readily refer to the single תְּרָפִים (according to our interpretation) that Micah fabricated in Judg 17:5. Indeed, the verb used for Micah’s manufacture of the אָפוּד וּתְרָפִים in Judg 17:5 and the אֱלֹהִים about which he speaks in Judg 18:24 is the same, עָשָׂה, “to make.” Of course, עָשָׂה is a very common Hebrew lexeme. Nevertheless, within the context of Judges 17–18, an audience hearing of Micah’s “making” an אֱלֹהִים in 18:24 would most readily think, we maintain, of the אָפוּד וּתְרָפִים that Micah “made” in Judg 17:5.

But why is it the loss of his father’s תְּרָפִים (and perhaps the associated אָפוּד) that is so devastating for Micah, and not, say, the theft of the more valuable פֶּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה? One answer might be that since Micah’s mother has used only two hundred of her eleven hundred pieces of silver to make her cast-metal figurine(s), Micah imagines that he can easily replicate the lost פֶּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה and so need not give priority to its/their theft. But we suggest something more is at play here. More specifically: although we have heretofore considered only the role of the תְּרָפִים and the deceased ancestors that they represent in rituals of divination, we propose now to take into account deceased ancestors’ function in cementing their descendants’ claim to their families’ נַחֲלָה. This term is commonly translated as “inheritance,” but as is well attested in the scholarly literature, its meaning is in fact much more multivalent and complex. Indeed, so multivalent and complex is the term נַחֲלָה, as well as the concepts associated with it, that no one definition can adequately gloss every occurrence of the word in the Hebrew Bible, much less

the use of the cognates of **נַחֲלָה** elsewhere in ancient Near Eastern literature. Still, it is clear that in several instances in the Bible, **נַחֲלָה** does refer to inheritance in the specific sense of the land each Israelite family claimed perpetually to hold as its inalienable patrimony.⁵⁶

The biblical witness speaks clearly, moreover, to the need to bury a family's ancestors together in a tomb associated with this **נַחֲלָה**, even if this required extraordinary measures at the time of death or long after. The premier case is the imperative that the Israelites of the Exodus generation feel, according to the biblical account, to move the body of the long-dead Joseph out of Egypt so that he might be interred "in the portion of the field that Jacob had purchased from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem," which "belonged to the descendants of Joseph as a **נַחֲלָה**" (Josh 24:32). Likewise, David is said to go to significant effort to exhume the bones of the dead King Saul and his son Jonathan from their original tomb in Jabesh-Gilead so that they might be reburied in the territory of Saul's tribe, Benjamin. More specifically, they are reburied in the tomb of Saul's father Kish in Zela (2 Sam 21:13–14), a town which we can take, based on Josh 18:28, to be the **נַחֲלָה** assigned to the Saulides within the Benjaminites' tribal allotment. Passages such as Josh 24:30 and Judg 2:9 similarly attest to the necessity for burial within one's family's **נַחֲלָה**.⁵⁷

But why is burial within the family **נַחֲלָה** so important? As Bloch-Smith has argued, "ancestral tombs served to reinforce the family claim to the patrimony, the **נַחֲלָה**." That is, Bloch-Smith goes on to say, "the existence of the tomb constituted a physical, perpetual witness to ownership of the land," or, more simply put, "the tomb [...] constituted a physical claim to the patrimony."⁵⁸ Likewise, H.C. Brichto, in a seminal article whose very title, "Kin, Cult, Land and Afterlife—A Biblical Complex," captures perfectly the intricate interrelationship that existed between an Israelite

⁵⁶ In addition to the standard lexica, dictionaries, and encyclopedias, we have found especially helpful the discussions of G. Gerleman, "Nutzrecht und Wohnrecht: Zur Bedeutung von **אחזה** and **נחלה**," *ZAW* 89 (1977), 313–25; N.C. Habel, *The Land is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), *passim*, but especially 33–35; P.D. Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 63–65; and Lewis, "The Ancestral Estate," 598–99, 605–7, with extensive references.

⁵⁷ These latter two references were brought to our attention by Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 111; see similarly eadem, "The Cult of the Dead in Judah," 222, and Lewis, "The Ancestral Estate," 608. Cf. as well Josh 24:33; Judg 8:32; 16:31; and 2 Sam 2:32 (as cited by Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 115) and, as Bloch-Smith elsewhere points out ("Resurrecting the Iron I Dead," *IEJ* 54 [2004], 77–91 [87]), Judg 12:7 and 1 Kgs 11:43 (// 2 Chr 9:31). In addition see, as noted by Lewis ("The Ancestral Estate," 608), 1 Sam 25:1 and 1 Kgs 2:34.

