

Research article

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Cherchez la femme: Ancient Israelite Women's Religion in Light of their Personal Names

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Abstract: In order to add new insights to recent research on women's religion in ancient Israel, we investigated women's names that appear in two categories of evidence: names on excavated Iron Age II epigraphic artifacts and names mentioned in First Temple narratives in the Bible. The two groups of names were quantitatively analyzed according to their theophoric content, chronology, and political affiliation. We found only five women's names on the epigraphic artifacts, all on seals or seal impressions from Jerusalem, reflecting the limited participation of women in the official public sphere. The 40 names of women mentioned in the Bible reveal that while most women's names do not have a specific form to distinguish them from men's names, as a group they are different: non-theophoric or non-hypocoristic-theophoric names dominate women's names, while theophoric, mainly Yahwistic names dominate men's names. In addition, the prevalence of non-theophoric or non-hypocoristic-theophoric women's names increases throughout the First Temple period, while among men, the frequency of such names decreases, and the frequency of theophoric, Yahwistic names increases. These results may be interpreted as indicating that while men mostly participated in the cult of the Israelite national god, YHWH, women performed ritual activities related mainly to gods other than YHWH.

Keywords: women, names, archeology, Bible, ancient Israel, religion

1 Introduction

In recent decades, women in ancient Israel have attracted increasing scholarly attention, along with an interest in family and household religion (Albertz and Schmitt 2012: 8–11, 474).¹ To reconstruct women's religious beliefs and activities, scholars have used archeological finds and biblical texts, sometimes aided by other areas of research, including anthropological studies (Albertz 2012: 474; Meyers 2018; Nakhai 2019). Excavated artifacts and architectural remains reveal the role women played in the household and in family religion. For example, ritual objects discovered in household contexts are frequently organized and placed close to fireplaces or other installations related to food processing and consumption, indicating that the rituals associated with these objects were probably carried out by women (Albertz and Schmitt 2012: 474, 478–479).

In the Bible, especially in the prophetic books, women are often condemned as responsible for actions that the prophets consider apostate in the Israelite religion (e.g., Hosea 1–3, 4:13; Amos 4:1–3; Isa 3:16–24, 4:1, 32:9–14) (Ackerman 2022 [2006]: 210–217, 223). They worshiped gods other than Yahweh: Tammuz (Ezek 8:14), the Queen of Heaven (Jer 7:17–20; 44:17–19), and Asherah (e.g., 1 Kgs 15:13, 2 Kgs 23:7).² Ackerman suggests that women's shift to the worship of other deities may have been a response to the rising Babylonian threat to Judah or to Josiah's religious reform. In the latter

¹ For a detailed explanation of the causes of traditional scholarship's limited focus on women's lives in Iron Age Israel, see Nakhai 2018.

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scenario, she proposes that women sought alternative forums for religious expression after being excluded from the roles they had previously held in the cult of Yahweh, such as producing cultic textiles and making cultic music (Ackerman 2022 [2006]: 209, 223). The biblical text also testifies to the different roles played by men and women in Israelite religion, even though both were commanded to worship Yahweh; while women performed specific roles such as those associated with textiles and music, officiation at the Temple was exclusively reserved for men (Nakhai 2019: 3–4).

Both the archeological and biblical sources suffer from well-known, inherent limitations as well as from difficulties specific to the study of women. The Bible was written and revised centuries after the events it depicts, was influenced by religious and political agendas, represents higher more than lower social strata, and offers limited insight into the daily lives of most women. The archeological data is partial and requires interpretation of the reality it reflects, and the majority of finds are gender-silent (Meyers 2018: 396–397; Nakhai 2019: 2–3).

As regards personal names, since they are mostly theophoric, they have also been used to investigate ancient Israelite religion. While personal names do not usually specify the cult or myth associated with a particular god, they do contain the names of gods and thus reflect religious beliefs (Tigay 1986; Norin 1986, 2013; Fowler 1988; Hess 2007; Albertz and Schmitt 2012; Golub 2017a). Names in the Bible have an advantage over biblical stories since they are generally less subject to the author's/ editor's ideological and theological views, compared with narratives (Zevit 2001: 80).

