

Pit, Spirit, Necromancer or Instrument Used in Necromancy? The Problem of Finding the Correct Meaning of the Hebrew Word אֹב ('*ôḇ*)

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ABSTRACT: Various meanings are attributed to the word אֹב: pit, spirit, necromancer, instrument for divining the future with the help of the dead. Thus, in some cases, it is difficult to decide on the right word to translate it. This article attempts a diachronic analysis of biblical texts and, based on it, traces the potential semantic development from the original sense of “pit,” “instrument used in necromancy” (1 Sam 28:7–8), through the sense of “spirit of the dead” (Isa 8:19; 19:3; 29:4) to the post-exilic use in the sense of “necromancer/medium” (Lev 19:31; 20:6, 27). Deuteronomistic narratives (2 Kgs 21:6; 23:24) and the later list of forbidden practices in Deut 18:10–11 may indicate the timing of this semantic transformation.

KEYWORDS: pit, spirit, medium, necromancy, אֹב

The Hebrew noun אֹב (*'ôḇ*) appears 17 times in the Old Testament. It always occurs in the context of mantic and necromantic practices. In 11 cases, it is associated with a noun דַּעְנִי (*jiddē'ōnī*), sometimes translated as “spirit of divination; someone in whom this spirit resides, a fortune teller.”¹ As regards the word in question, one use (Job 32:19) is particularly interesting because the context suggests the meaning of “(leather) wineskin,”² and it is the only case when it takes on this meaning. Hence, on the one hand, the lexicographers distinguish it as meaning I (*hapax legomenon*) of אֹב (*'ôḇ*) and treat it as separate from meaning II of אֹב (*'ôḇ*), the more frequently used one, related to necromancy that is of interest here; on the other hand, they consider the former an example of a possible derivation of the second meaning (a device used to mimic the voice of the dead/spirit; cf. Greek ἐγγαστριμυθος, “ventriloquist,” but Vulg. *magus*).³

1 KBL, I, 372; *HAWAT* 133. Cf. albeit *DCH* IV, 113: “familiar spirit...sometimes medium, necromancer”; *Gen*¹⁸ II, 445: “Wissende...kleine Figuren mit unklare Funktion in Zauber- und Orakelwesen...Beschwörungsmittel das vorwiegend zu Wahrsagerei benutzt wird...kollektive 'Person; 'Ausübende die Wahrsagerei.”

2 On this interpretation see D.J.A. Clines, *Job 21–37* (WBC 18A; Nashville, TN: Nelson 2006) 688, n. 19c.

3 J. Tropper, “Spirit of the Death,” *DDD*³ 806, 809. Tropper notes that later translations move the term *'ôḇ* from a cultic/necromantic context into the context of divination and magic (809). More in H. Rouillard – J. Tropper, “Vom kanaanäischen Ahnenkult zur Zauberei,” *UF* 19 (1987) 235–254.

Dictionaries usually give two or three possible meanings of the word אֹב (*’ōb*) II: “spirits of the dead; pit”;⁴ “instrument (used) when addressing the dead (bullroarer, turndun);”⁵ “spirit – a word used in the context of seeking an oracle, medium, necromancer – someone who consults ghosts”;⁶ “a means of conjuring/invoking (spirits),” “a sacrificial pit” (Sumerian: *ab*; Hittite: *a-a-bi* [*ajubi*]; Acadian: *apu*; Ugaritic: *’ēb* [also transcribed as *’ajb* or *’āb*] – “hole in the ground”);⁷ “wineskin, medium, spiritist, necromancer, wizard, spirit of the dead, ghost.”⁸ According to lexicographers, the noun אֹב (*’ōb*), broadly speaking, means something or someone granting access to and contact with the world of the dead. However, most commentators and translators find it difficult to choose the right word when translating specific texts. It results from the fact that three major trends emerge in analyses of the meaning of this word:

- 1) אֹב (*’ōb*), a means/ritual for invoking/conjuring the spirits of the dead, analogous to the Ugaritic *’ēb* and syllabic cuneiform *a-a-bi/apu*. Generally speaking, it refers to something providing access to the world of the dead⁹ or, more specifically, an instrument used to contact the dead. It is also often assumed, as already mentioned, that the term might be etymologically related to the noun אֹב (*’ōb*) I, “(leather) wineskin” (cf. Job 32:19).¹⁰ In the latter case, the word in question may have started as an onomatopoeia imitating the sound heard when opening such a leather wineskin.¹¹
- 2) אֹב (*’ōb*) “spirits of the dead” or “divinised ancestor”¹² represented by the spirit of the dead (אֹב [*’wb*] derived from Egyptian *3bw* meaning “family” but also “form,” “figure,” analogous to Hebrew תַּרְפִּים [*trāpīm*], “statuettes representing dead ancestors”).¹³

4 HAWAT 9.

5 KBL, I, 19–20.

6 DCH I, 148.

7 Ges¹⁸ I, 22.

8 M.V. Van Pelt – W.C. Kaiser Jr., “אֹב, *’ōb*,” *NIDOTTE* I, 303–304.

9 M.M. Vieyra, “Les noms du ‘mundus’ en hittite et en assyrien et la pythionise d’Endor,” *RHA* 19 (1961) 47–55; C. Rabin, “Hittite Words in Hebrew,” *Or* 32 (1963) 113–139; J. Ebach – U. Rüterwörden, “Unterweltsbeschwörung im Alten Testament. Untersuchungen zu Begriffs- und Religionsgeschichte des *’ōb* I–II,” *UF* 9 (1977) 57–70; 12 (1980) 208–220; O. Loretz, “Ugaritisch *’āp* (III) und syllabisch-keilschriftlich *abi/apu* als Vorläufer von hebräisch *’ab/’ōb* (Kult/Nekromantie) Grube: Ein Beitrag zu Nekromantie und Magie in Ugarit, Emar und Israel,” *UF* 34 (2002) 481–518, particularly 508–509.

10 Cf. T. Podella, *Šōm-Fasten. Kollektive Trauer um den verborgenen Gott im Alten Testament* (AOAT 224; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker – Neukirchener-Verlag 1989) 103–105; KBL, I, 20–21.

11 This is the suggestion of Rabbi Ibn Ezra, which was quoted by Naftali Herz Tur-Sinai in his commentary on the Book of Job (1957) and later developed by Herman Wohlstein, “Zu den altisraelitischen Vorstellungen von Toten- und Ahnengeistern,” *BZ* 5 (1961) 30–38, particularly 32.

12 J. Tropper, *Nekromantie. Totenbefragung im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (AOAT 223; Kevelaer – Neukirchener-Verlag: Butzon & Bercker – Neukirchener Verlag 1989) 223–225; Tropper, “Spirit of the Death,” 806–809; and differently from his previous opinion T. Podella, “Nekromantie,” *TQ* 177 (1997) 120–133; T. Podella, “Ahnenerverehrung III,” *RGG* I, 227–228; T. Podella, “Totenrituale und Jenseitsbeschreibungen – Zur anamnetischen Struktur der Religionsgeschichte Israels,” *Tod, Jenseits und Identität. Perspektiven einer kulturwissenschaftlichen Thanatologie* (eds. J. Assmann – R. Trauzettel) (Veröffentlichungen des „Instituts für Historische Anthropologie e.V.“ 79; Freiburg – München: Alber 2002) 530–561, particularly 535–538; T. Römer, “Das Verbot magischer und mantischer Praktiken im Buch Deuteronomium (Dtn 18:9–13),” *Diasynchron.*

3) אֹב (*’ōb*), the practice of asking questions to the spirits of the dead (Assyrian influence).¹⁴

This article aims to consider the state of debate on the etymology and meaning of the word in question and then, if possible, chronologically analyse Old Testament texts in which the word appears. The authors of this paper believe that such an approach may enable finding a way to develop its semantic scope in the context of the Hebrew Bible and clarify the difficulties associated with its proper translation.

1. Etymology

There are several suggestions. However, none has been definitively proven to satisfy all researchers. An unquestioned authority on research into the etymology of the word אֹב (*’ōb*), Harry A. Hoffner,¹⁵ points out three basic directions in the search for the etymology of this biblical term. The first is the already mentioned Job 32:19 and the sense mentioned therein, i.e. “(leather) wineskin.” The second is Arabic *’āba*, which means “return.” The third is a possible borrowing from a non-Semitic cultural circle (Sumerian, Hurrian, Hittite via Acadian and Ugaritic), in which similar words denoted sacrificial pits. According to Hoffner, the first option is related to the skill of ventriloquism (LXX: ἐγγαστριμυθος). In his opinion, the second should be ruled out, as there is no evidence of such a connection in ancient Semitic languages. According to Hoffner, the third option is best.

Today, based on his view, the sources for uncovering the original meaning of the word אֹב (*’ōb*) are often sought in the practice of using pits in the ground as places for offering sacrifice to chthonic deities. It was believed that they were also places of contact with the spirits of the dead. The latter could return from the afterlife (cf. the mentioned Arabic *’āba*, “return”).¹⁶ In particular, Hoffner points to examples from the Hittite culture, where there were pits for conjuring/evoking spirits (*a-a-bi*) and special rituals for summoning chthonic deities to cleanse houses.¹⁷ From Neo-Assyrian texts, the concept of *apu*, “sacrificial pit,” is known (*CAD* 2.201), which was the place for offering sacrifices to chthonic deities (e.g. texts related to the *Akitu* festival; cf. *KAR* 146 III 9–11.20; IV 24–28; K 164;

Beiträge zur Exegese, Theologie und Rezeption der Hebräischen Bibel. Fs. W. Dietrich (eds. T. Nauman – R. Hunziker-Rodewald) (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2009) 311–327.

13 C.B. Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II and in First Isaiah* (FAT 79; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2011) 171.

14 B.B. Schmidt, *Israel’s Beneficent Dead. Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (FAT 11; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1994) 286.

15 H.A. Hoffner Jr., “Second Millennium Antecedents to the Hebrew ’ōb,” *JBL* 86 (1967) 385–401; H.A. Hoffner Jr., “אֹב, ’ōb,” *TDOT* I, 131.

16 Schmidt, *Israel’s Beneficent Dead*, 151.

17 Cf. also H. Otten, “Eine Beschwörung 131 RS III, 14–18 der Unterirdischen aus Bogazköy,” *ZA* 20 (1961) 114–157; B. Janowski – G. Wilhelm (eds.), *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments*. Neue Folge. IV. *Omina, Orakel, Rituale und Beschwörungen* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 2008) 206–217.