⁵⁸ Bloch-Smith, "Cult of the Dead in Judah," 222.

family, its deceased ancestors, and the family's land, claims that "the burial place as the ancestral home" attaches the family "to the soil."⁵⁹ "The land represented the family," van der Toorn affirms, "joining the ancestors with their progeny," and he adds, "an important reason why the family land was inalienable was the fact that the ancestors were buried there."⁶⁰ A family's tomb, in short, inexorably tied that family to its patrimony, co-mingling the ancestors' remains with the very earth of their descendants' homestead. Indeed, so tied are the ancestors' remains to their family's homestead that, according to Lewis, in a brilliant reading of 2 Sam 14:16, the נַחֲלָה itself can be described as the נַחֲלַת אֱלֹהִים, literally (interpreting אֱלֹהִים here as deceased spirits in general and a family's deceased ancestors in particular) "the patrimony of the ancestors" or "the ancestral estate."⁶¹

Yet just as a family's forebears, or אֱלֹהִים, safeguarded their descendants' possession of their נַחֲלַת אֱלֹהִים, or their ancestral estate, through the interring of their bones in the family's tomb, so too did the figurative representations of these deceased ancestors, the תְּרָפִים, also called the אֱלֹהִים, participate in the safeguarding of the familial patrimony through their presence in their descendants' homes or extended household compounds. Indeed, this association of the תְּרָפִים/אֱלֹהִים with the safeguarding of a family's patrimony was long ago argued by those who used Nuzi texts concerning the *ilānu* to argue that the תְּרָפִים were household gods. To be sure, the specific interpretation of the Nuzi texts that took the *ilānu* and kindred תְּרָפִים to be emblems, and even jural guarantors, of inheritance rights within a family, particularly in the case of property that was being passed to an otherwise irregular heir,⁶² has been discounted, most pointedly by M. Greenberg in 1962.⁶³ Yet Greenberg still admits that the Nuzi *ilānu* pertained to issues of family continuity (concerning, especially, the designation of each generation's paterfamilias). In this, he has been followed by M.A. Morrison, who has similarly affirmed that the *ilānu* were important markers of family continuity, "passed down from a father to his heir." More important for our purposes though, Morrison, while like Greenberg eschewing any hypothesis that relates the Nuzi *ilānu* explicitly to inheritance rights, argues that the *ilānu* nevertheless were, in some fundamental way, "linked to the immovable property of the family." Morrison continues: "[Their] transmission [...] from one generation to another represented the continuity of the family

⁵⁹ Brichto, "Kin, Cult, Land and Afterlife," 5.

⁶⁰ Van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 199.

⁶¹ Lewis, "The Ancestral Estate."

⁶² See, e.g., Smith, writing in 1931 ("What Were the Teraphim?" 34): the "house gods had a legal significance; the possessor of them had a claim *de iure* to property."

⁶³ M. Greenberg, "Another Look at Rachel's Theft of the Teraphim," *JBL* 81 (1962), 239–48, especially 241–46.

line [...] [they] were not only the tie between the family unit and its property but also the very heart of the family.”⁶⁴

Of course, Morrison, who wrote in 1983, still understood the *ilānu* to be household gods. Yet despite the revised understanding of the *ilānu* as ancestor figurines that we have followed here, Morrison’s observations regarding their tie to the family’s property should still hold. Indeed, given the analysis of a family’s ancestors that we have discussed above—that one of the ancestors’ key roles within the network of reciprocity that ties them to their living descendants was to help safeguard those descendants’ claim to their property or נַחֲלָה—an interpretation of the *ilānu* as ancestor figurines helps to explain *why* these images should be associated with a family’s property in a way that interpreting the *ilānu* (or in Israelite tradition, the תְּרָפִים/אֱלֹהִים) as household gods never made clear. We therefore conclude that the *ilānu*/תְּרָפִים/אֱלֹהִים, as “symbolic representations of the human dead,”⁶⁵ served not only the divinatory function within their descendants’ households on which we have heretofore focused. In addition, these *ilānu*/תְּרָפִים/אֱלֹהִים helped bind their family to its נַחֲלָה. Van der Toorn concurs: “The possession of the teraphim may indeed be regarded as a kind of legitimization [...] by keeping the cult of its ancestors, the family proclaimed its right to the land.”⁶⁶

This understanding of the תְּרָפִים and the deceased ancestors they represent as guarantors of the נַחֲלָה, moreover, compellingly addresses the question we posed at the beginning of this part of our discussion: why Micah, in 18:24, accuses the Danites of stealing only—as we have interpreted—his תְּרָפִים and perhaps the associated אֶפֶד and why he does not make note, again at least as we have interpreted, of the theft of the פְּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה.⁶⁷ The answer is that while the פְּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה, as we have seen, is (are) surely very precious, it is (or they are) replaceable. The warrant to Micah’s נַחֲלָה that is safeguarded by his father’s תְּרָפִים, however, is not so easily restored.