1.1 The Goals of the Study

The goal of the present study is to characterize the names of Ancient Israelite women as a group in order to shed more light on the religious beliefs of women in the Iron Age II. Previous onomastic studies have mainly focused on analyzing individual women's names or on prosopography (see, e.g., Zadok 1988; WSS; Sass 2018). The methodological questions of this study are as follows: What is the distribution of the main name types (theophoric, hypocoristic-theophoric, and other – see below) in women's names? What is the distribution of the various theophoric elements? Are these distributions similar to those of Iron Age II men's names, as women's names do not have a specific form to distinguish them from men's names? The answers to these questions will reveal whether, similar to Iron Age II names mostly borne by men, the largest group of women's names are theophoric-Yahwistic names, and their prevalence increased throughout this period.

2 Methodology

2.1 Collecting the Names from Epigraphic Artifacts

Women's names were collected from epigraphic artifacts found in archeological excavations at Israelite and Judean sites during the Iron II period, *i.e.*, from the 10th century BCE to the destruction of the First Temple in 586. Names found on artifacts from the antiquities market were excluded since their geographical origin is unknown and their authenticity is uncertain. We searched several corpora,³ as well as relevant periodicals, excavation reports, and books on Iron Age epigraphy published between 2000 and the end of 2022.

2 Ackerman asserts that, unlike the worship of Tammuz and the Queen of Heaven, the cult of Asherah seems to have been part of the cult of Yahweh (2022 [2006]: 222–223). For a discussion on the role of the Queen Mother (e.g., מַלְכָּה; 1 Kgs 15:13) as a cult functionary for Asherah, see Ackerman 2022 [1993]: 151–169.

3 These corpora are: (1) Ahituv 2008 and its Hebrew version in Ahituv 2012; (2) Renz 1995; Renz and Röllig 2003; (3) WSS; (4) Dobbs-Allsopp 2005; and (5) Davies 1991–2004.

Determining the gender of a personal name with certainty is not a straightforward task.⁴ Generally, a name is identified as belonging to a woman by the designations בַּת ('daughter') or אִשָּׁה ('wife'). Without this indication, especially in seals and other short epigraphic inscriptions, we are severely limited by the elusiveness of gender in West Semitic names due to the lack of literary context that would have provided information on the individuals they mention. Grammatical gender and semantics may not avail us either (Biermann 2024: 34). Noth and Stamm have already noted that ancient Israelite women's names have no specific form that distinguishes them from men's names (Noth 1928: 61–62; Stamm 1967: 339). Like other West Semitic names, they can be classified into three main groups according to their structure and content: theophoric names, hypocoristic (abbreviated) theophoric names, and other names (see 2.3 *Analyzing the Names According to Different Categories*). However, they lack elements that are clearly feminine, such as those found in women's names from Ugarit: *bitta/bt* ('daughter'; e.g., *bitta-šidqi*) or *aḥat/aḥt* ('sister'; e.g., *aḥt-mlk*) (Gröndahl 1967: 55). Names ending with ה were also borne by men; this ending can be interpreted as a hypocoristic suffix rather than a feminine ending (Golub 2020: 22, 28–29). Examples of such names are: פִּלְטָה (WSS: 144, No. 326) an abbreviation of פִּלְטִיָּאל (2 Sam 3:15) or פִּלְטִיָּה (1 Chr 3:21); עֲדָנָה (Ahituv *et al.* 2012: 76–77) equivalent to the hypocoristic name עֲדָנָא (Ezra 10:30); and חֲשִׁבָּה (1 Chr 3:20) and מִתְּתָה (Ezra 10:33) abbreviated from חֲשִׁבָּיהוּ and מִתְּתִיהוּ, respectively (1 Chr 25:3) (Noth 1928: 189, 170). Similarly, names ending with ת were also borne by men, such as the name שְׁלֹמִית/שְׁלֹמִית (Ezra 8:10, 1 Chr 23:18, 26:28, 2 Chr 11:20).⁵ An exception is the name נֶאֱהָבַת ('beloved'), which appears without the designation בַּת or אִשָּׁה, but is regarded by scholars as a woman's name (Mazar and Livyatan Ben-Arie 2015: B59, 336–337). The feminine identification of this particular name is supported by several pieces of evidence: (1) the legend בַּת דְּמִלְיָהוּ נֶאֱהָבַת that appears on another, though unprovenanced seal (WSS: 64, No. 39);⁶ (2) the iconography of a horned animal accompanying נֶאֱהָבַת, common in female imagery (Ornan 2016: 296); and (3) several occurrences of נֶהָבַת, a variant of נֶאֱהָבַת, found as a woman's name in Elephantine in the 5th century BCE (TAD 226–C3.15:94,99,110), with its parallel male names נֶהָבַת/נֶהָבַת (TAD D3.2a:4, D9.4:3, C3.15:11).