RS 39–39).¹⁸ In Ugarit (a potential transmission route to Hebrew), the word *ʿēb* also means a sacrificial pit or a pit used for necromantic practices. One of the texts (*KTU* 1.16 I 2–3) reads as follows:

We howl loudly like dogs in thy palace,
Like puppies in the pit (*ʿēb*) of thy sanctuary for the dead (*hštk*).¹⁹

Oswald Loretz²⁰ is convinced that the Hebrew word אֹב/אָוֶב *ʾa/ōḅ*, “pit,” comes from the Ugaritic *ʿēb*, and he believes it to be related to the already mentioned Old Assyrian, Canaanite, Hurrian-Hittite and Akkadian words. In his opinion, all of them represent a *terminus technicus* and denote a sacrificial pit allowing access to both chthonic deities and the dead.²¹ Rüdiger Schmitt,²² in turn, notes that אֹב (*ʾōḅ*) in 1 Sam 28 is located in the “house” of a woman referred to as אֵילַת-אֹב (*baʾālat ʾōḅ*) (1 Sam 28:7), and this term could mean a waste pit or a water tank – places that fit well with the ideas about the location in (the pit of) the world of the dead. However, he also admits that there are no examples of using such places in the Old Testament mantics. The only potential archaeological example comes from Tell Mozan/Urkeš, where a palace installation that may have been used for such rituals was found.²³ Nonetheless, Hoffner²⁴ believes that אֹב (*ʾōḅ*) is an old word known already in the second millennium BC. He also points to toponyms associated with it (cf. Num 21:10–11; 33:43–44: אֶבֶת [*ʾōḅēt*]). Although the place with this name is difficult to identify, some scholars translate it as “leather wineskin” (cf. Job 32:19) or “necromancers.”²⁵

Other source suggestions indicate something dangerous and hostile (from אֶבֶת [*ʾōḅēt*] “being an enemy”) or a derivative of the Hebrew word אָב (*ʾāḅ*), “father,” understood as “dead ancestor.”²⁶ The arguments regarding the last proposal, often cited by Joseph Tropper, may indeed also suggest such a source of the word. According to Tropper:

- the cult of dead ancestors was well-known in the ancient Near East;
- in the Old Testament, אֶבֶת (*ʾōḅēt* then as *defective plural* – *ʾōḅôt*) often means dead ancestors;

18 Texts cited in Tropper, *Nekromantie*, 118–122.

19 Loretz, “Ugaritisch āp (III),” 502; own translation based on the text quoted in R. Schmitt, *Mantik im Alten Testament* (AOAT 411; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag 2014) 93.

20 Loretz, “Ugaritisch āp (III),” 509.

21 Tropper, *Nekromantie*, 117.122.

22 Schmitt, *Mantik*, 93.

23 Schmitt, *Mantik*, 93, n. 18 with reference to M. Kelly-Buccellati, “Ein hurritischer Gang in die Unterwelt,” *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft zu Berlin* 134 (2002) 131–148, <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.8294051>; see also Loretz, “Ugaritisch āp (III),” 501–502.

24 Hoffner, “אֹב, ʾōḅ,” 131.

25 K.M. Penner, “Oboth,” *NIDB* IV, 318.

26 J. Lust, “On Wizards and Prophets,” *Studies on Prophecy* (VTSup 26; Leiden: Brill 1974) 133–142; Tropper, “Spirit of the Death,” 807.

- parallel applications also indicate that persons, not objects, are involved (cf. already mentioned 11 times ידעני [jidd^e ʾōnī] with אוב [ʾōb]; מתים [mētīm], “the dead”; אטים [ʾittīm], “spirits” [Isa 19:3]; תרפים [tʾrāpīm] → אלהים [ʾēlohīm], “gods” [Isa 8:19]; אלילים [ʾelīlīm] גללים [gillūlīm], “[false] gods” [Isa 19:3]; גללים [gillūlīm], “idols”; שקצים [šiqqūšīm], “abominations” [2 Kgs 23:24]);
- although אוב (ʾōb) is a specifically Hebrew word for dead ancestors, it has equivalents in other languages: Eblaite *dingir-a-mn*,²⁷ Old Acadian *ilabu*;²⁸
- In Mesopotamia and Ugarit, the dead were worshipped (KTU 1.161);
- there are “obvious” ideological connections between Hebrew אוב (ʾōb) and the words for the dead in other languages, such as Ugaritic *rpum*; Phoenician *rp̄m*; Hebrew רפאים (rʾpāʾīm) and between Acadian *eṭemmū* (Hebrew *ʾittīm*; cf. Isa 19:3). In Mesopotamia, there were also many spells called *gidim-ḥul* = *eṭemmū lemnūtu*.²⁹ All were used to cleanse the house/expel the evil spirits of the dead.

According to Tropper, those examples are a “convincing” argument for the idea that the word אוב (ʾōb) should be understood as “divinised ancestors.” However, such a conclusion is easily undermined if one looks at the pericope of 1 Sam 28:3–25, which is crucial for research on this issue, where the spirit of Samuel conjured in Endor is not the ancestor of Saul. Here, the dead is/are referred to as אלהים (ʾēlohīm; 1 Sam 28:13), and אוב (ʾōb) which more likely means the necromancer’s instrument (vv. 7–8), one who has access to the world of the dead, or even power over the spirits of the dead, or who possesses powers enabling such practices (cf. v. 7: בעלת-אוב [baʾālat ʾōb]) or the necromancers themselves (vv. 3, 9). While other statements such as Isa 8:19; 19:3 (in conjunction with the verb דרש [dʾrš], “to seek”) or Isa 29:4 (אוב [ʾōb] coming מארץ [mēʾereš], “out of the earth”) may indeed point to the sense of “spirits of the dead” (there is no mention of dead ancestors!), Lev 19:31//Deut 18:11; 2 Kgs 21:6//2 Chr 33:6; 2 Kgs 23:24 (parallel to each other אבות [ʾōbōt] and ידענים [jidd^e ʾōnīm]) more likely relate to people engaged in divination practices and necromancers.³⁰

2. Use in the Old Testament

Of the 17 uses of the word אוב (ʾōb), nine appear in narrative texts (1 Sam; 2 Kgs; 1–2 Chr), four in legal texts (Lev; Deut), three in the Book of Isaiah and one in the Book of Job. Most concern practices related to the worship of foreign gods/idols or practices

²⁷ P. Xella, “Aspekte religiöser Vorstellungen in Syrien und den Ebla und Ugarit Texte,” *UF* 15 (1983) 279–290.

²⁸ W.G. Lambert, “Old Akkadian Ilaba = Ugaritic Ilib?,” *UF* 13 (1981) 299–301.

²⁹ J. Bottéro, “Les morts et l’au-delà dans le rituel en accadien contre l’action des «revenants»,” *ZA* 73 (1983) 153–203.

³⁰ R. Schmitt, *Magie im Alten Testament* (AOAT 313; Münster: Ugarit-Velag 2004) 339–347; Schmitt, *Mantik*, 91–93.

forbidden in Yahwism. In those cases, the word is usually used in the plural, nine of which in parallel to the aforementioned ידענים (*jiddē'ōnīm*). Here, one can find phrases such as פנה אל (*pānā 'el*), “to turn to” (Lev 19:31; 20:6); בקש אל (*biqqēš 'el*), “to seek before/at” (Lev 19:31); דרש אל (*dāraš 'el*), “to refer to” (Isa 8:19; 19:3); זנה אחר (*zānā aḥar*), “to practice fornication” (Lev 20:6) related to אוב (*'ōb*). In some cases, reference is made to something that can be performed עשה (*'āšā*; 2 Kgs 21:6//2 Chr 33:6) or destroyed הטר (*hēsir* in 1 Sam 28:3), הכרית (*hikrīt* in 1 Sam 28:9); בער (*bi'ēr* in 2 Kgs 23:24). Therefore, it is a vocabulary typical of idolatry.³¹ The Deuteronomistic narrative (1 Sam 28:3, 7, 9; Saul; 2 Kgs 23:24; Josiah) refers to the need to eliminate this practice and related installations, as their promotion is also mentioned (2 Kgs 21:6; Manasseh), which is considered טמא (*tāmē*), “cultically impure” in later law (Lev 19:31). In five cases, אוב (*'ōb*) (singular) clearly refers to necromantic practices and posing questions to the spirits of the dead. In such cases, it appears only once together with a singular or plural term ידעני (*jiddē'ōnī*).

Now, let us have a closer look at the most important of the uses to reveal their potential meaning and possible development of the semantic scope of the word אוב (*'ōb*).

2.1. Narrative Texts

The word אוב (*'ōb*) (singular/plural) appears mainly in Deuteronomistic texts, and its use clearly shows links with the legal formula in Deut 18:10–11. A potentially older meaning can be found in the pre-Deuteronomistic literary layer of 1 Sam 28. The Book of Chronicles, in turn, clearly reflects the completely negative attitude of post-exilic Judaism towards necromancy.