⁶⁴ M.A. Morrison, “The Jacob and Laban Narrative in Light of Near Eastern Sources,” *BA* 46 (1983), 155–64 (161); see similarly van der Toorn, “Gods and Ancestors in Emar and Nuzi,” 38, who writes of the *ilānu* both that “the heir in possession of these gods was, in title and in fact, the head of the household” and that the *ilānu* “represented the identity of the family.” Likewise at Emar, van der Toorn writes (p. 43), “the main heir [...] will obtain the main house, and with the main house also the gods.”

⁶⁵ Van der Toorn, “Nature of the Biblical Teraphim,” 216.

⁶⁶ Van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 235.

⁶⁷ This *contra* van der Toorn, “Nature of the Biblical Teraphim,” 211, who sees the אֱלֹהִים of Judg 18:24 as the “costly” פְּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה and who writes that “in comparison to the theft of this image, the ephod and the teraphim were the lesser loss.”

3. “AND RACHEL STOLE HER FATHER’S תְּרָפִים”

We suggest in addition that this understanding of the role the תְּרָפִים play in legitimating a family’s claim to its נַחֲלָה can help explain the story of Rachel’s theft of her father Laban’s תְּרָפִים in Gen 31:19–35. In that story, as is well known, Jacob, after many long years in Paddan-Aram laboring on behalf of his maternal uncle and father-in-law Laban, has finally resolved to return, along with his two wives and many children, to his family’s homestead in Canaan. Before departing, though, Rachel steals her father Laban’s תְּרָפִים.

No reason is given in the Genesis account for this theft, although suggestions among commentators have been numerous.⁶⁸ According to the *Genesis Rabbah*, Rachel stole Laban’s תְּרָפִים with a good end in mind—to bring to an end her father’s worship of worthless idols. A less generous midrashic interpretation, found in the *Tanḥuma*, takes Rachel’s motivation to be selfish: she feared that the תְּרָפִים, given their divinatory function, could be used to reveal to her father her family’s flight and their route and so abet Laban in his pursuit.⁶⁹ Among moderns, some argue that Rachel steals the תְּרָפִים because Laban has otherwise not furnished his daughters with a dowry, which Gen 31:14–16 might suggest that they are owed.⁷⁰ Others somewhat similarly suggest that Rachel, in stealing Laban’s תְּרָפִים, “attempts to retain some stake [...] in her father’s household” and “in addition [...] seeks their [the *tērāpîm*]’s apotropaic protection, since she is most likely pregnant at the time of her departure from Haran.”⁷¹ For others still, Jacob has essen-

⁶⁸ In addition to the opinions listed here, see the catalogs assembled by Greenberg, “Another Look at Rachel’s Theft,” 239–40; A.-M. Korte, “Significance Obscured: Rachel’s Theft of the Teraphim: Divinity and Corporeality in Gen. 31,” in J. Bekkenkamp and M. de Haardt (eds.), *Begin with the Body: Corporeality, Religion and Gender* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 157–82 (161–63); and K. Spanier, “Rachel’s Theft of the Teraphim: Her Struggle for Family Primacy,” *VT* 42 (1992), 404–12 (405).

⁶⁹ J. Dan, “Teraphim: From Popular Belief to a Folktale,” in J. Heine-mann and S. Werses (eds., on behalf of the Institute of Jewish Studies), *Studies in Hebrew Narrative Art throughout the Ages* (ScrHier, 27; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1978), 99–106 (99–100).

⁷⁰ M. Heltzer, “New Light from Emar on Genesis 31: The Theft of the Teraphim,” in M. Dietrich and I. Kottsieper (eds.), “*Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf*: Studien zum Alten Testament und zum alten Orient (Festschrift für Oswald Loretz zur Vollendung seines 70. Lebensjahres mit Beiträgen von Freunden, Schülern und Kollegen) (AOAT, 250; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1998), 357–62 (362); Morrison, “The Jacob and Laban Narrative,” 162. Although dowries, as we have noted above, are not the norm within Iron Age Israelite marriages, they are described occasionally within the Bible as a component within marriages that Israelite men contract with non-Israelite women (e.g., 1 Kgs 9:16).

