

Teraphim

I. Introduction. *Ancestor statuette, oracular instrument*, →DDD. The word *terāpim* is attested 15 times in the Hebrew Bible (always with a plural ending, though usually with a single referent; of uncertain etymology; DDD) denoting an object that was associated both with familial cult activities and the giving of oracles (1Sam 15:23; 2 Kin 23:24; Eze 21:26; Zec 10:2). Rachel steals Laban's t. and hides it inside a camel's saddle (Gen 31:19, 34f). In Jdg 17:5; 18:14, 17f, 20 there is reference to t. as part of the cult inventory of a private shrine. Michal rescues David from his persecutors by putting a t. into David's bed and dressing it as a dummy (1 Sam 19:13, 16). Thus the word t. probably denotes a transportable object that varies in size and form, and that may (but need not) vaguely resemble a human being. It is possible to consider t. as anthropomorphic statuettes, objects representing human heads or faces, possibly in schematic or abstract form. The t. may have been made of wood (Hos 4:12 may refer to t.). We usually come across the t. in people's homes. Possessing the t. was important to the *pater familias*. Some evidence suggests that the t. is a figurative representation of a particular family's household god, a deceased and deified ancestor (see also the ritual admission of a freed slave into a family before the *'ēlohim* of the household, referred to in Exo 21:6).

The appearance of the t. mentioned in the Hebrew Bible is difficult to ascertain (KOEHLER/BAUMGARTNER 1999; LORETZ 1992; BOTTERWECK/FABRY 2006; GÖRG/LANG 1991–2001; DDD 844–850). At present it is impossible to identify them with certainty with any objects found in artistic representations known from Palestine/Israel and neighbouring countries, or with any artifacts unearthed by archaeologists. The latter may be due to the fact that the t. were made of perishable materials (e.g., wooden statuettes that have not survived). We may have to look for objects, possibly "masks," in the context of the cult of the dead or ancestor worship, which was practised in a family context rather than at the important centers of cult worship or at burial sites. For an overview of a suggested identification of t. with "masks," see JAROŠ 1982: 71 and GALLING 1977: 169.

II. Suggested identifications. From as early as the Neolithic period there is archaeological evidence pointing to the existence of a cult of the dead or ancestor worship. Throughout the ancient Near East

people treated the skulls of particularly revered deceased with special care and kept them in their houses (BIENERT 1991; 2000; BIENERT/MÜLLER-NEUHOF 2000). They also hung up stone and clay masks on strings in their homes (fastening them on the walls or posts?), possibly to imitate and replace the skulls (YIZRAELI-NOY 1999: 126–133, nos. 121–127). Their size and shape, however, do not fit with the idea that they functioned as masks in the proper sense of the term. It seems more likely that they were icons representing the deceased or ancestors. The holes for attaching artificial beards to the "masks" possibly underline the patrilinearity of ancestor worship. In the Chalcolithic period the skulls and masks are replaced by the large basalt pillar figurines, among others, that were found primarily in dwelling places (EPSTEIN 1998: 230–233, pls. 30–33).

A number of Syro-Cappadocian and Paleo-Syrian cylinder seals from 1900–1700 probably show us how "masks" were used. They depict standards carrying two human face masks or heads on top of each other. These standards are being saluted by people behaving as if they were worshipping cultic images (SEYRIG 1960; SCHROER 1987: 154 n. 383; BERNETT/KEEL 1998: 22–27, 109–111, figs. 17–23). The more immediate scenic context in which these standards appear is again predominantly cultic in nature, so that a connection with the more domestically oriented forms of veneration associated with the t. in Israel again cannot be regarded as anything more than hypothetical.

A number of complete and fragmentary clay "masks" have been unearthed at various Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age sites in Palestine/Israel (Hazor, Gezer, Tell Qasile, Tell Sera; for listings of finds see GALLING 1977: 195f and SCHROER 1987: 146f) and Cyprus (NYS 1995). From the 9th/8th cent. down to the Persian and Hellenistic periods, "masks" were widely distributed throughout the Phoenico-Punic world (CULICAN 1975–76; STERN 1976; CIASCA 1988 [→Face]; LIPÍŃSKI 1992: 277). These Levant clay "masks" were too small to wear, and in some cases were perforated (like their Neolithic counterparts) for some kind of attachment. Their function remains largely unexplained. The information provided by the archaeological contexts of these finds is not very clear (GALLING 1977: 195f; BETZ 1998: 887f). For example, there are diverse contexts associated with such "masks": a temple (Tell Qasile), a tomb

(Achzib), a cistern (Hazor), and a workshop (Hazor).

III. Conclusion. From the Neolithic period the cult of the dead or ancestor worship by means of plastered skulls, “masks,” and other forms representing the deceased is attested in the earliest Palestinian art. However, whether the Late Bronze and Iron Age “masks” from Palestine/Israel are a continuation of these traditions and are to be interpreted along similar lines remains uncertain. In light of the available evidence, a connection with the t. mentioned in the Hebrew Bible is conceivable. Full-figured t. statuettes, though so far archaeologically unattested, may have existed, too, as from the beginning full-figured and portray representations occurred side by side (→bull/bull’s head; →nude goddess/ fetish of goddess; →Bes/head of Bes).

VI. Selected bibliography
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