2.1.1. Female Necromancer/Lady (1 Sam 28:3–19)

And Samuel died, and all Israel mourned for him. They buried him in his city Ramah. And Saul removed (ור *sūr* hifil) evoking the spirits of the dead (האבות *hā'ōbōt*) and the soothsayers (ואת-הידענים *w'et-hajjiddē'ōnīm*) from the land. Meanwhile, the Philistines gathered together and set up a camp in Shunem. Saul assembled all of Israel and they encamped in Gilboa. Upon seeing all the Philistines gathered for the attack, Saul became concerned and fearful. Saul sought (ל' שאל) YHWH, but YHWH did not answer him (נה ענה) neither in dreams, nor through *Urim*, nor through the prophets. So Saul said to his servants: “Find for me a woman who is a medium (אוב בעלת-אוב *ba'ālat-'ōb*), so that I may go to her and inquire [contact] through her (בה + דרש *drš + bāb*).” His servants said to him: “Behold, there is a woman who is a medium in Endor (בעלת-אוב *ba'ālat-'ōb*).” Then Saul disguised himself by putting on other clothes, and went, he and two men with him. When they came to the woman at night, he said: “Conjure up for (קסם *qsm* qal) me please through the spirit of the dead (אוב *ba'ōb*) and bring up for me (*imperativus* hifil עליה *'ll*, “to ascend, to go up”) whom I shall name to you.” The woman said to him: “Surely you know what Saul has done: How he has cut off (כרת *krt* hifil) the mediums (האבות *hā'ōbōt*) and (הידעני *hajjiddē'ōnī*) the necromancer from the land. Why then are you laying a trap for my life to bring about my death?” And Saul vowed to her by YHWH: “As the YHWH lives, there shall no punishment come upon you for this thing!” So the woman said: “Whom do you want me to bring (up; עליה *'ll* hifil)?” And he said: “Bring (עליה *'ll* hifil) me Samuel.” When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out in a loud voice

31 Tropper, “Spirit of the Death,” 808.

and said to Saul: “Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!” The king said to her: “Do not be afraid. What do you see?” And the woman said to Saul: “I see a divine being (אלהים *‘ēlohîm*) coming up from the earth (עלה *‘lh* + מן-הארץ *min-hā’āreṣ*).” He said to her: “What form is he of?” And she said: “An old man cometh up (עלה *‘lh* *qal participium*) covered with a robe.” And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground, and worshipped him. And Samuel said to Saul: “Why have you disturbed me by calling me up (עלה *‘lh* *hifil*)?” Saul replied: “I’m in deep trouble, the Philistines are making war against me and God has deserted me and has not answered me yet, either through a prophet or in dreams, so I have called on you to tell me what to do?” Samuel replied: “Why do you ask me since YHWH has turned away from you and has become your enemy?” YHWH has treated you as he foretold through me. YHWH has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbour – David. As you did not listen to the voice of YHWH and did not execute his burning anger on Amalek, therefore YHWH has done this thing to you this day. YHWH will deliver both Israel and you into the hands of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons [will be] with me, YHWH will also hand Israel over to the Philistines.

In the whole pericope (1 Sam 28:3–25), vv. 3–19 are the most relevant to the issue under consideration here. This is undoubtedly the most important text to the research area of this paper. The context is clearly necromantic here. However, the very dating of the pericope is disputed. For some researchers, it is compositional, and the younger literary layers overlap the older core of the story (compared to DtrH), while others consider it a later, integral composition.³² In early Judeo-Christian exegesis, the prevailing opinion was that the entire scene was historical.³³ Today, it is more often assumed that some pre-written oral tradition is contained in the necromancy scene, which gives us insight into that ritual during the early monarchical period.³⁴ According to Walter Dietrich,³⁵ at that stage, there was a tradition about Saul consulting his dead ancestor (Kish?). However, it can no longer be reliably reconstructed.³⁶ Two subsequent literary elaborations of that tradition, the so-called “Saulide narrative arc” (vv. 4–5, 7–8, 11, 12a, 13–14, 15–16a, 19a²b, 20a, 21ab, 23b–25) and the so-called “court narrative,” less sympathetic towards Saul (vv. 6, 15b, 16a²b, 20b, 23a), turn it into a story, but only the last, Deuteronomistic redaction (vv. 3, 9,

32 I. Fischer, *Gotteskinderinnen. Zu einer geschlechterfairen Deutung des Phänomens der Prophetie und der Prophetinnen in der Hebräischen Bibel* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2002) 131–157; P. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol. Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press 2002) 154–158, particularly 157; W. Dietrich, *Samuel. 1 Samuel 27 – 2 Samuel 8* (BKAT 8.3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2019) 43–44. Dietrich (*ibidem*, 44–45) considers the pericope to be a literary complex text, due to the noticeable numerous tensions, contradictions, repetitions and gaps in it. He also proposes various options for the development of that text (*ibidem*, 45–48).

33 K.A.D. Smelik, “The Witch of Endor: 1 Sam 28 in Rabbinic and Christian Exegesis till 800 A.D.,” *VC* 33 (1977) 160–179, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1583267>.

34 R. Schmitt, “Totenversorgung, Totengedenken und Nekromantie. Biblische und archäologische Perspektiven ritueller Kommunikation mit den Toten,” *Tod und Jenseits im alten Israel und in seiner Umwelt* (eds. A. Berlejung – B. Janowski) (FAT 64; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2009) 501–524, particularly 502.

35 Dietrich, *Samuel*, 52–53.

36 Dietrich, *Samuel*, 49.

12b, 17–19, 21b_{2,3}), viewed Saul's act in a decidedly negative light, treating it as disobedience to the word of God and transgression against the Law (cf. Deut 18:10–11).³⁷

Looking at the distinguished stages of pericope editing, one can notice that the crucial moments where the word under study appears (vv. 3b, 7, 8, 9) and other elements related to necromancy (especially vv. 8, 13–14) represent this alleged oral tradition, first included in the context of the pre-Deuteronomistic tradition about Saul (vv. 7–8, 13–14: the night visit to the necromancer and the description of the creature coming out of the earth), and then viewed negatively by the Deuteronomistic redaction (vv. 3b, 9). From that perspective, the meaning assigned to the words בעלת-אוב (*ba'ālat-ōb* v. 7) and קסם באוב (*qsm qal* + באוב) (*bā'ōb* v. 8b) in the pre-Deuteronomistic version and (vv. 3b, 9a) in the editorial work done by the Deuteronomistic community may be interesting. To the mentioned verb באוב + קסם (*qsm qal* + *bā'ōb*) from the first literary version of the narrative describing various forms of divination and predicting the future (v. 8b), from casting lots, through hepatoscopy (divination by liver inspection), to prophesying (in this case, Saul asks to consult the spirits of the dead for that purpose in 1 Sam 28:8),³⁸ we should also add the verb שאל (*š'ā* v. 6a), “to seek (advice)” (2nd edition: the so-called courtly), (דרש *drš* + “through her,” v. 7), as well as the often repeated verb עלה (*lā*), “to go (up), to go out (upwards)” (vv. 8b, 11bis, 15: *hifil*; vv. 13–14: participle *qal*), describing the direction in which the spirit called from the earth moves (מן-הארץ v. 13: *min-bā'āreš*), referred to in the oldest literary version as אלהים (*ēlohīm* v. 13).

Having experienced God's silence while using traditional practices (v. 6: dreams, *Urim*, prophets), Saul looks for a “new” form of consultation with Him to dispel his doubts (1 Sam 28:3a). He wants to hear the opinion of the prophet who died (cf. 1 Sam 25:1) and needs a competent person to “bring out” the spirit of the late Samuel. He “comes out of the earth” (1 Sam 28:13: a synonym for Sheol³⁹) and informs him that he and his sons would be “with him” the next day, that is, they would die (1 Sam 28:19). The pre-Deuteronomistic version mentions a woman אשת (*ēšet*) additionally referred to as בעלת-אוב (*ba'ālat-ōb* v. 7), consulting (קסם *qsm qal*) the dead using אוב (*bā*) אוב (*ōb* v. 8b). In this case, אוב (*ōb*) may be both an instrument and an installation⁴⁰ used by the woman, or the spirit of the dead Samuel.

37 Similarly B.T. Arnold, “Necromancy and Cleromancy in 1 and 2 Samuel,” *CBQ* 66/2 (2004) 199. See also C.L. Nihan, “1 Samuel 28 and the Condemnation of Necromancy in Persian Yehud,” *Magic in the Biblical World. From Aaron Rod to the Ring of Solomon* (ed. T.E. Klutz) (JSNTSup 245; London: Clark 2003) 23–54.

38 KBL, II, 179.

39 W.L. Holladay, “Ereš – “Unterworld”: Two More Suggestions,” *VT* 19 (1969) 123–124; N.J. Tromp, *Primitive Conception of Death and the Death and Nether World in the Old Testament* (BibOr 21; Roma: PIB 1969) 23–46, 85–91, 98; M. Ottosson, “ארץ 'ereš,” *TDOT* I, 388–405, particularly 398–400; KBL, II, 584.

40 “mistress of the (bottle-shaped) pit,” cf. Vieyra, “Les noms,” 51–53; Hoffner, “Second Millennium,” 401; already suggested earlier by C.J. Gadd, *Ideas of Divine Rule in the Ancient East* (The Schweich Lectures on Biblical Archaeology 1945; London: Oxford University Press 1948) 89, <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.73601/page/n99/mode/2up> [access: 1.09.2023].

The phrase בעלת-אוב (*ba'ālat-ōb*) means here a representative of a certain professional group,⁴¹ a necromancer, a medium, comparable to the Hittite *haššawa/SALSŪ.GI*, “wise/old woman.”⁴² However, some researchers believe it to be a combination of two separate terms for this profession: אשת אוב (*št ūwb*), a “ghostwife” and בעלת-אוב (*b'lt ūwb*), a “ghost-mistress,”⁴³ while others understand the word אשה (*iššā*) as “the conjurer of the spirits of the dead,” and the apposition as a term indicating the one she serves: the lady, i.e. a solar goddess having power over the afterlife.⁴⁴ Grammatically, it is also possible for the preposition ב (*b^e*) to function as an accusative (cf. Gen 25:22: ב [*b^e*] + YHWH), but the spirit charmer and the spirits are not consulted in the same way as deities according to Dietrich, who translates the whole phrase as “a woman, who is capable of (conducting) a spell/consultation of ancestors.”⁴⁵

After performing the necromantic ritual, the woman achieves her goal and describes to Saul what she sees (vv. 13b–14a). It is not known how Saul recognises that the “old man covered with a robe” (v. 14a; cf. 2 Kgs 2:13–14) is the dead Samuel (v. 14b), but much more intriguing in that description is the identification of the figure emerging from the ground as אלהים (*ʾlōhīm*) (v. 13b). Both the Masoretic text and the LXX retain the plural form of the verbs in this case. The latter translates the word as “gods.” Some exegetes retain that meaning, considering it a description of “many dead” (cf. Isa 8:19)⁴⁶ or many chthonic deities accompanying the dead.⁴⁷ However, the context of the description does not make it possible to prove the validity of such an understanding of the word. This is why it is usually considered the reference exclusively to the spirit of the dead Samuel. The first and last cases could exemplify the fact that the ancient Israelites, like other peoples in the area, idolised their dead ancestors over time.⁴⁸ In recent years, however, another opinion has begun to prevail, according to which the term אלהים (*ʾlōhīm*) means only “something divine,” “divine

41 Tropper, *Nekromantie*, 227.

42 R. Schmitt, “Divination, Media of,” *Encyclopedia of Material Culture in the Biblical World. A New Biblisches Reallexikon* (ed. A. Berlejung) (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2022) 239.