⁷¹ Cooper and Goldstein, “Cult of the Dead and Entry into the Land,” 295.

tially become an adopted son of Laban during his long sojourn in Paddan-Aram and he therefore has a right—that Rachel exercises on his behalf—to Laban’s תַּרְפִּים,⁷² just as the תַּרְפִּים generally were “passed down from a father to his heir” (to quote Morrison once more).⁷³ Yet another explanation proposes that Rachel steals the תַּרְפִּים to preserve her own *matrilineage* in the face of the overwhelmingly patriarchal Israelite society into which she has married.⁷⁴ Rachel’s theft has also been interpreted as “part of her continuing struggle for primacy within Jacob’s household,” as she sought to “prevail over her sister” and secure “the appointment of her son as his father’s chief heir.”⁷⁵

While all of these explanations are of interest, we feel they suffer by grounding their analyses only in the story of Jacob and his marriages and not considering the larger Genesis narrative in which the Jacob-Rachel-Leah story is embedded: the story of the multiple generations of the Abrahamic family tree, beginning already in Gen 11:26 with the genealogical notices regarding Abram’s/Abraham’s father Terah and Abram’s/Abraham’s two brothers Nahor and Haran. Interestingly, we are not told in this text which of Terah’s three sons is the oldest and thus which is his father’s presumptive heir, but the son Haran, according to Gen 11:28, predeceased his father Terah and so at any rate was removed from his father’s line of inheritance. Abram/Abraham presumably also inherits nothing from his father as—according, at least, to the biblical chronology (see Gen 11:26, 32; 12:4)—he leaves Haran while his father is still alive to follow Yahweh’s command that he go to Canaan and settle there. Nahor, who remains resident with Terah in Haran, would thus seem to stand as the sole heir to his father’s role as family paterfamilias and also as sole heir to his family’s Haran estate.

This paterfamilias position and the family’s property in Haran should next pass on to Nahor’s heir, and although one might presume from the list of Nahor’s sons in Gen 22:20–24 that this would be Nahor’s firstborn, Uz, the Genesis story in fact focuses on the son who is apparently Nahor’s youngest, Bethuel, and then on Bethuel’s son and heir, Laban. Indeed, recall that Jacob, when he is sent by his father to Paddan-Aram many years later, is specifi-

⁷² Proponents of this view are catalogued in Greenberg, “Another Look at Rachel’s Theft,” 240, and also Lewis, “Teraphim,” 1597, although note that neither Greenberg nor Lewis concurs with this position. Rather, in Greenberg’s opinion, Rachel steals her father’s תַּרְפִּים because (in the words of Korte, “Significance Obscured,” 163), “it was customary for women to take familiar household or family gods along on journeys or when moving house”; according to Lewis (“Teraphim,” 1599), Rachel steals Laban’s תַּרְפִּים for reasons having to do with their divinatory function, perhaps—as indicated in the *Tanhuma* long ago—to prevent her father Laban “from using them [...] to detect Jacob’s escape.”

⁷³ Morrison, “The Jacob and Laban Narrative,” 161.

⁷⁴ Korte, “Significance Obscured,” 170.

⁷⁵ Spanier, “Rachel’s Theft of the Teraphim,” 405.

cally sent to the house of Bethuel, Rebekah's father, and of Laban, Rebekah's brother (Gen 28:2), a clear indication of how that family's leadership and inheritance was being passed from the household's father to the son. The **תְּרָפִים**, we have now repeatedly suggested, are likewise transmitted as a part of the inheritance passed from a household's father to a son; Laban's **תְּרָפִים** that Rachel steals, that is, should be taken as the **תְּרָפִים** that have been passed down from Terah through Nahor to the Bethuelite family line. In addition, they should be seen, like all **תְּרָפִים**, as supernatural safeguards that bind Terah's descendants to their family's patrimony in Haran.

In Gen 31:14, however, Rachel and Leah declare themselves no longer bound to the Terahite family's patrimony in Haran; indeed, they quite specifically state that they no longer have a **נַחְלָה** in their paternal home. Yet what guarantee of a **נַחְלָה** do Rachel and Leah have in the land of Canaan to which they are relocating? More important, what guarantees a **נַחְלָה** to the family of Terahite descendants who already live in the land of Canaan—and, perhaps most important from Rachel's perspective, what will guarantee a **נַחְלָה** to her two sons, one as yet unborn? To be sure, Genesis posits a grant to a **נַחְלָה** in Canaan that is quite potent—a promise from Yahweh—but a promise that has been delivered only in private visions to the chosen members of Abraham's line (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and that, moreover, involves a long delay until its realization (400 years according to Gen 15:13; 430 years according to Exod 12:40). Might the text thus imagine that Rachel would seek a more immediate assurance that the Abrahamic branch of Terah's family tree is guaranteed a patrimony? Laban's **תְּרָפִים**, we suggest, were stolen to fulfill this function.