A few excavated Iron Age II artifacts contain references to women as daughters or wives without specifying their names; hence, they were not included in the list of women's names: בַּת יַעֲמָא on an inscribed jar from Jerusalem (Naveh 2000: 4–5), three women mentioned as 'X אִשָּׁה' on an ostrakon from the City of David (Ahituv 2008: 28–29), and a reference to אִמְתָּה ('his handmaiden/spouse') appearing on an inscription from a burial cave in Jerusalem (Ahituv 2008: 44–47).

2.2 Collecting the Names from First Temple Biblical Narratives

In the Bible, women's names are generally identified through the literary context. These names were collected from First Temple narratives found in the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.⁷ These narratives relate to the 'United Monarchy,' the 'Divided Monarchy,' and the Kingdom of Judah after

4 Biermann (2024: 33–34) highlights the tendency in epigraphic scholarship to treat most names on archeological objects without clear gender markers as standard male, to the point of almost automatically inserting the male filiation בֶּן. This "male until proven otherwise" premise has further tipped the balance in scholarship in favor of elite males.

5 Biermann (2024: 35) considers the name פִּלְטָה to be either a feminine or a hypocoristic name, but classifies it as feminine on the basis of comparanda, i.e., the appearance of this name as feminine in sources outside of Iron Age II epigraphy from Jerusalem and Judah. He also identifies the name שְׁלֹמִית as feminine, similar to נֶאֱהָבַת and יְהוּדִית, all of which have the feminine suffix ת (Biermann 2024: 34). However, as noted above, שְׁלֹמִית is also borne by men in the Bible. We excluded these two names from our dataset, as we strive to obtain results based solely on unequivocally female names.

6 This seal was found in 1837, before forgers could rely on the Hebrew script of the Siloam Inscription for their fabrications. See Bordreuil 2014, esp. 129–131.

7 The Masoretic Text according to *The Koren Jerusalem Bible*.

the destruction of Israel and until 586. Names of women depicted as foreigners in the narratives have been excluded. These are אִיזְבֵּל the Phoenician, daughter of the king of Sidon (1 Kgs 16:31), מַעֲכָה daughter of the king of Geshur (2 Sam 3:3; 1 Chr 3:2), נַעֲמָה the Ammonite (1 Kgs 14:21; 2 Chr 12:13), שְׁמֶרַת the Ammonite (2 Kgs 12:22; 2 Chr 24:26), שְׁמֶרַת the Moabite (2 Kgs 12:22; 2 Chr 24:26), and תַּחְפְּנִיס/תַּחְפְּנִיס the Egyptian (1 Kgs 11:19,20).

Several women have either two different names, such as בַּת-שֹׁבַע בַּת אֶלְיָעָז (2 Sam 11:3) and בַּת-שׁוּעַ (1 Chr 3:5); two variants of their name, such as אֲבִיָּה and אֲבִיָּה (2 Kgs 18:2; 2 Chr 29:1); or more than one spelling of their name, such as אֲבִיגַיִל, אֲבִיגַיִל, אֲבִיגַיִל, אֲבִיגַיִל (1 Sam 25:3,14,18,32) and יְרוּשָׁה (2 Kgs 15:33). In such cases, the different names/variants are listed together in the table as a single entry, separated by commas. In the quantitative analyses, however, the relative weight of each name is considered. For example, each of the names of Hezekiah's mother, אֲבִי (the hypocoristic form) and אֲבִיָּה (the theophoric form) is given a weight of half a sample, and the theophoric element יה in אֲבִיָּה is also counted as half a sample.

It is important to note that names may originate later than indicated in the Bible. The Book of Chronicles was composed in the post-exilic period, toward the end of the Persian Empire in the 4th century BCE (Rofé 2009: 70–75). Samuel-Kings, which is used by the Chronicler as its main source, was originally written during the rule of Josiah or the exilic period, and certain sections are from the post-exilic era (Rofé 2009: 66, 69, 109–111, 131–134). In this study, however, we aim to characterize women's names associated with the biblical narratives of the First Temple period, rather than to determine which of the names originated in the period in which they appear.