43 P.K. McCarter, *1 Samuel* (AB 8; New York: Doubleday 1980) 418; R.W. Klein, *1 Samuel* (WBC 10; Waco, TX: World Book 1983) 268; T.J. Lewis, *Cult of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (HSM 39; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press 1989) 107.

44 D.T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge: Eerdmans 2007) 621, 630–631.

45 Dietrich, *Samuel*, 32: “Frau, die der Ahnenbeschwörung mächtig ist” + n. 35 to v. 7. Similarly, already A. Caquot – P. de Robert, *Les livres de Samuel* (Genève: Labor et Fides 1994) 331: “femme expert en évocation que j’aïlle chez elle la consulter.”

46 Tropper, *Nekromantie*, 219–220; M. Kleiner, *Saul in En-Dor: Wabragung oder Totenbeschwörung? Eine synchrone und diachrone Untersuchung zu 1 Sam 28* (ETS 66; Göttingen: Benno 1995) 134–135.

47 M. Hutter, “Religionsgeschichtliche Erwägungen zu *ʾlhym* in 1 Sam 28,13,” *BN* 21 (1983) 32–36; B.B. Schmidt, “The ‘Witch’ of En-Dor. 1 Samuel and Ancient Near Eastern Necromancy,” *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (eds. M. Meyer – P. Mirecki) (RGRW 129; Leiden – New York – Köln: Brill 1995) 120–127.

48 More on the matter cf. J. Lemański, “*Sprawisz, abym ożył! (Ps 71,20b). Źródła nadziei na zmartwychwstanie w Starym Testamencie* (Rozprawy i Studia 532; Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe US 2004) 93–94.

beings,” beings that do not come from the world of the living.⁴⁹ Bill T. Arnold⁵⁰ believes that the demarcation line between the being from this world and the divine one was less clear in ancient times than today, and the noun אלהים (*‘ēlōhîm*) has an attributive meaning of “divine,” “extraordinary” in this case. The dead are described as “gods” but only to emphasise their existence other than earthly (*preternatural* but not *supernatural*). According to the scholar, it is also possible that it does not concern only the broadly understood “shades of the dead” but “ancestral preternatural beings” (Arnold also points to a similar meaning in Mic 3:7).⁵¹ However, as was already noted, Samuel is not Saul’s relative, and one can only speculate as to who the dead was in the alleged oral version of that tradition.

Still, if the dead/spirit is referred to as אלהים (*‘ēlōhîm*), then the word אוב (*‘ōb*) used by the female necromancer in the older version of the tradition about the events in Endor may, in fact, be an instrument for conjuring it or an object (e.g. a hole in the ground imitating/allowing access to the afterlife). Because one can use it to consult the spirits (דַּרְשׁ *drš* v. 7; קָסַם *qsm* v. 8b) and cause them to come out of the earth/Sheol (עֵלָה *‘lh* hifil vv. 8b, 11b, 15; qal vv. 13–14).

In the early development stage of the ancient Israel religion, referred to as “vorkanonische Vorstellungen,”⁵² the coexistence of belief in YHWH and the world of the dead ruled by the chthonic deity Mot was not yet a major issue. That situation changed radically with the religious reforms attributed by biblical authors to Hezekiah (cf. Exod 22:17, 28) and later intensified in the times of Josiah (Deut 18:11; 2 Kgs 23:24). In any case, in the late 8th and early 7th centuries BC, there were bans on practising necromancy and the cult of dead ancestors,⁵³ treating such practices as contrary to orthodox Yahwism. The narrative in 1 Sam 28 describes a practice originating from the “pre-canonical” period, which is then overlaid by a clear, canonical correction in the approach to necromancy.

In the corrected Deuteronomistic version, the phrase האות והארת-הירענים (*hā’ōbôt w’et-hajjidd’ōnim*) (vv. 3b, 9) is a description of a profession (necromancers and fortune tellers) or items used to perform the practice. This time, choosing one of those two possible meanings is more difficult. Dietrich⁵⁴ notes that the verb סור (*sur* hifil), “to dismiss, to remove,”⁵⁵ does not indicate something abstract, such as conjuring the dead (Fritz Stolz),

49 Lewis, *Cult of the Dead*, 49–50, 112–116; P. Johnston, “The Underworld and the Dead in the Old Testament,” *TynBul* 45 (1994) 415–419; K. van der Toorn, “God (I): ‘lhjm,” *DDD*² 363; Dietrich, *Samuel*, 36.

50 Arnold, “Necromancy,” 202–203.

51 Arnold, “Necromancy,” 203 with reference to H. Niehr, “Ein unerkannter Text zur Nekromantie in Israel,” *UF* 23 (1991) 301–306, particularly 304.

52 B. Lang, “Leben nach dem Tod (I). Altes Testament,” *Neues Bibel-Lexikon* (eds. M. Görg – B. Lang) (Zürich – Düsseldorf: Benziger 1995) I, 599–602, particularly 599.

53 E. Gönye, *JHWH und die Unterwelt* (FAT 23.2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2007) 17. Cf. also several articles in the collective monograph *Tod und Jenseits im alten Israel und in seiner Umwelt* (eds. A. Berlejung – B. Janowski) (FAT 64; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2009).

54 Dietrich, *Samuel*, 32, 33, 34 + n. cc: “Ahnenfiguren und Allewissenden” with reference to Klein, *1 Samuel*, 267: “The (images of) ancestral spirits and ghosts”; Troppe, *Nekromantie*, 224: “Requisiten des Ahnenkultes (=Ahnenbilder).”

55 KBL, I, 701–702.

nor the spirits of the dead (Robert Alter), nor those involved in their invocation (Pete Kyle McCarter; Antony F. Campbell), but something more precise; an item used by necromancers – statuettes of the dead (ancestors). In fact, combined with the pronoun מִן (*min*), it can have such a meaning. As was already established, the current canonical version of 1 Sam 28 does not mention an ancestor of Saul. Moreover, the semantics of that verb also includes the meaning of “to leave,”⁵⁶ which in the hifil conjugation can also take the meaning of “to dismiss/make go away” and refer to those practising necromantic rituals. What is intriguing in this case (vv. 3b, 9) is the presence of the preposition וְאֵת (*w'et*). It is not found in front of the first noun הָאוֹת (*h'obót*) in v. 3b but appears before it in v. 9. Then again, הַיִּדְעָנִים (*hajjidd'e'onim*) can be found in v. 3b in the plural and in v. 9 in the singular. This may be a trace of editorial activity, which turned the instrument(s) used for necromancy (the original version of v. 3b) into a profession (definitely in v. 9).

As noted by Tropper,⁵⁷ when it comes to choosing the meaning of אוֹב (*'ob*), scholars are usually of different opinions and go for the personal sense (spirits of the dead, malevolent spirits, spirits of ancestors) or the instrumental sense (empty vessel, pit/hole; intestine or leather wineskin⁵⁸). In younger texts, as will be discussed shortly, there is clearly the possibility of choosing a third meaning: necromancers/spirit conjurers.⁵⁹ Therefore, there may have been some evolution in the word's meaning, and the plural form may be a sort of simplification. Over time, those who gave voice to the spirits were referred to by the word describing spirits.⁶⁰

In fact, the second term (הַיִּדְעָנִים *hajjidd'e'onim*) occurs only together with אוֹב (*'ob*), and Tropper⁶¹ also interpreted it differently: enchanter, fortune teller or figurines representing the dead. Indeed, the noun is derived from the stem יָדַע (*jd'*), “to know,” and may be associated both with the knowledge of the future attributed to the dead and with the spirit enchanter who are able to extract that knowledge from them.⁶² It seems less likely that it denotes the spirits of the dead themselves.⁶³ As noted by David Toshio

56 J.A. Thompson – E.A. Martens, “סור *sur*,” *NIDOTTE* III, 238–239.

57 Tropper, *Nekromantie*, 189–200.

58 The last two examples are from A.G. Auld, *I and II Samuel* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 2011) 325.

59 S. Bar-Efrat, *Das Erste Buch Samuel. Ein narratologisch-philologischer Kommentar* (BWANT 176; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2007) 353.

60 As Bar-Efrat (*Das Erste Buch Samuel*, 353) explains it: “vielleicht wegen des Glaubens, dass die Totengeister in sie hineingehen und aus ihrer Kehle spechen (vgl. Lev 20:27).”

61 Tropper, *Nekromantie*, 200–201.

62 Bar-Efrat, *Das Erste Buch Samuel*, 353. Cf. F. Schmidtke, “Träume, Orakel und Totengeister als Kündler der Zukunft in Israel und Babylonien,” *BZ* 11 (1967) 240–246; L. Schwienhorst-Schönberger, “Saul bei der Totenbeschwörerin von En-Dor (1 Sam. 28),” *BL* 61 (1988) 264–267, particularly 265.

63 This is what Christoph L. Nihan (“1 Samuel 28,” 31) suggests: “(the spirits of) the ancestors, the one who knows.” Cf. also S. Fischer, “1 Samuel 28. The Woman of Endor – Who is She and What Does Saul See?,” *Old Testament Essays* 14 (2001) 26–46, particularly 30–31, https://www.academia.edu/30933041/1_Samuel_28_The_woman_of_Endor_who_is_she_and_what_does_Saul_see_OTE_14_1_2001_pdf [access: 5.08.2023].

Tsumura,⁶⁴ the word is used twice to refer to necromancy (2 Kgs 21:6; 2 Chr 33:6) and nine times to those who practise it, but never to describe the spirits. Therefore, the phrase אֹב־הַיִּדְעָנִים וְהַחֹזֵן וְהַחֹזֵן (hāḥōḥôt w'et-hajjiddē'ōnîm) means, in the younger editorial layer, those specialised in gaining knowledge of the future: necromancers and diviners/interpreters of signs. Whether the second profession was also related to consulting the dead is no longer certain unless it is a *hendiadys*.⁶⁵ However, not all researchers accept such an interpretation of the whole lexeme. Yet, Dietrich⁶⁶ maintains that the phrase describes instruments (figurines representing ancestors) and not representatives of a specific profession. Still, such a meaning is only possible in the older narrative version. It should also be noted that there is a word for such items in Hebrew, תַּרְפִּים (terāpîm).⁶⁷ Adopting the interpretation proposed by Dietrich, a question should be posed: Why was it not used here?