To be sure, Laban's **תְּרָפִים**—guarantors of Terah's descendants' land grant in Haran—can only fictionally serve as safeguards of Abraham's descendants' claims to the land of Canaan. But just as today, cases abound around the world of individuals who use fake land deeds to assert ownership of a piece of property to which they otherwise have no legitimate title,⁷⁶ so too, we suggest, does

⁷⁶ See, e.g., K. Allen, "Kenya Faces Resettlement Problem," BBC News, Nairobi, April 24, 2008, available on-line at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7366037.stm>; S.A. Ferguson and T.C. King, "Taking Up Our Elders' Burdens as Our Own: African American Women against Elder Financial Fraud," *National Women's Studies Association Journal* 18 (2006), 148–69, especially 158; M. Hatcher, "Dirty Deeds: Criminals Have a New Way to Steal Homes," *The Miami Herald*, State and Regional News, August 18, 2006, available on-line at <http://www.lexisnexis.com/us/lnacademic>; L. Namubiru, "Is Your Land Title Genuine?" originally published in *New Vision* (Kampala, Uganda), November 2, 2007, and available on-line at <http://allafrica.com/stories/200711030012.html>; and "Hawk's Eye on Land Deals," *The Hindu Business Line*, August 22, 2008, available on-line at <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/life/2008/08/22/stories/2008082250080300.htm>.

our text imagine that Laban's תְּרָפִים can be used to assert their possessors' ownership of a piece of property that is otherwise only tenuously denoted as theirs. Indeed, because the תְּרָפִים Rachel stole were at least tied to Abraham's family—if not to the land in Canaan that family had settled—they may have seemed to an ancient Israelite audience to be more legitimate safeguards for binding the Abrahamic line to their Canaanite patrimony than something like the fake land deeds used fraudulently today. One might even argue that the story of Rachel stealing the תְּרָפִים of the descendants of Nahor and housing them with the descendants of Abraham is used by the biblical writers to put forward one of their prime assertions about Abraham: that despite the narrative arc that has the family's inheritance handed down through Nahor, Bethuel, and Laban after Terah's death, Abraham's descendants are the lineage's true heirs. Under the terms of this interpretation, the authors of Genesis use the story of Rachel's theft to demonstrate how the Terahite patrimony, in the form of its תְּרָפִים, comes to be restored to its true owners.

One might immediately object, of course: what of Gen 35:2–4, where, “under the terebinth that was near Shechem,” Jacob is said to dispose of all the אֱלֹהִים that are in the possession of his household and others of his entourage? If, as many commentators propose, these אֱלֹהִים were, or included, the תְּרָפִים Rachel had stolen from Laban,⁷⁷ then is not our thesis that these תְּרָפִים serve in the biblical tradition as safeguards of the Abrahamic family's claim to the land of Canaan utterly undermined? We admit the answer to this question would have to be yes. But we must point out that it is not necessarily the case that the אֱלֹהִים of Gen 35:2–4 were, or included, Rachel's תְּרָפִים; some commentators have suggested rather that these אֱלֹהִים might be divine figurines taken as spoil by the Jacobites after their defeat of Shechem.⁷⁸ Editorially,

⁷⁷ Brichto, “Kin, Cult, Land and Afterlife,” 46, n. 74; Cooper and Goldstein, “Cult of the Dead and Entry into the Land,” 295; V.P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 375; Korte, “Significance Obscured,” 175; G. von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 332; B. Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 362; and C. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981), 551. J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1910), 423, and E.A. Speiser, *Genesis: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 1; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 270, also seem inclined toward this position (although they do not state so clearly); R. Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York/London: W.W. Norton, 1996), 195, similarly equivocates.

⁷⁸ G.J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (Word Bible Commentary, 2; Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1994), 324; see also N. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (The JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 240, who writes that “the