2.3 Analyzing the Names According to Different Categories

In terms of both content and structure, personal names can be categorized into three main groups: The first group, theophoric names, consists of sentence names including a divine name, e.g., YHWH (יהוה/יהו) or a divine appellative, e.g., the familial nouns אב ('father'), אח ('brother'), חם ('husband's father'), which convey the perception of the deity as a familial entity. Theophoric names can be further classified according to the type of the theophoric element they contain. Examples are יהוהחן ('YHWH has shown grace,' Reich and Sass 2006: 316) and יהוהעֵדֶן ('YHWH is my bliss,' Albertz and Schmitt 2012: 564), אֲבִיגַיִל ('my [divine] father is [my] rejoicing,' Albertz and Schmitt 2012: 564), and חמִיאהל ('my [divine] father-in-law is [my] tent'). The theophoric element אל (El) in names can be understood as a divine name, referring to the head of the Canaanite pantheon, or as a divine appellative – a general term for "God."

The second group includes hypocoristic theophoric names, where the theophoric element is omitted. For example, חֲנָה ('[divine name] was gracious,' Albertz and Schmitt 2012: 538) is an abbreviated form of חַנְּנִיָּה, חַנְּנָאֵל, or יהוהחן. The third category comprises non-theophoric names, such as נאהבת ('the beloved one,' Albertz and Schmitt 2012: 604), מִשְׁלֶמֶת ('[female] substitute,' Albertz and Schmitt 2012: 601), צִבְיָה ('[female] gazelle') and תְּמָר ('palm tree').

3 Results

3.1 Women's Names from Iron Age II Artifacts

In Table 1, the names of women collected from excavated Iron Age II epigraphic artifacts are listed in alphabetical order. Each row in the table represents a woman's name found on an artifact. The columns represent the following categories: *Name* – the woman's full name, including the name of her father or husband (if present); *Artifact Type* – bulla, seal, impression on jar, ostrakon, or inscription; *Artifact Site* – where the artifact was found; *Artifact Date* – specifies the artifact's date by century; *Territorial Affiliation* – the site's territorial affiliation, Judah or Israel; *Bibliography* – a corpus or a recent publication. When the data on the name is combined from two sources, two references are given.

Only five women's names were found in the excavated artifacts of the Iron Age II. Nevertheless, each of the three main groups of names is represented: two names are theophoric: יהוהחן with the divine name YHWH and חמיאלה with the divine appellative חם. One name is a hypocoristic theophoric name: חֲנָה. This is the only name that also appears in the Bible, but its reading is uncertain (WSS: 244, No. 664; 499). The other two names are non-theophoric: נאהבת and עליהנה ('the exalted one has done good' or 'May the exalted one do good,' Ben-Ami and Misgav 2016: *106–*108; Cf. Sass 2018: 217). The names also appear throughout most of the Iron Age II period: from the 8th century to the early 6th century. However, all five names are from Jerusalem and appear only on seals, stamped jars or bullae (see also Garfinkel and Mendel-Geberovich 2020: 13). No woman's name was found on the more than 150 Iron Age II ostraca with at least one legible name (Golub 2023; see footnote 11).

Table 1: Women's names from excavated Iron Age II epigraphic artifacts

Name	Artifact Type	Artifact Site	Artifact Date	Territorial Affiliation	Bibliography
חמיאלה בת מנחם	Seal	Jerusalem	Last quarter of the 8th century	Judah	WSS: 63, No. 35; Renz and Röhlig 2003: 216
חֲנָה בת עזריה	Impression on jar	Jerusalem	8th or late 7th to early 6th century	Judah	WSS: 244, No. 664
יהוהחן בת פקעת	Seal	Jerusalem	Late 7th to early 6th century	Judah	Reich and Sass 2006: 314–316
נאהבת	Bulla	Jerusalem	6th century	Judah	Mazar and Livyatan Ben-Arie 2015: 336–337 and <i>passim</i> , No. B59
עליהנה בת גאל ⁸	Seal	Jerusalem	7th or early 6th century	Judah	Ben-Ami and Misgav 2016: *106–*108