2.1.2. To Make אֹב הַיִּדְעָנִים ('ōḇ and jiddē'ōnîm) (2 Kgs 21:6//2 Chr 33:6)

He (i.e. Manasses) made his son pass through the fire, he practised witchcraft (עָנַן ānan I)⁶⁸ and divination (נָחַשׁ nāḥaš I),⁶⁹ he did/established (practised/turned to?) אֹב הַיִּדְעָנִים ('ōḇ and jiddē'ōnîm). He did much evil in the eyes of YHWH, angering Him (2 Kgs 21:6; cf. 2 Chr 33:6).

The text of 2 Kgs 21:3–9 is considered a Deuteronomistic construct, which refers to the list of offences against YHWH in Deut 18:10–11.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, vv. 2b, 6 might come from a slightly later period (the so-called *revision royal focus*).⁷¹ The allegations, as they are referred to now, relate to the religious transgressions of King Manasseh, a ruler viewed negatively by the Deuteronomistic historiographer. The pair of words of interest here אֹב הַיִּדְעָנִים ('ōḇ and jiddē'ōnîm) (cf. Lev 20:27) may indicate some installation or necromantic practice and not the people involved in it.⁷² However, the use of אֹב ('ōḇ) in

64 Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, 619 with reference to J. Tropper, “Wizard,” *DDD*² 907–908.

65 Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, 619.

66 Dietrich, *Samuel*, 54. Cf. Caquot – de Robert, *Les livres de Samuel*, 331: (v. 3): “instruments d'évocation (des morts)”; (v. 9) “pratique la divination avec l'instrument.”

67 F. Tryl, “Twarzą w twarz z przodkami. O znaczeniu *massēbôt*, *bāmôt* i *tērāpîm* w religii ludowej Ugarit i Izraela,” *Gloriam praecedat humilitas (Prz 15,33). Księga pamiątkowa dla Księdza Profesora Antoniego Troniny w 70. rocznicę urodzin* (ed. M. Szmajdziński) (Częstochowa: Regina Poloniae 2015) 757–790.

68 KBL, I, 798.

69 KBL, I, 649.

70 V. Fritz, *Das zweite Buch der Könige* (ZBK 10.2; Zürich: TVZ 1998) 128.

71 A.F. Campbell – M.A. O'Brien, *Unfolding the Deuteronomistic History. Origins, Upgrades, Present Text* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2000) 454. Also other proposals (vv. 3, 5–7) take into account the later addition of v. 6; more in: M. Nobile, *1–2 Re* (Milano: Paoline 2010) 447, n. 9.

72 With reference to Lev 20:27 M. Cogan – H. Tadmor, *II Kings* (AB 11; New York: Doubleday 1988) 267, but both translate the text (265): “dealt with person who consult ghosts and spirits.” Similarly E. Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige: 1.Kön.17– 2.Kön.25* (ATD 11.2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1984) 441. A bit different P.R. House, *1, 2 Kings* (NAC; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman 1995) 376; L.M. Wray Beal, *1 & 2 Kings* (ApOTC 9; Nottingham: Apollon – Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press 2014) 489: “...consulted mediums and spiritist”; J.B. Łach, *Księgi 1–2 Królów* (PŚST 4.2; Poznań: Pallottinum 2007) 544: “allowed the evokers of the spirits of the dead, fortune tellers, to act.”

the singular and ידעניים (*jidd'eōnīm*) in the plural is noteworthy. Thus, Marvin A. Sweeney⁷³ translates the entire phrase as “conjured ghost and multiplied sorcerers.” Such translation, however, does not reflect the difference adequately, although he interprets the word אוב (*’ōb*) not in the sense of a necromantic ritual but as a “spirit (of the dead).” Volkmar Fritz⁷⁴ probably captures the sense of the whole phrase better, translating it as “er förderte die Totengeistbefragung und Zeichendeuter.” In his translation, אוב (*’ōb*) again denotes the practice of necromancy while ידעניים (*jidd'eōnīm*) refers to those explaining signs (omens).

The verb עשה (*šb qal*), in its broadest sense, means “to make, to do,”⁷⁵ which could suggest some installation for practising necromancy, perceived here as an act of infidelity towards YHWH. In this case, however, the noun ידעניים (*jidd'eōnīm*) is more difficult to interpret similarly. Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor,⁷⁶ following Arnold B. Ehrlich’s⁷⁷ suggestion, believe that the verb should be understood as “to address” (cf. 1 Sam 8:15), not as “establish”⁷⁸ (cf. 2 Kgs 17:32). Still, it is sometimes used to describe holiday celebrations or practising specific rituals.⁷⁹ Therefore, the allegation in question could be that Manasseh practised⁸⁰ necromancy and consulted through unauthorised divination rituals, which fits well with the whole list of allegations against him. In this case, deciding what is the proper meaning of the word אוב (*’ōb*) is indeed difficult. For Manasseh could just as well have “made” some installation for necromancy as he could have “addressed the spirit (of the dead).”

The parallel, later version presented by the Chronicler does not help much in understanding the Deuteronomistic account. There is a list of condemned practices from Deut 18:10–11 in its background. In addition to the allegation of “leading children through fire,” the Chronicler also mentions the practice of various forms of divination and magic. The singular “son” is replaced only by the plural form “sons,” and the list of magical practices (Deut 18:10) is expanded by the practice of witchcraft (אוב וידעניים [*’ōb* and *jidd'eōnīm*]).⁸¹ The Chronicler does not, in any way, correct the analysed phrase. Thus, it is not clear what he means by either term. Perhaps the most accurate meaning would be that “(Manasseh) addressed a dead person (through a necromancer) and those interpreting signs/diviners.”

73 M.A. Sweeney, *I & II Kings* (OTL; Louisville, KY – London: Westminster John Knox 2007) 424.

74 Fritz, *Das zweite Buch*, 127. Similarly, although in the second case rather incorrectly, also T.R. Hobbs, *2 Kings* (WBC 13; Waco, TX: Word Books 1985) 298: “and practiced necromancy and wizardry.”

75 H. Ringgren, “עשה, *’āšá*,” *TDOT* XI, 388; KBL, I, 826–829.

76 Cogan – Tadmor, *II Kings*, 267.

77 A. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zum hebräischen Bibel* (Hildsheim: Olms 1914; reprint 1968) VII, 316: “und bediente sich...”

78 For example G. Hentschel, *2 Könige* (NEchtB; Würzburg: Echter 1985) 102–103: “bestellte Totenbeschwörer und Zeichendeuter.”

79 Ringgren, “עשה, *’āšá*,” 392.

80 Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 298: “practised necromancy and wizardry.”

81 S. Japhet, *2 Chronik* (HThKAT; Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder 2002) 447.

2.1.3. Enchanters תַּבְּוֹנָה (*’ōḥōt*) and Diviners (2 Kgs 23:24)

And Josiah got rid of (בער *b’r piel*) the mediums (את-הַאֲבוֹת *et-bā’ōbōt*), the spiritualists (אֶת-הַיִּדְעָנִים *w’ et-hajjidd’ōnīm*), the household gods, the idols and all the other abominable objects in Judah and Jerusalem so that he might fulfil the requirements of the law written in the book that Hilkiyah the priest had discovered in the temple of YHWH.

The phrase is part of the Deuteronomistic account of the religious reforms and renewal of the Covenant by King Josiah (2 Kgs 23:1–27).⁸² Interests (list of offences) may suggest a later origin of v. 24 in relation to the rest of the account,⁸³ and the entire description of the so-called Josiah’s reforms (2 Kgs 22–23) means, in practice, a transition from cult religion to the religion of the book.⁸⁴ It mainly concerns the practices indicated as the cause of the fall of the Kingdom of Israel (2 Kgs 17:17), which were brought to Judah by Manasseh later on (2 Kgs 21:6). Thus, Josiah is presented as a reformer removing them from his kingdom (cf. Deut 12:29–13:19). The expression וגם (*w’gam*), “moreover/and also,” brings attention to details not yet mentioned in the description of the reforms and introduces a list of practices related to religious abuses that Josiah removed from Judah. It mentions two practices forbidden in Deut 18:11. Cogan and Tadmor⁸⁵ translate the phrase describing them as “those who consult *ghosts* and *spirits*”). Ernst Würthwein⁸⁶ translates it as “the conjurers of the spirits of the dead and diviners” (German: *Totengeistbeschwörer und Wahrsager*), and Józef B. Łach:⁸⁷ “he removed the conjurers of the souls of the dead, diviners...” In this case, scholars agree to the interpretation of הַאֲבוֹת (*hā’ōbōt*) as a medium (plural) facilitating contact with the dead.

2.1.4. Consultation Through the Spirit/Medium (1 Chr 10:13)

So Saul died because of his unfaithfulness to YHWH, which he committed against the word of YHWH, which he disobeyed and even consulted a spirit/medium (בְּאוֹב *bā’ōb*) to seek [advice] (שָׁרַף *drš qal*).

Scholars agree that vv. 13–14 represent the Chronicler’s contribution (the commentary refers to 1 Sam 13:15), in which he justifies the reasons for the complete rejection

82 W. Dietrich et al. (eds.), *Die Entstehung des Alten Testaments* (Theologische Wissenschaft 1; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2014) 282 (Walter Dietrich): “2Kön22f: Eine eigene Quelle mag auch ein Bericht über kultische Reformen des Königs Joschija sein.”

83 Campbell – O’Brien, *Unfolding*, 464.

84 K. Schmid – J. Schröter, *Die Entstehung der Bibel. Von den ersten Texten zu den Heiligen Schrift* (München: Beck 2019) 74–80.

85 Cogan – Tadmor, *II Kings*, 290.

86 Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 454. Similarly Fritz, *Das zweite Buch der Könige*, 139: “Totengeistbefrager und die Zeichendeuter”; Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 437: “necromancer, the soothsayers...”; Wray Beal, *I & 2 Kings*, 498: “mediums, spiritist...”