the immediate juxtaposition of the Shechem story in Genesis 34 with the story of the Jacobites' putting aside their אֱלֹהִים (at least in the Bible as it has come down to us) might suggest this. Even more of note is that the אֱלֹהִים of Gen 35:2–4 are exclusively referred to as אֱלֹהֵי הַנֶּכֶד, “foreign אֱלֹהִים.” And while the adjective “foreign” might possibly allude to the תְּרָפִים Rachel took from Paddan-Aram, the fact of the matter is that nowhere else in the Bible is the phrase אֱלֹהֵי הַנֶּכֶד or its variants (see Deut 31:16; 32:12; Josh 24:20, 23; Judg 10:16; 1 Sam 7:3; 2 Chr 33:15; Ps 81:10 [in most of the Bible's English versions, 81:9]; Jer 5:19; Mal 2:11) used to refer to תְּרָפִים. More important, nowhere else in the Bible are תְּרָפִים described as “foreign.” Only once, indeed, are they associated with “foreignness” in any way (in Ezek 21:26, where they are used by the king of Babylon along with other divinatory practices). Instead, even in passages where their use is condemned (e.g., 2 Kgs 23:24), the תְּרָפִים are treated as *Israelite*. This, for us, throws the argument regarding Gen 35:2–4 somewhat more in favor of those scholars who see the אֱלֹהֵי הַנֶּכֶד as something other than Rachel's תְּרָפִים. Her תְּרָפִים, we continue to suggest, are brought to Canaan and used by the biblical writers to fulfill one of the standard functions of the תְּרָפִים, serving as otherworldly safeguards of Abraham's family's claim to its נַחְלַת אֱלֹהִים.

Yet other objections might still persist. For example, if Rachel's תְּרָפִים did in fact serve, in the conceit of the biblical writers, as such important safeguards of the Abrahamic family's claim to its נַחְלַת אֱלֹהִים, then why do they never again appear in Genesis (or elsewhere in the biblical text)? In response, we note, first, that it is not just Rachel's תְּרָפִים that never again appear in the biblical text; once the Jacob and Laban narrative ends, Genesis's “Haran connection” also draws to a close. Yet until this point in the Genesis narrative, Nahor's descendants have played an extremely important role, especially by serving as a source for wives for Isaac and Jacob. Why should they so suddenly disappear? The answer is that as a result of Rachel's theft of the Terahite ancestor figurines, the complex of elements Brichto identified for us in his article's title—kin, cult, land, and afterlife—are all united in the “promised land.” Thereby, the story line of a divided lineage—as represented both by competing descriptions of the legitimate Terahite נַחְלָה and by dueling claims to Terah's תְּרָפִים—comes to an end. More simply put, the dramatic tension that kept Abraham's family tied to Haran, so to speak, is resolved, and so the story's Haran-based characters—whether the living relatives still resident in Haran or the deceased ancestors embodied in the תְּרָפִים—can exit the stage. Thereby they give way to what is, from the Bible's perspective, the next great act that the unification of תְּרָפִים, נַחְלָה,

idols are probably household gods found among the spoils of Shechem or carried by the captives,” yet adds, “the phrase may also include the *terafim* that Rachel stole.”

and the Abrahamic family line has made possible: the story of Jacob's twelve sons and the lineage and נַחֲלָה that through them and their descendants is eventually established for Israel's twelve tribes.

4. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

These conclusions about the role of the תְּרָפִים in Genesis 31 as guarantors, in a fictional sense, of Jacob's family's claim to the נַחֲלָה of Canaan prompt us, finally, to return to Judges 17–18 and ponder whether there are some last nuances that are played out in that text concerning the role of the תְּרָפִים. For example, are there intimations that even though the object(s) of primary value to the Danite thieves who plundered Micah's בֵּית אֱלֹהִים was/were the mother's פֶּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה, Micah's תְּרָפִים—both the תְּרָפִים that Micah had made and the other תְּרָפִים of his household shrine—were of appeal to the Danites as well, in order that these תְּרָפִים might serve the Danites as fictional guarantors of the land they took for themselves in Laish?

Crucial to note here is the reason why, according to Judg 18:1, the Danites were attempting to lay claim to Laish in the first place: because at that point in Israelite history, no נַחֲלָה had come to the Danites “among the tribes of Israel.” Why that is, Judg 18:1 does not say, but the text seems to reflect the same (or at least a similar) presumption as that found in Judg 1:34: that the נַחֲלָה of the Danites should have been, as in Josh 19:40–46, territory in the southwestern part of Israel, but that the Danites either failed to take this land (so Judg 1:34) or lost it (so Josh 19:47), because, according to Judg 1:34, of the resistance put forward by the Canaanite population already settled in those parts. In this respect, Judg 18:1 differs from other Danite tales in Judges, most notably the tale of the Danite Samson in Judges 13–16, which does speak of Samson's clan, at least, as having established a family burial place (and so, presumably, a נַחֲלָה) within a Danite patrimony in Israel's southwest. Indeed, commentators frequently acknowledge that Judg 1:1–2:5 and Judges 17–18, 19–21 seem to belong to a different redactional stratum than Judg 2:6–16:31.⁷⁹ Whereas 2:6–16:31, for example, and especially 3:7–16:31, “explore Israel's early history by tracing the careers of heroic and charismatic individuals,” using a “recurring, covenantally oriented frame,” Judg 1:1–2:5 and Judges 17–18, 19–21 “tend not to feature heroic individuals” and “themes concerning the transience of power are especially strong.”⁸⁰ Thus,

⁷⁹ See, for example, Boling, *Judges*, 29–38; Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 188–94; Martin, *Judges*, 5–9; Matthews, *Judges and Ruth*, 6–11; Niditch, *Judges*, 8–13; Soggin, *Judges*, 4–5 (albeit all with slightly different divisions of the book's main parts).