3.2 Women's Names from First Temple Biblical Narratives

The collected names are listed in alphabetical order in the table of *Women's Names from First Temple Narratives in Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles* (Appendix A). Each row represents a woman mentioned in Samuel-Kings and/or Chronicles. The columns in the table represent the following categories: *Name in Sam-Kgs* – a name or a list of names belonging to a woman mentioned in Samuel-Kings. In addition, all the different forms of the name(s) appearing in Samuel-Kings are listed – *plene* and *defective*, *qere* (the name is marked with 'ק') and *ketiv* (the name is marked with 'כ'). The name is vocalized as it appears in Samuel-Kings.⁹ This category is left empty when the woman is mentioned only in Chronicles; *Biblical Source in Sam-Kgs* – a reference in Samuel-Kings for each name and each form of a name listed in the *Name in Sam-Kgs* category; *Name in Chr* – as *Name in Sam-Kgs* but for a name mentioned in Chronicles. This category is left empty when the woman is mentioned only in Samuel-Kings; *Biblical Source in Chr* – as *Biblical Source in Sam-Kgs* but for Chronicles; *Context* – indicates the political affiliation of the woman: the 'United Monarchy' (the late 11th to 10th century), or Israel and Judah during the 'Divided Monarchy' period (the 9th to early 6th century).

The table contains the names of 40 women. Five of them were also used by men in the Bible: אביה (1 Sam 8:2; 1 Kgs 14:1; Neh 10:8, 12:4; 1 Chr 7:8 and more); מיכיהו (Judg 17:1; 2 Chr 17:7); מעכה borne by two women (Gen 22:24; 1 Chr 11:43; 1 Chr 27:16); and עתליה (Ezra 8:7; 1 Chr 8:26).

⁸ Sass suggests an alternative reading – עליה נהבת גאל – but admits that this reading is less plausible (Sass 2018: 217–218).

⁹ However, when changes occur in the name's vocalization, such as dropping the light dagesh in the בגדכפת letters, or changing a vowel caused by disjunctive accents, the initial vocalization is used.

Only three of the 40 names appear exclusively in Chronicles: מְחֻלָּה (2 Chr 11:18), אֲבִיָּהֶל (2 Chr 11:18), and מִיָּהוּ (2 Chr 13:2). Thirty-seven names (92.5%) appear in Samuel-Kings; of these, 16 are unique to Samuel-Kings and 21 are also found in Chronicles. The women's names are almost equally divided between the 'United Monarchy' period – 19 names – and the 'Divided Monarchy' period (Israel and Judah) – 21 names. Within the 'Divided Monarchy' only two women appear in the context of Israel – צְרוּעָה and עַתְלִיָּהוּ/עַתְלִיָּה. The other 19 women are mentioned in a Judean context.

Table 2 shows the distribution of women's names according to the three main groups: theophoric names, hypocoristic theophoric names, and other names – *i.e.*, non-theophoric or non-hypocoristic-theophoric names – in percentages and in absolute numbers (in parentheses). This shows that other names are the largest group (65%), while theophoric names (26%) make up less than half of the other names. Other names are the largest group throughout the First Temple period, and their frequency increases over time; they comprise 10 out of 19 (53%) in the 'United Monarchy' and 16 out of 21 (76%) in the 'Divided Monarchy'. Hypocoristic theophoric names are the smallest group (9%). Of the 10.5 theophoric names, 4.5 contain YHWH and six contain divine appellatives: 4 אֵל and 2 אֵה. The element El and divine names other than YHWH are absent from the women's names found in First Temple narratives.

Table 2: Women's Names from First Temple Biblical narratives, distributed according to the three main groups

Theophoric Names	Hypocoristic Theophoric Names	Other Names	Total
26% (10.5) ¹⁰	9% (3.5)	65% (26)	100% (40)

4 Discussion

4.1 Women's Names from Iron Age II Artifacts

The five women who owned and used seals bearing their names are all Judeans from Jerusalem, and apparently belonged to the upper classes (see also Garfinkel and Mendel-Geberovich 2020: 11, 13). However, this small sample of five names does not allow us to characterize names of Iron Age II women or upper-class women. That is, we cannot determine the distribution of names according to the three main types of names, nor the distribution of the different theophoric elements. This is because any new additional woman's name will significantly change the percentage of each of the three main groups (theophoric names, hypocoristic theophoric names, and other names). If a newly found name contains a theophoric element, the percentage of each of the theophoric elements in the names will also change significantly. Thus, it is impossible to establish whether *other names* are the largest group among Iron Age II women's names on epigraphic artifacts, as we found for biblical women's names (see 3.2 *Women's Names from First Temple Biblical Narratives*), or whether YHWH is the most common element in women's theophoric names, as in the hundreds of theophoric names, mostly borne by men, on Iron Age II artifacts (Golub 2017b: Table 1, 40, Table 2, 41).¹¹

The small number of women's names in the Iron Age II Hebrew onomasticon is not unusual. Other West-Semitic onomastica also contain few women's names, such as the Amorite names from Mari (Huffmon 1965: 19–60), the Ugaritic names from Ras Shamra (Gröndahl 1967: 55, 86–202), and the Palmyrene names from Palmyra (Hillers and Cussini 1996: 429–441). In the corpus of Ammonite Inscriptions there is only one woman's name out of 66 names on excavated artifacts (Aufrecht 2019:

¹⁰ The figure uses decimal points because several women have two names, and the relative weight of each name is represented as a fraction.