87 Łach, *Księgi 1–2 Królów*, 566.

of Saul.⁸⁸ The general terminology seems to support their opinion (על מלך דרש *drš*, שמר את-דבר *šmr [et-]dēḥar*).⁸⁹ The allegation against Saul is based on the account in 1 Sam 28, but it is not entirely consistent with the Deuteronomistic version,⁹⁰ in which Saul sought a prophecy from God, even if through a medium. This allows us to assume that it is not a chronicler's shorthand based on 1 Sam 28; 31, but the biblical author's attention is instead focused on the theological justification of the legitimacy of the royal authority of the House of David. The final statement in v. 13 clearly refers to 1 Sam 28, but the syntactic links to that pericope are quite tenuous; hence, the last words in that verse may be a later gloss.⁹¹ The phrase וגם-לשאול באוב (*wēgam liš'ol bā'ōḇ*), although not a quotation from 1 Sam 28, is based on the phrases used there (cf. vv. 6, 16). At the same time, it is also an intentional wordplay with Saul's name (לשאול *liš'ōl*). The second lexeme used to describe consulting through necromantic practices – לדרוש (*ldruš*) – “to seek, to consult,” is the Chronicler's favourite word for seeking answers from God and an opportunity to worship Him.⁹² However, this time, he consults the dead through necromantic practices. So, according to the Chronicler, was Saul no longer seeking information from the words of God (as in 1 Sam 28) but from the spirit of the dead? In 1 Sam 28, Saul also seeks contact with God, but when “traditional” methods fail (cf. 1 Sam 28:6), he tries to make contact with the help of a necromancer. The clearest reference to the above situation is expressed by the word באוב (*bā'ōḇ*) (1 Sam 28:7–8).⁹³ Again, a modern translator has a dilemma here: whether to interpret this phrase as “through/with the help of a spirit,” “through a medium,” or “through a tool used by a necromancer to consult the spirit of a dead person”? However, the focus is now solely on why God rejected Saul. A loose reference to the events in 1 Sam 28 may, therefore, retain the original meaning of the phrase in 1 Sam 28:8 (the spirit of the dead/instrument/installation), or as understood by the Chronicler, have a new meaning: “medium/spirit charmer.”

2.2. Prophetic Texts

In this case, there are only three uses, all of which occur in the Book of Isaiah and in texts that may form part of the oldest legacy preserved from this prophet (Isa 8:19; 19:3; 29:4).

2.2.1. Spirit/Medium (Isa 8:19)

And when they say to you, “Look for (דרש *drš*) (the summoners of) the spirits of the dead (אל-האבות *el-hā'ōḇōt*) and wizards (ואל-הידענים *wē ḥajiddē'ōnīm*), who whisper and mutter (צפר *ṣpp* pilpel + גגה *ggh*)

⁸⁸ S. Japhet, *1 Chronik* (HThKAT; Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder 2002) 235: “Zusatz.”

⁸⁹ P.B. Dirksen, *1 Chronicles* (HCOT; Leuven: Peeters 2005) 166; T. Willi, *Chronik. 1 Chr 1–10* (BKAT 24.1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag 2009) 330: “rein chronistisch.”

⁹⁰ “These lines have no parallel in Samuel and are filled with phrases typical of the Chronicler, but the syntax is rough” (G.N. Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 10–29* [AB 12A; New York: Doubleday 2004] 519).

⁹¹ Dirksen, *1 Chronicles*, 166–167.

⁹² Japhet, *1 Chronik*, 235; Willi, *Chronik. 1 Chr 1–10*, 331.

⁹³ Willi, *Chronik. 1 Chr 1–10*, 332.

hgb hifil).” Should not the people consult their gods, consult (דרש *drs*) on behalf of the living with the dead (אל-המתים *el-hammētīm*)?

It is the unanimous opinion of scholars that Isa 6:1–9:6 contains the core of Isaiah’s preaching between 735/732–701 BC. Although the complex was eventually developed during exile in its present form, the passage of interest is usually considered to be originally Isaiah’s.⁹⁴ Even though the argument that necromancy was not popular during the so-called Second Temple period can hardly be disregarded,⁹⁵ one cannot ignore the fact that it was also practised later on.⁹⁶ The statement is an element of the so-called epilogue (Isa 8:19–9:6), and its origin is marked by the change of the speaking subject. But where does it occur (v. 19 or v. 20)? Indeed, the question in v. 19 can be put into the mouths of both his opponents and the prophet.⁹⁷ However, the content of v. 19b would be difficult to attribute to the prophet of YHWH. It appears to be an encouragement, a suggestion from pagans at the time when the inhabitants of Judah experienced the lack of the voice of the prophets/YHWH (cf. 1 Sam 28:6–19).⁹⁸ Later on, is the reference made to the spirits of the dead (in the role of divinised ancestors?⁹⁹) and divination spirits or rather those who can contact them (mediums)? Finding the answer is not easy. The verbs “whisper and murmur” are used to describe the sounds made by both the spirits and those who consult them and represent them to “the seekers.” The description of the method of communication reflects ideas about the world of the dead, in which the latter are “shadows” of themselves¹⁰⁰ (hence the weak, indistinct voice!). Both concepts may indicate personification of אבות (*’ōbôt*) (צפף *spp*, “to chirp, squeak,” about birds cf. Isa 10:34; 38:14; הגה *hgb*, “to coo, purr,” about animals and people cf. Isa 16:7; 31:4; 38:14; Jer 48:31; “mumble”; cf. Isa 33:18). Willem Beuken¹⁰¹ believes that this use concerns the spirits of the dead, and not the medium who contacts them. However, one cannot definitively rule out that the prophet means the way in which the dead were made present during necromantic practices (behaviour/voices made by the medium!).¹⁰² The verb דרש (*drs* cf. Deut 19:3) may refer to consultation with a deity (similarly to שאל *š’l* in 1 Chr 10:13) but does not necessarily mean a reference to “divinised ancestors” (אבות *’ōbôt* as a “distorted” form of the word *’ābôt*). The methods

94 See the discussion in Dietrich, *Die Entstehung*, 327–330.

95 J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39* (AB 19; New York: Doubleday 2000) 244.

96 T. Brzegowy, *Księga Izajasza. Rodziny 1–12* (NKB.ST 22.1; Częstochowa: Edycja Świętego Pawła 2010) 490 (the time of the Babylonian crisis).

97 W.A.M. Beuken, *Jesaja 1–12* (HThKAT; Feiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder 2003) 235.

98 Brzegowy, *Księga Izajasza 1–12*, 491.

99 As suggested by Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 245. Cf. also B.S. Childs, *Isaiah* (OTL; Louisville, KY – London – Leiden: Westminster John Knox 2001) 70, 76: “ghosts and familiar spirits,” “ōv refer to familiar spirits.”

100 J. Lemański, “Hebrajski szel na tle wyobrażeń eschatologicznych sąsiednich kultur,” *Scripta Biblica et Orientalia* 3 (2011) 67–97; cf. also K. Less, “Tod,” *Wörterbuch alttestamentlicher Motive* (eds. M. Fieger – J. Krispenz – J. Lanckau) (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 2013) 397–402, particularly 399–401 (*Totenexistenz*).

101 Beuken, *Jesaja 1–12*, 242; similarly Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 245.

102 Brzegowy, *Księga Izajasza 1–12*, 491–492.

of “removal” (אבות *ʾōbôt*) described elsewhere (1 Sam 28:3b, 9; 2 Kgs 23:24) could also suggest that some figurative representation (idols) is involved this time too.¹⁰³ Still, the use of אלהים (אלהים *ʾēlōhîm*) seems to rule out such an interpretation because, as already mentioned, it never denotes an instrument/object. Therefore, the spirits of the dead or the medium contacting them appear to be better options here.¹⁰⁴

2.2.2. Necromancers/Ghosts and Diviners (Isa 19:3)

Egypt’s spirit will be disturbed within it, and I will frustrate its plans. Then they will seek אלהים (אלהים *ʾēlōhîm*) idols and wizards, necromancers/spirits of the dead (אל-האבות *ʾel-hāʾōbôt*) and diviners (אל-הידענים *ʾel-hayiddēnîm*).

This passage belongs to the collection known as Proto-Isaiah A (Isa 5–10; 14–20; 28–32), the final editing of which took place at the time of the Babylonian exile.¹⁰⁵ It is difficult to date it more precisely as there are no reference points, and the process of compiling the collection was quite complex. Isa 19:1–4 may have some historical background, but it is difficult to determine.¹⁰⁶ One possibility is the Israel-Assyrian war of 724–721, when the Egyptians, despite their declarations, failed to provide adequate assistance to the Israelites (cf. 2 Kgs 17:4)¹⁰⁷ or the years 713–711 (the anti-Assyrian revolt of the Philistine cities) when the Egyptians disappointed their allies once again. In any case, the context of the narrative suggests an intellectual and spiritual crisis in Egypt (בקה *bqq* nifal: “to be desolate”; about the country in Isa 24:1; “to be troubled”: about the spirit in Isa 19:3¹⁰⁸) described in the style of a theophany and God’s judgement.¹⁰⁹ The consequence of religious demoralisation is political and social chaos in the land of the Pharaohs.

Beuken¹¹⁰ translates both terms of interest as “Gruben- und Wahrsagegeistern,” i.e. ghosts. Similarly, John Blenkinsopp:¹¹¹ “they will consult the idols, the spirits of the dead, the shades and the ghosts,” although the order and choice of words in the translation are somewhat surprising. The two words in question are plural, as are the two that precede them on this list. Blenkinsopp states that they “refer [to] the spirits of the dead rather than their human manipulators.”¹¹² However, the list as a whole should be coherent, and the announcement may, in this case, concern those “manipulators,” i.e. necromancers and

103 Brzegowy, *Księga Izajasza 1–12*, 491.

104 Brzegowy, *Księga Izajasza 1–12*, 491.

105 Dietrich, *Die Entstehung*, 327–330.

106 W.A.M. Beuken, *Jesaja 13–27* (HThKAT; Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder 2007) 179–180.

107 M.A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39 with an Introduction to the Prophetic Literature* (FOTL 16; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1996) 271–272.

108 KBL, I, 143.

109 Childs, *Isaiah*, 143.

110 Beuken, *Jesaja 13–27*, 173.

111 Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 312.

112 Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 315.

soothsayers. Yet, it cannot be ruled out that consulting “spirits (of the dead) and diviners” is meant here.

2.2.3. Spirit (of the Dead) (Isa 29:4)

You will speak from the ground (i.e. Sheol)
 your speech will mumble out of the dust;
 your voice will come ghostlike (אֹב *’ōḇ*) from the earth (i.e. Sheol),
 out of the dust your speech will whisper.