⁸⁰ Niditch, *Judges*, 12, 180.

writes S. Niditch, we find in Judges 18, “a tale characterized by an aggressive, conqueror’s demeanor.”⁸¹

Which is to say, as we have already intimated: we find in Judges 18 an aggressive account of the Danites’ efforts to conquer a *נַחֲלָה* that was not theirs and to which, according to the logic of the text, they had little grant, this as opposed, in our text’s conceit, to the territory associated with the Danites in the southwest. This *נַחֲלָה*, Judg 1:34 and especially Josh 19:40–46 imply, was given to the Danites by Joshua, acting on behalf of Yahweh, as part of the distribution of all the lands of Canaan to the tribes of Israel. We might even say that in the view of Josh 19:40–46 and Judg 1:34, Yahweh, as the “god of the fathers,” or the ancestral god, stood as the supernatural guardian who legitimated the Danites’ claim to their *נַחֲלָה* in the south.⁸² But within our narrative’s framework, no otherworldly agent links the Danites as emphatically to the *נַחֲלָה* that they sought to capture in the north; there is only the Levite priest’s assurance to the five spies sent by the Danites to seek territory for the tribe’s habitation that “your way is under the watch of Yahweh” (*נִכַּח יְהוָה דְּרַבְּכֶם*; Judg 18:6). The Levite’s assurance, moreover, might be said to have given the Danite spies only a minimum of comfort, for as C. van Dam points out, such a secondhand endorsement is a far cry from the more typical language used to report Yahweh’s response to an oracular inquiry: the much more emphatic claim that “Yahweh answered” or “Yahweh said” (Judg 1:2; 20:18, 23, 28; 1 Sam 10:22; 23:2, 4, 11, 12; 30:8; 2 Sam 2:1; 5:19, 23).⁸³ It is thus easy to understand why, from the Danites’ point of view, a more authoritative land grant is desirable. Micah’s *תְּרָפִים*, we might suppose, were stolen to fulfill this function.

But why, one might immediately ask, would the Danites need to make use of representations of Micah’s *Ephraimite* ancestors who are tied to *Ephraimite* land, rather than use their own tribal *תְּרָפִים*, who at least—like Laban’s *תְּרָפִים* as we described Rachel’s use of them in Section 3 of our paper above—would have been tied to Danite lineages, even as these lineages’ members sought to use their ancestors’ *תְּרָפִים* disingenuously to safeguard their claims to land other than those ancestors’ *נַחֲלָה*? The answer to this question is to recall that according to the narrative stratum of which Judges 18 is a part, the Danites, unlike Terah’s family, had not been able to take possession of their original *נַחֲלָה*: their need, that is, was not to replace the *נַחֲלָה* of Haran with the *נַחֲלָה* of Canaan, but to estab-

⁸¹ Niditch, *Judges*, 180.

⁸² Note in this regard Lewis’s provocative suggestion that the concept of the “god of the fathers” might be productively rethought in the light of the notion of *אֱלֹהִים* designating “spirits of the dead.” See Lewis, *Cults of the Dead*, 178–79.

⁸³ C. van Dam, *The Urim and the Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 216.

lish a נַחֲלָה where none had existed before. But without a pre-existent נַחֲלָה, the complex of interlocking elements of “kin,” “cult,” “land,” and “afterlife” on which the potency and even the presence of the תְּרָפִים depends collapses. If there is no “land,” or נַחֲלָה, for example, there is no tomb of the ancestral “kin” that lies within it. Consequently, there are no forebears properly ensconced in the “afterlife” who are able to be made present through the “cult” of the תְּרָפִים. Without, however, תְּרָפִים, and when in addition there is no ancestral tomb, there is no agency for legitimating land-grant claims, nor the ability to access necromantic oracles. Indeed, we should remember in this regard that the five original Danite scouts, when they passed through Ephraim during their search for a Danite home, asked Micah’s Levite priest to deliver on their behalf an oracle regarding their mission’s potential success. Why had they not asked this, though, of their own תְּרָפִים? For the same reason, we suggest, that they ended up stealing Micah’s family’s תְּרָפִים to serve as fraudulent safeguards of the Danites’ claim to their northern fief: due to their lack of a pre-existing נַחֲלָה and an associated ancestral tomb, the Danites were without the תְּרָפִים that were their entombed ancestors’ counterparts. Thus, they had to make do with Micah’s Ephraimite תְּרָפִים, both as divinatory revelators and guarantors of their נַחֲלָה-to-be, no matter how less than desirable these Ephraimite תְּרָפִים might have been.