¹¹ Personal names from Israel, Judah and other Iron II Southern Levant polities, which were published up to the end of 2022, are listed on an open-access website – www.onomasticon.net. Many thanks to Itay Zandbank, CEO of the Research Software Company, for developing and maintaining this website.

#117, 312–313; Golub in press). The onomastica of Moab and Edom, the other two neighboring Transjordanian polities, are too small to be used to evaluate the presence of women's names on excavated artifacts (Albertz and Schmitt 2012: Table 5.3, 506; WSS: 387–394; Bartlett 1989: 204–227). Still, the total number of women's names in the Hebrew onomasticon is remarkably low; no woman's name was found among the 121 names¹² on artifacts excavated in Israel, and only five were found among nearly 600 names on artifacts excavated in Judah, which is less than 1%.¹³ By contrast, 10.6% of Jewish names from epigraphic sources in Israel in Late Antiquity (330 BCE–200 CE) belong to women (Ilan 2002: Table 9, 57).¹⁴ The extremely low percentage of Iron Age II women's names may be explained by the nature of the epigraphic artifacts; many of them are related to administration, such as seals and seal impressions, inscribed jars, and transaction documents, as well as military correspondence, in which the role of women was limited. The five women's names on three seals, a bulla, and a stamped jar from Judah indicate that the privilege of signing documents and parcels belonged to very few elite Iron Age II women. This reflects the social structure of Judean society, which was characterized by a limited, affluent upper class and a lower class that comprised most of the population (Faust 2012: 115–116). The absence of women's names on artifacts from Israel is probably due to the smaller number of artifacts found there than in Judah; many of the excavated epigraphic artifacts are dated to the end of the Iron Age II, i.e., the 7th to early 6th centuries, when Israel no longer existed, and literacy was more common among the population in Judah (Hess 2009: 1–9).

In addition to the appearance of five women's names in epigraphic artifacts, there are five references to women that do not specify their names (see 2.1 *Collecting the Names from Epigraphic Artifacts*). This phenomenon is not unique to women and is also attested in men. A few men are mentioned only by their father's name, such as בן חמדה (Renz 1995: 163) and בן עבדיהו (Ahituv 2008: 110–111). However, while these are a few references among hundreds of men's names, such references to women are similar in number to the mentions of women's names. In conclusion, the meager number of women's names and the references to women that do not provide their names are signs of the limited participation of women in the official public sphere.

4.2 Women's Names from First Temple Biblical Narratives

The 40 women mentioned in the First Temple biblical narratives were from even higher social strata than the women appearing on epigraphic artifacts. Almost all of them were members of the royal family. They were queens, mothers or wives of kings, or princesses. This is not surprising, given the androcentric nature of the Bible. Women's names make up between 5.5 and eight percent of the total number of names in the Hebrew Bible, and are mainly the names of elite women (Bohmbach 2000: 33–34). The names of five of these 40 women (12.5%) were also borne by men in the Bible, since most First Temple women's names do not have a specific form and can be used by both genders.

Although names of women depicted in the narratives as foreigners were excluded, the study shows that more than half of the women had other names (65%). In addition, the prevalence of other names increases from the 'United Monarchy' (53%) to the 'Divided Monarchy' (76%). In contrast, theophoric names, mainly Yahwistic, are the largest group of names in the First Temple biblical narratives (Norin 2013: 171–173; Golub 2019: Table 1, 61). These narratives mention mostly men. Had we excluded the women's names from the 2019 study and compared only men's names to women's names, the difference between the two groups in the percentage of theophoric names would have

¹² Golub 2020: Table 1, 27.

¹³ 589 names from artifacts excavated in Judah were published up to the end of 2018 (Golub 2020: Table 1, 27). Since then, more names have been discovered at Judean sites, especially in Jerusalem. For an updated list of glyptic finds, see Mendel-Geberovich 2023.