Isaiah 28–32 are chapters concerning the events of 701 BC and describe the fate of those who stood in the way of the Assyrians – the great humiliation of Zion (Isa 28:7–15, 18–19; 29:1–4; 30:1–7; 31:1–3).¹¹³ Isa 29:1–4 is usually dated to the 8th century BC.¹¹⁴ To understand Isa 29:4, it is necessary to note the fact that the previous verse mentions a siege and battle (v. 3), so v. 4a may refer to those killed in battle or taken prisoners (the initial ו [waw] serves as a *circumstantial indicator*¹¹⁵). Feminine verb forms made the older exegetes believe that the subject could be the daughters of Jerusalem sitting in the dust (cf. Isa 3:26; 47:1; Jer 6:26; 48:18; Mic 1:10; Lam 1:2; 2:10, for instance, Ferdinand Hitzig). Others saw fugitives taking shelter in caves from the advancing enemy (Josephus, *B.J.* 7.1; Campegius Vitringa). However, looking at it from the perspective of the “Isaiah code” suggests that it may refer to those who boasted before YHWH (cf. Isa 2:10–11) and were humiliated (Lothar Ruppert).¹¹⁶ The second part of the line (v. 4b) is sometimes understood as a later editorial addition, but there are also opinions that it is a logical progression and the original climax of the entire statement. Those who fell to the ground in the battle (v. 4a) cry out (as if) from Sheol now.¹¹⁷ Ground is its synonym here (אֶרֶץ + עָפָר *’ereṣ + ’āpār*, “dust”).¹¹⁸ The voice of the still living, but defeated and humiliated,¹¹⁹ sounds like that of the dead. Therefore, the phrase would not concern necromantic practices but serve only as a comparison.¹²⁰ Although Beuken¹²¹ translates אֹב (*’ōḇ*) as the “spirit (of the dead),” he adds a comment that it is more often understood as a tool for communicating with the dead (hole in the ground) or an exorcist. This time, however, the noun in question clearly needs to be understood as “the spirit (of the dead/fallen),”¹²² who asks for mercy like a defeated war-

113 Dietrich, *Die Entstehung*, 326, 331.

114 Dietrich, *Die Entstehung*, 328.

115 J.N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1–39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1988) 524, n. 3.

116 Opinions cited in W.A.M. Beuken, *Isaiah. II.2. Isaiah 28–39* (HCOT; Leuven: Peeters 2000) 83.

117 J. Werltz, *Studien zur literarkritische Methode. Gericht und Heil in Jesaja 7,1–17 und 29,1–8* (BZAW 204; Berlin: De Gruyter 1992) 262–268.

118 H. Wildberger, *Jesaja. III. Kapitel 28–39* (BKAT 10.3; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag 1982) 1107.

119 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 528.

120 Wildberger, *Jesaja*, 1107.

121 Beuken, *Isaiah*, 69, 71.

122 K. Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (AOAT 219; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker – Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag 1986) 252–256.

rior or to whom the weak/moaning/chirping voice of the defeated is compared (pīpel; cf. Isa 8:19). If it is a comparison, although the text does not tell much about the realm of the *post-mortem*,¹²³ it makes it possible to assume that, after all, in the ancient imaginations a man did not quite die but continued to exist in some form in the underworld and could sometimes be contacted (cf. Isa 8:19; 19:3). Here, it is about Jerusalem defeated by the enemies, whose inhabitants did not so much suffer death as experienced humiliation comparable to the situation of the dead (cf. Ezek 37:11). They have been reduced to an existence reminiscent of the fate of wraiths and ghosts. It is not the dead who are described here, but the experience of the living, whose fate resembles that of the dead.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, אִיב (*ōb*) in this statement clearly means the “spirit (dead person)” and not a necromancer. More precisely, the point is that the voice of the city (Jerusalem) is weak, like the voice of the “spirit” coming out from “the ground.”

2.3. Legal Texts

In this case, there are three statements in Leviticus and one in Deuteronomy. It is good to start with the latter as it is potentially older.

2.3.1. Prohibition of Necromancy and Divination (Deut 18:10–11)

There shall not be found among you anyone that makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire; or that uses divination, prophecy, witchcraft or sorcery, engaging in conjuring and contacting a necromancer/spirit (אִיב וְשֵׁאל אִיב *wəšōʿel ʾōb*) or spiritualist/interpreter of signs (וְיִדְעֵנִי *wəjiddē ʾōnī*) or addressing the dead (וְדַרְשׁ אֶל-הַמֵּתִים *wə dōrēš ʾel-hammētīm*).

Eckart Otto¹²⁵ classifies the text as “nachexilische Fortschreibung.” In the context of that statement (Deut 18:9–22), the principles relating to the last of the offices functioning in the society of ancient Israel are described: prophets. However, it is not presented as an institution but as a function of a charismatic nature established by YHWH.¹²⁶ The law concerning the prophetic office (Deut 18:13–22) assumes that direct contact between God and people is no longer possible; hence, it is preceded by a list of pagan practices (Deut 18:10–12a)¹²⁷ that were sought to be eradicated. The last passage in question concerns motives (mantic and magical practices) that have nothing to do with prophetism and have already led to the fall of Samaria (cf. 2 Kgs 17:17 + negative assessment of Manasseh, the king of Judah from 2 Kgs 21:6). Deut 18:10–11 is an extended and more precise

123 Tak Beuken, *Isaiah*, 84.

124 Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 401; T. Brzegowy, *Księga Izajasza. Rozdziały 13–39* (NKB.ST 22.2; Częstochowa: Edycja Świętego Pawła 2014) 537.

125 E. Otto, *Deuteronomium 12, 1–23, 15* (HThKAT; Freiburg – Basel – Vienna: Herder 2016) 1495. More generally (Deut 16:18–18:22), the so-called Laws of Offices are treated as additions from the period of exile and after the Babylonian Exile also by Thomas Römer in: Dietrich, *Die Entstehung*, 159.

126 S. Paganini, *Deuteronomio* (Milano: Paoline 2011) 289.

127 E. Nielsen, *Deuteronomium* (HAT 1.6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1995) 177.

reception of that older tradition.¹²⁸ The closer context clearly indicates that this is necromancy known before the exile (cf. Isa 8:19; 19:3) and practised long after the Babylonian Exile (cf. Isa 57:69; 65:4), the fullest testimony of which is the final, post-exilic version of the narrative in 1 Sam 28:3–25.¹²⁹ The list covers activities related to divination and foretelling the future – practices that were common and well-known in ancient times but, at the same time, unknown to the classic prophetism found in the prophetic books of the Bible. What or who is meant in that statement by the term אֹב (*’ōb*) used in the singular parallel to the one appearing immediately after it יִדְעֹנִי (*jiddē’ōnî*), also used in the singular? As was already noted, the noun אֹב (*’ōb*) often occurs alone (1 Sam 28:7, 9 [= 1 Chr 10:13]; Isa 29:4; Job 32:19), whereas יִדְעֹנִי (*jiddē’ōnî*) only appears with it (Lev 20:6, 27; Deut 18:11; 1 Sam 28:3, 9; 2 Kgs 21:6; 23:24; Isa 8:19 19:3; 2 Chr 33:6). Here, Otto¹³⁰ is right to reject the interpretation of אֹב (*’ōb*) in the sense of “pit” and suggests “spirit of a dead ancestor”¹³¹ instead. Still, the parallel word indicates a practitioner of necromancy/diviner rather than the spirit of the dead.¹³² Otto himself translates that phrase as “keiner, der den Geist eines Ahnen, eines Wissenden, befragt...”¹³³ Jack R. Lundbom,¹³⁴ Richard D. Nelson¹³⁵ and Simone Paganini¹³⁶ also understand it similarly, i.e. as a medium.

2.3.2. (Conjuring) Spirits of the Dead and Ritual Impurity (Lev 19:31)

You shall not contact (אֶל-תִּפְנוּ *’al- tipnû*) spirit conjurers/spirits (אֶל-הָאֹבֹת *’el-hā’ōbōt*) or necromancers (וְאֶל-הַיִּדְעֹנִים *w’el-hajjiddē’ōnim*). You shall not seek them out (אֶל-תִּבְקְשׁוּ *’al-’baqšû*) and make yourselves unclean by them...

The so-called Holiness Code (Lev 17–26) includes three subsequent laws, written just after the Babylonian Exile and later supplemented with numerous additions.¹³⁷

¹²⁸ Otto, *Deuteronomium 12,1–23,15*, 1457–1458.

¹²⁹ See Schmidt, *Israel’s Beneficent Dead*, 201–219.

¹³⁰ Otto, *Deuteronomium 12,1–23,15*, 1496.

¹³¹ Also Nielsen, *Deuteronomium*, 175, 186: “Totengeister und Wahrsagegeistern.”

¹³² Hence the translation “to evoke spirits and ghosts” (M. Baranowski, *Księga Powtórzonego Prawa* [NKB.ST 5; Częstochowa: Edycja Świętego Pawła 2022] 440–441) seems unconvincing; cf. other Polish translations: “...questioning the spirits of the dead and those having visions and necromancers” (J. Lemański, *Księga Powtórzonego Prawa* [BLub; Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2022] 113); “who would perform spells, invoke spirits and interrogate the dead” (S. Łach, *Księga Powtórzonego Prawa* [PŚST 2.3; Poznań – Warszawa: Pallottinum 1971] 206).

¹³³ Otto, *Deuteronomium 12,1–23,15*, 1431.

¹³⁴ J.R. Lundbom, *Deuteronomy. A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge: Eerdmans 2013) 552: “One who consult a ghost.”

¹³⁵ R.D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy* (OTL; Louisville, KY – London: Westminster John Knox 2002) 226: “or consults ghost or spirits.” Although in the comment (233), he hesitates whether the first word should be understood as “ghost or the pit utilised to communicate with one.”

¹³⁶ Paganini, *Deuteronomio*, 286: “uno che pronunzierà un esorcismo e che farà domande a uno spirito dei morti e uno spirito di visione ultraterrene e che porrà domande ai morti.”

¹³⁷ Cf. J. Lemański, *Prawo Pana doskonałe – krzepi życie (Ps 19,8a). Kilka refleksji na temat istoty prawa i sprawiedliwości w Starym Testamencie* (Rozprawy i Studia 54; Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe US 2019) 111–114.