Or, to put the matter another way: if the analysis of the תְּרָפִים as a “tie between the family unit and its property” (to quote yet again Morrison) is correct,⁸⁴ then תְּרָפִים—even fraudulent תְּרָפִים—were something the Danite clans, in order to lay claim to new land in Laish, would feel the need to possess. Indeed, the text of Judg 18:27, in which the account of the Danites’ conquering Laish comes just after the notice that these Danites stole “that which Micah made,” could well suggest an association between the Danites’ taking possession of Laish and their possessing Micah’s תְּרָפִים. Note in this regard that the verb used in 18:27 for “to make” is, as in 18:24, עָשָׂה, and thus again, as in 18:24, the image of the תְּרָפִים that Micah “made” in 17:5 is evoked.⁸⁵

That said, it pushes credulity to suppose that an ancient Israelite audience would grant that Ephraimite תְּרָפִים could have been used by the Danites to help secure a patrimony to which they could otherwise only tenuously lay claim. But in this regard we must recall the polemical nature of the Judges 17–18 story that we noted in our opening remarks and in particular Brettler’s contention that the story’s polemic is not directed just against the Danite sanctuary and its priesthood, but also against the tribe of Dan itself: in Brettler’s

⁸⁴ Morrison, “The Jacob and Laban Narrative,” 161.

⁸⁵ Although note two medieval Hebrew manuscripts, which identify—under the influence of Judg 18:31?—the object that Micah made according to 18:27 as the פָּסֶל of 17:4. See Bartusch, *Understanding Dan*, 176, note on v. 27.

reading (following M. Noth), because of the Danites' violent conquest of the peaceful residents of Laish.⁸⁶ The Danites are thereby derided for their generally cutthroat and callow dispositions; indeed, in 18:25, the text describes them in practically these terms: as אַנְשֵׁי־מָרִי נָפֶשׁ, "bitter-souled men." Based on the Danites' illogical appropriation of Ephraimite תְּרָפִים, we might in addition characterize these boorish cads by using R. Alter's description of their fellow Danite Samson as depicted in the redactional stratum found in Judg 2:6–16:31: as men whose "formidable brawn will not be matched by brain, or even by a saving modicum of common sense."⁸⁷ Under the terms of this interpretation, the incredulity that an ancient Israelite audience might well express regarding the text's subplot that we have proposed—whereby the Danites irrationally attempt to use Micah's תְּרָפִים to secure a נְחֻלָּה—would become testament to the text's success at discrediting the Danites' acumen, which is itself part and parcel of the text's larger goal of discrediting the Danites in general. If this is the case, then one last nuance in Judges 17–18 has come into play, as the story of the Danites' misguided taking of Micah's family's תְּרָפִים is used in conjunction with Judges 17–18's other attacks on Dan to promote even further the text's polemical assault on Dan's sanctuary and Dan's people.

Still, we must be clear that there is no definite reference to the תְּרָפִים in the account of the Danites' conquest of Laish in 18:27 and thus no firm link drawn in the text between the Danites' taking of Laish and an attempt to use Micah's תְּרָפִים as guarantors of this newly claimed נְחֻלָּה. Hence the caution that we expressed in our introductory remarks: that our concluding comments about the potential appeal of Micah's תְּרָפִים to the tribesmen of Dan would be the product of considerable speculation. Nevertheless, we cannot help but wonder whether the Judges 17–18 account of Dan's laying claim to a נְחֻלָּה in Laish draws on ancient Israel's closely interwoven complex of "kin," "cult," "land," and "afterlife" in order to portray the Danites as guilty—among other things—of loutishly seeking to manipulate their culture's venerable תְּרָפִים traditions.

⁸⁶ Above, n. 18.

⁸⁷ R. Alter, "How Convention Helps Us Read: The Case of the Bible's Annunciation Type-Scene," *Prooftexts* 3 (1983), 115–30 (124); see also the catalogue of other scholars' unflattering descriptions of Samson collected by D.M. Gunn, "Samson of Sorrows: An Isaianic Gloss on Judges 13–16," in D.N. Fewell (ed.), *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 225–53 (225).