¹⁴ Table 9 lists 405+535+130+85=1155 men's names and 99+19+4+15=137 women's names from epigraphic sources. Thus, $137/(137+1155)*100=10.6\%$.

been larger. Moreover, biblical names in the context of Judah show the opposite onomastic evolution as that of the 40 women's names: a decrease in the number of other names and an increase in the number of theophoric names, caused by an increase in Yahwistic names (Golub 2019: 60–61). We compared the 40 women's names exclusively with Judean names, as only two women are mentioned in an Israelite context, making a broader comparison unfeasible. Noth and Stamm also noted the large number of profane women's names compared to the few theophoric names (Noth 1928: 61; Stamm 1967: 338), although the women's names in their study are not limited to the First Temple period.

Differences between Jewish women's and men's names are also found in Late Antiquity (330 BCE–200 CE). These names reveal a considerably lower percentage of biblical names borne by Jewish women than by Jewish men, and a higher percentage of Greek, Latin, and Semitic-Hebrew names borne by Jewish women than by Jewish men (Ilan 2002: Table 3, 55).

The number of theophoric names of women in the First Temple biblical narratives (10.5 names¹⁵) is too small a sample to draw conclusions about the distribution of theophoric elements. Thus, we cannot determine with certainty whether divine appellatives, rather than YHWH, are the most common theophoric elements in women's names, even though six out of the 10.5 theophoric names contain divine appellatives and only four contain YHWH. Norin found that leading figures in the biblical texts had names with YHWH, while others had other types of names (Norin 2013: 278). Accordingly, since almost all the women were members of the royal family, one would expect them to have more Yahwistic names. However, most of the leading figures, like other figures in the Bible, were men, not women.

Since 37 of the 40 women's names are mentioned in Samuel-Kings, which was originally written at the end of the First Temple period or in the exilic period, the question arises whether this group of names reflects women's onomastic traditions of the First Temple period. A comparison of theophoric names on excavated artifacts dated to the Iron Age II period (9th century until 586) with theophoric names mentioned in 'Divided Monarchy' biblical narratives revealed that the Bible reflects Judean but not Israelite onomastic traditions (Golub 2017b). Both groups of names in this comparative study – from epigraphic artifacts and from the Bible – belong mostly to people from the higher social strata. Thus, the 21 women's names appearing in the 'Divided Monarchy' narratives (see Appendix A), probably also reflect women's onomastic tradition in Judah, including the high prevalence of other names.¹⁶ Thus, the dominance of other names in women's names vs. the high prevalence of theophoric, Yahwistic names borne by men may be interpreted as an indication of the different roles played by women and men in ancient Israelite religion (see *Introduction*). The increase in the prevalence of other names may reflect women's shift to worshipping other deities after being excluded from the positions they once held within the Yahweh cult (see above and Ackerman 2022 [2006]: 223).

5 Summary and Conclusions

Women's names were collected from excavated Iron Age II epigraphic artifacts and from the biblical narratives of the First Temple period. Both groups of names were borne by upper-class women. Among the epigraphic artifacts, only five names have been conclusively identified as belonging to women, all on seals or seal impressions from Jerusalem, and five references to women without mention of their personal names were found on a jar, an ostrakon, and an inscription, also from Jerusalem. The meager number of names makes this sample too small to characterize and draw conclusions about Iron Age II women's names. Nevertheless, this number indicates that the privilege of

¹⁵ For an explanation of the fraction, see footnote 10.

¹⁶ The hundreds of theophoric names from biblical and epigraphic sources in Golub's comparative study (2017b) are mostly men's names. However, our assumption is that the biblical author/editor used men's and women's names from the same period.

signing documents and parcels belonged to very few Iron Age II women, reflecting their limited participation in the official public sphere. The 40 women's names mentioned in the Bible reveal that although most women's names do not have a specific form to distinguish them from men's names, as a group they are different. Other names (*i.e.*, non-theophoric or non-hypocoristic-theophoric names) predominate in women's names, while theophoric names, mainly Yahwistic, predominate in men's names. In addition, the prevalence of other names of women increases from the 'United Monarchy' to the 'Divided Monarchy,' while biblical names, including mainly men's names, show the opposite onomastic evolution: a decrease in the number of other names and an increase in the number of theophoric, Yahwistic names. These results may be interpreted as an indication of the different roles played by women and men in ancient Israelite religion: while men participated mainly in the cult of the Israelite national god, YHWH, women performed ritual activities, probably in the domestic sphere, mainly related to gods other than YHWH.