The general prohibition of practising magic and divination appeared already in Lev 19:26. This law supplements it with necromantic practices related to the cult of foreign deities (an interpretation of the first commandment of the Decalogue). However, no specific practices are indicated. Commenting on that prohibition, Rashi gave several examples of conjuring spirits, including taking a bone of a dead person into a mouth and “reading” it.¹³⁸ In this case, the plural אַבֹּת (*’ōḇōt*) is used and a parallel use of the plural in the expression יַדְעֵנִים (*jiddē’ōnīm*). Again, it is difficult to say whether it denotes the spirits of the dead or those who invoke/conjure them. Thomas Hieke¹³⁹ also does not rule out the possibility that it could be an “instrument” allowing access to the dead (pit/hole). However, the plural and the verb פָּנָה (*pnh*), “to address,”¹⁴⁰ suggest that only the first two options are possible. In practice, Jacob Milgrom¹⁴¹ notes that the precise meaning of the two words used here is “disputable,” and they can be understood both as spirits of the dead, in the sense of consulting them about the future, or necromancers, i.e. specialists in that kind of consultation. The mentioned threat of contracting ritual impurity “through them” (לְטִמְאָה בָּהֶם *l’ṭāmē’ā bāhem*) may suggest the meaning “spirits of the dead,” as contact with the dead was most often the cause of it.¹⁴² Nevertheless, the biblical author may also have in mind the person who makes such a contaminating contact possible. Despite the “poetic” elements present in the style of the Holiness School, the mentioned tandem does not, according to Milgrom, function as a *hendiadys*, and each term denotes a separate practice. Therefore, ו (waw) cannot be understood as “or.”¹⁴³ The verb form with the negation אַל-תִּפְנוּ (*’al-tipnū*), “not to address,” is somewhat surprising. One would rather expect a permanent prohibition לֹא (*lō*) than a negation suggesting an ad hoc, temporary prohibition אַל (*’al*). Then, too, the verbs דָּרַשׁ (*drs*) or שָׁאַל (*š’l*) (both in the sense of “to seek”) would be more expressive. However, the choice here may be stylistic (inclusion with v. 4a). Still, such a justification cannot be used in the case of Lev 20:6, which may indicate a different editor of the second statement.¹⁴⁴

138 Quoted after T. Hieke, *Leviticus 16–27* (HThKAT; Freiburg – Basel – Vienna: Herder 2014) 752.

139 Hieke, *Leviticus 16–27*, 752.

140 In a cultic and theological sense, the verb indicates a spiritual orientation, such as turning to idols (cf. Lev 19:4) or towards the path one has chosen (Isa 53:6; 56:1; Job 36:21; cf. Moses’ warning against turning away from YHWH in Deut 29:17); J.A. Thompson – E.A. Martens, “פָּנָה *pnh*,” *NIDOTTE* III, 636–637.

141 J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22* (AB 3A; New York: Doubleday 2000) 1701.

142 More on this subject in, e.g. J. Lemański, “Woda oczyszczenia i jej parakultowe zastosowanie (Lb 19,1–22) jako problem egzegetyczny i teologiczny,” *Colloquia Theologica Ortoniana* 36 (2020) 221–260; J. Lemański, “‘Dead Souls’ and ‘Open Vessel’. Is There a Need for a ‘New’ Meaning of the Hebrew Word nefes̄?” *Verbum Vitae* 40/3 (2022) 661–674.

143 Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1701.

144 Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1701.

2.3.3. Penalisation: Exclusion (Lev 20:6)

And anyone who turns (אל פנה *pnh 'el-*) to those who invoke spirits/ghosts (אל-האבת *'el-hā'ōḇōt*) and/or to fortune tellers (ואל-הידענים *'el-hajiddē'ōnīm*) commits fornication with them. And I will set my face against him and will cut him off my people.

This statement also places spirit conjurers and fortune tellers in the context of religious customs unknown to Yahvism (“fornication” is a metaphor for the religious betrayal of YHWH). It contains sanctions for offences mentioned in Lev 19:31. Why was it placed here and not right next to Lev 19:31? Perhaps it was the desire to create an inclusion or a later addition placed – as the Romans were wont to do later on – not where it would logically fit but at the end of the body of law (cf. *Lex Aquila* approx. 287 BC).¹⁴⁵ Also, in this case, there is a problem with determining the meaning of the word אבת (*ōḇōt*) – necromancers or spirits of the dead?¹⁴⁶ Both can be addressed in this way (אל פנה *pnh 'el*). However, since reference is made to “betrayal” of a religious nature here, of which the aforementioned “fornication” is a metaphor (cf. 5: likewise about the worship of Moloch),¹⁴⁷ this may be an accusation related to the worship of dead ancestors. Yet, this is the case when one consults the dead (directly) or turns to those who make such a consultation possible. When it comes to the word אבת (*ōḇōt*), it is certainly not an “instrument” for such practice (“hole in the ground”).

2.3.4. Penalisation: Death (Lev 20:27)

And a man or woman, when there is a familiar spirit in them (אוב *'ōḇ*) or who are wizards (אוי ידעני *'ō jiddē'ōnī*), shall be put to death; they shall be stoned to death. Their blood shall be upon them.

Here, it is an even later addition, perhaps even from the Hellenistic period, when a community concerned about the lack of classical prophets was looking for other ways to find answers to the question about the future.¹⁴⁸ In this case, explicit reference is made to “a man or woman” fulfilling the role of a medium or diviner (cf. “if it be in them,” כִּי-יְהִיָּה בָהֶם *kī-jīheje^h bāhem*). It certainly does not concern אוב (*'ōḇ*) intended to mean an instrument because אודעני (*jiddē'ōnī*) – as already mentioned – never denotes an instrumental role.¹⁴⁹ Hieke argues that¹⁵⁰ the “mixed translation” in this case should also be considered incorrect

¹⁴⁵ Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1764–1765.

¹⁴⁶ Hieke, *Leviticus 16–27*, 787.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. also Exod 34:15, 16; Lev 17:7; Deut 31:16; Judg 8:33; similar vocabulary in Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1736.

¹⁴⁸ Rouillard – Tropper, “Vom kanaanäsichen,” 239. However, the arguments for such a dating of this interpolation (there was no belief in a medium before that time) are *ex silentio* according to Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1765. In turn, Thomas Hieke (*Leviticus 16–27*, 808) agrees with that.

¹⁴⁹ Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1765.

¹⁵⁰ Hieke, *Leviticus 16–27*, 787.

(“spirit of the dead and a fortune teller”) and renders the entire phrase as: “Und wenn in einem Mann oder einer Frau ein Totengeist oder ein Wahrsagegeist (ist)...” i.e. “and if in some man or some woman there is a spirit of the dead or a spirit of divination.”¹⁵¹ Milgrom¹⁵² translates it similarly using the words: “A man or a woman who is a medium for a ghost or wizard-spirit...”

3. אֹב ('ōḇ) – from Pit to the Spirit of the Dead (Ancestor) and the Necromancer?

Let us now sum up the above analysis. Among etymological suggestions, two are the most popular today. One views the word אֹב ('ōḇ) as a borrowing from neighbouring languages and translates its original meaning as the “pit/hole (in the ground),” and the other one sees it as an alternative version of the word אב ('āḇ), “father,” originally meaning a dead ancestor. The above suggestions can be expanded by the *hapax legomenon* from Job 32:19, where אֹב ('ōḇ) means a leather wineskin. In the latter case, however, there is no certainty as to the actual connection between אֹב ('ōḇ) I and II.¹⁵³ However, returning to the first two suggestions relevant to the analysed biblical texts, none seems to apply explicitly to the biblical texts. In 1 Sam 28, Saul’s consultation with some dead relative is only implicit. In the available canonical version, Saul consults the late Samuel, who is not his ancestor but a dead prophet respected during his lifetime. In the Isaiah texts, which could potentially be the original legacy of that prophet, in two instances, it is uncertain whether the more appropriate sense is “spirit” or “medium” who consults it (Isa 8:19; 19:3). However, the issue can be clarified by the third text (Isa 29:4), which explicitly mentions “the spirit of the dead person/its voice” coming “out of the earth.” If the previous two texts come from the same period, then it follows (especially in Isa 8:19: the spirits whisper and hiss) that they deal with the spirits of the dead rather than necromancers summoning them and giving them their voice. Nevertheless, here, there is no indication of the ancestors but only of the dead in general.

Does the same sense of אֹב ('ōḇ) also apply to the oldest version of the story in 1 Sam 28? In this case, the phrases בעלת אֹב (*ba'ālat-'ōḇ*) (v. 7) and באֹב + קסם (*ba'ōḇ + qsm qal*) (v. 8b) may contain both an instrumental sense (an object used to conjure a spirit, e.g. a bull-roarer or an installation: a pit) and a personal sense (the spirit of the dead). In the latter case, however, it is important to note that the necromancer from Endor sees a figure coming “out of the ground” אלהים ('ēlohīm; v. 13b), rather than אֹב ('ōḇ). If the aforementioned etymological suggestion of a foreign borrowing of the word is correct, the oldest, pre-Deuteronomistic version would be a potential example of the use of that noun in

¹⁵¹ Hieke, *Leviticus 16–27*, 772.

¹⁵² Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1301, 1701.

¹⁵³ As in the cases of stem בָּרַךְ (*brk*) I and II (“to kneel” and “to bless,” respectively; cf. KBL, I, 150–152), where the originally suggested connection (kneeling to receive a blessing) was eventually undermined.

the suggested sense of “a pit/hole in the ground” treated as an installation for consulting the dead. Still, such an interpretation is only implicit, although highly probable at this point. The meaning “medium/necromancer” is possible only in the later (post)Deuteronomistic redaction (vv. 3b, 9).

In Deuteronomistic texts, the oldest statements are set in the context of practices forbidden in the Yahwist religion, which Manasseh introduced (2 Kgs 21:6), and Josiah abolished (2 Kgs 23:24). In those two cases, the choice between the instrumental and personal meaning is more difficult. Admittedly, Manasseh “made” אֹב (’*ōb* in the singular), but the used verb (שָׁחַט *šḥ* qal), as some exegetes suggest, can also be understood as “to address.” In the second case (plural), it is rather about practitioners of necromancy. Today, the legal text (Deut 18:10–11) is considered to be an even later reception of the negative assessment of such practices. The form וְדַרְשׁוּ אֵל-הַמְּתִים + יִדְעוּ אֹב (šl’ *ōb* + *jiddē’ōmī* + *drš’el-hammētīm*) clearly suggests that the reference is made to practitioners of various forms of necromancy. The word אֹב (’*ōb*) has a definitely personal meaning in texts from the so-called Holiness Code, and it undoubtedly means people practising necromancy (Lev 19:31: prohibition; Lev 20:6, 27: penalisation).

The diachronic approach to the interpretation of texts in which the word אֹב (’*ōb*) (singular/plural) is used makes it possible to assume some semantic evolution from the objective sense (pit/hole or some unknown instrument) to the personal sense (spirit of the dead → necromancer).

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