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Appendix

Women’s Names from First Temple Narratives in Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles

Catalog Number	Name in Sam-Kgs	Biblical Source in Sam-Kgs	Name in Chr	Biblical Source in Chr	Context
1	אָבִי	2 Kgs 18:2	אָבִיָּה	2 Chr 29:1	Judah
2	אָבִיגַיִל, אָבִיגַיִל, אָבִיגַיִל, אָבִיגַיִל	1 Sam 25:3,14,18,32	אָבִיגַיִל	1 Chr 3:1	United Monarchy
3	אָבִיגַיִל	2 Sam 17:25	אָבִיגַיִל	1 Chr 2:16	United Monarchy
4			אָבִיגַיִל	2 Chr 11:18	Judah
5	אָבִיטָל	2 Sam 3:4	אָבִיטָל	1 Chr 3:3	United Monarchy
6	אָבִישָׁג	1 Kgs 1:3			United Monarchy
7	אָחִינֹעַם	1 Sam 14:50			United Monarchy
8	אָחִינֹעַם	1 Sam 25:43	אָחִינֹעַם	1 Chr 3:1	United Monarchy
9	בְּשֵׁמֶת	1 Kgs 4:15			United Monarchy
10	בֶּת-שָׁבַע	2 Sam 11:3	בֶּת-שָׁוֶעַ	1 Chr 3:5	United Monarchy
11	זְבוּדָּה כ', זְבוּדָּה ק'	2 Kgs 23:36			Judah
12	חֲגִית	2 Sam 3:4	חֲגִית	1 Chr 3:2	United Monarchy
13	חֲלָדָה	2 Kgs 22:14	חֲלָדָה	2 Chr 34:22	Judah
14	חֲמוּטָל, חֲמִיטָל כ', חֲמוּטָל ק'	2 Kgs 23:31; 24:18			Judah
15	חֲנָה	1 Sam 1:2			United Monarchy
16	חֲפָצִי-בָּהּ	2 Kgs 21:1			Judah
17	טָפַת	1 Kgs 4:11			United Monarchy
18	יְדִידָה	2 Kgs 22:1			Judah
19	יְהוֹעֲדִין כ', יְהוֹעֲדִין ק'	2 Kgs 14:2	יְהוֹעֲדָן	2 Chr 25:1	Judah
20	יְהוֹשָׁבֶעַת	2 Kgs 11:2	יְהוֹשָׁבֶעַת	2 Chr 22:11	Judah
21	יְכִלְיָהוּ	2 Kgs 15:2	יְכִילְיָה כ', יְכִלְיָה ק'	2 Chr 26:3	Judah
22	יְרוּשָׁא	2 Kgs 15:33	יְרוּשָׁה	2 Chr 27:1	Judah
23			מְחֵלֶת	2 Chr 11:18	Judah
24			מִיכָיְהוּ	2 Chr 13:2	Judah
25	מִיכָל	1 Sam 14:49	מִיכָל	1 Chr 15:29	United Monarchy
26	מַעֲכָה	1 Kgs 15:2	מַעֲכָה	2 Chr 11:20	Judah
27	מַעֲכָה	1 Kgs 15:10	מַעֲכָה	2 Chr 15:16	Judah
28	מֶרֶב	1 Sam 14:49			United Monarchy
29	מִשְׁלֵמָת	2 Kgs 21:19			Judah
30	נַחֲשָׁתָא	2 Kgs 24:8			Judah
31	עֲגֵלָה	2 Sam 3:5	עֲגֵלָה	1 Chr 3:3	United Monarchy
32	עֲזוּבָה	1 Kgs 22:42	עֲזוּבָה	2 Chr 20:31	Judah
33	עֲתִלְיָהוּ, עֲתִלְיָה	2 Kgs 8:26; 11:1	עֲתִלְיָהוּ	2 Chr 22:2	Israel
34	פְּנִנָּה	1 Sam 1:2			United Monarchy
35	צִבְיָה	2 Kgs 12:2	צִבְיָה	2 Chr 24:1	Judah

36	צָרוּיָה, צָרוּיָה	1 Sam 26:6 (2 Sam 17:25); 2 Sam 14:1	צָרוּיָה	1 Chr 2:16	United Monarchy
37	צָרוּעָה	1 Kgs 11:26			Israel
38	רָצָפָה	2 Sam 3:7			United Monarchy
39	תָּמָר	2 Sam 13:1	תָּמָר	1 Chr 3:9	United Monarchy
40	תָּמָר	2 Sam 14:27			United Monarchy