

From Temple to Text: Text as Ritual Space and the Composition of Numbers 6:24-26

JEREMY D. SMOAK



FROM TEMPLE TO TEXT: TEXT AS RITUAL SPACE AND THE COMPOSITION OF NUMBERS 6:24–26*

JEREMY D. SMOAK

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

The discovery of the two silver amulets at Ketef Hinnom problematizes the study of the priestly blessing in the book of Numbers.¹

* A version of the present paper was presented at the Alan D. Leve Center for Jewish Studies *The Bible and Its Interpreters Seminar Series* at UCLA in January 2016. I would like to thank Jacqueline Vayntrub, Jim Watts, David Lambert, and the two anonymous reviewers of the manuscript for reading a draft of the paper and offering their very helpful comments. Any remaining errors are solely mine.

¹ The *editio princeps* was published by G. Barkay, “The Priestly Benediction on Silver Plaques from Ketef Hinnom in Jerusalem,” *TA* 19 (1992), 139–92. For the more recent edition, see G. Barkay et al., “The Amulets from Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation,” *BASOR* 334 (2004), 41–71. Other reconstructions and translations have been offered by J.D. Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture: The Early History of Numbers 6:24–26* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); idem, “May YHWH Bless You and Keep You from Evil: The Rhetorical Argument of Ketef Hinnom Amulet 1 and the Form of the Prayers for Deliverance in the Psalms,” *JANER* 12 (2012), 202–36; B.B. Schmidt, “The Social Matrix of Early Judean Magic and Divination: From ‘Top Down’ or ‘Bottom Up?’,” in B.J. Collins and P. Michalowski (eds.), *Beyond Hatti: A Tribute to Gary Beckman* (Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2013), 279–94; idem, *The Materiality of Power: Explorations in the Social History of Early Israelite Magic* (FAT, 105; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 123–43; N. Na’aman, “A New Appraisal of the Silver Amulets from Ketef Hinnom,” *IEJ* 61 (2012), 184–95; S. Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2008), 127–29; idem, “A Rejoinder to Nadav Na’aman’s ‘A New Appraisal of the Silver Amulets from Ketef Hinnom,’” *IEJ* 62 (2012), 223–32; A. Yardeni, “Remarks on the Priestly Blessing on Two Amulets from Jerusalem,” *VT* 41 (1991), 176–85; J. Renz, *Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik*, vol. 1, fasc. 1: *Die althebräischen Inschriften, Text und Kommentar* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995), 447–56; F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions:*

The amulets locate a blessing with close parallels to the priestly blessing of Num 6:24–26 in a mortuary context. In addition, they show that the blessing was worn upon the body for personal use as a protective incantation during the late Iron Age.² As a result, the amulets provide a different context for the blessing than the instructions for the blessing in Num 6:22–27. The text of Numbers associates the blessing with the Israelite priesthood and the ritual functions of the tabernacle. Specifically, Numbers locates the instructions for the blessing between the law of the Nazirite (6:1–21) and the description of the lists of offerings that the tribal leaders offered at the altar during the dedication of the tabernacle (7:1–88).

Previous scholarship has failed to draw attention to the importance of the association that the book of Numbers draws between the priestly blessing and the tabernacle.³ Many studies assume that such an association was normative and chronologically anticipated the use of the blessing in temple liturgy in the post-

From the Biblical Period of the Monarchy, with Concordance (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 217–20; P.K. McCarter, “The Ketef Hinnom Amulets (2.83),” in W.W. Hallo and K.L. Younger (eds.), *Context of Scripture*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 221; A. Berlejung, “Der gesegnete Mensch: Text und Kontext von Num 6, 22–27 und den Silberamuletten von Ketef Hinnom,” in A. Berlejung and R. Heckl (eds.), *Mensch und König: Studien zur Anthropologie des Alten Testaments: Rüdiger Lux zum 60. Geburtstag* (Herders biblische Studien, 53; Freiburg: Herder, 2008), 37–62; idem, “Ein Programm fürs Leben. Theologisches Wort und anthropologischer Ort der Silberamulette von Ketef Hinnom,” *ZAW* 120 (2008), 204–30.

² T.J. Lewis, “Job 19 in the Light of the Ketef Hinnom Inscriptions and Amulets,” in M.J. Lundberg, S. Fine, and W.T. Pitard (eds.), *Puzzling Out the Past: Studies in the Northwest Semitic Languages and Literatures in Honor of Bruce Zuckerman* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 99–113; J.D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 99; J.D. Smoak, “Amuletic Inscriptions and the Background of YHWH as Guardian and Protector in Psalm 12,” *VT* 60 (2010), 421–32; H. Spieckermann, “‘YHWH Bless You and Keep You’: The Relation of History of Israelite Religion and Old Testament Theology Reconsidered,” *SJOT* 23 (2009), 165–82. For further on the mortuary context of the blessing, see O. Keel and C. Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 368. For further on the apotropaic character of the inscriptions, see most recently Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power*, 123–43.

³ Most studies focus upon the way in which the instructions for the blessing envision it as an oral performance (see especially, R.P. Knierim and G.W. Coats, *Numbers* (FOTL; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 27; D.N. Freedman, “The Aaronic Benediction (Numbers 6:24–26),” in J.W. Flanagan and A. Weisbrod Robinson (eds.), *No Famine in the Land: Studies in Honor of John L. McKenzie* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975), 35–48; M.C. Korpel, “The Poetic Structure of the Priestly Blessing,” *JOT* 45 (1989), 3–13.

exilic period and beyond. That is, most studies have emphasized how the instructions in Numbers envision the blessing as an oral recitation given by the priests at the temple.⁴ The discovery of the blessing in a tomb complex at Ketef Hinnom, however, challenges the assumption that the priestly blessing's appearance in Numbers reflects its background in the liturgy of the Jerusalem temple. The evidence of the amulets might be interpreted to suggest that a version of the blessing functioned as an apotropaic incantation in a variety of contexts (tombs, amulets, etc.) during the late Iron Age and only came to be associated with the tabernacle at a later date when the book of Numbers took its final shape. But if this suggestion is correct, it still leaves an important question unanswered: what is the background and significance of the association that the text of Numbers drew between the blessing and the tabernacle cult? If indeed the descriptions of the tabernacle in Numbers reflect aspects of the temple cult, is there external evidence that such blessings were incorporated into the physical spaces of other Iron Age temples?

The following study addresses this question by drawing attention to the importance that written blessings held in temple spaces in the Iron Age Levant. In order to do this, I attempt to deconstruct the concept of "text" as it is applied to the study of Iron Age Levantine inscriptions and to the study of the composition of Numbers. I argue that the evidence of the blessing on the Ketef Hinnom amulets and several other blessings from the sites of Ekron, Byblos, and Kuntillet 'Ajrud redirects the line of inquiry about the priestly blessing in Numbers toward questions about the

⁴ This is in large part due to the enormity of the blessing's significance in the liturgy of later Jewish and Christian communities. On the role of the blessing in such contexts, see H.C. Brichto, "Priestly Blessing," in F. Skolnik (ed.), *EncJud*, 2nd ed. (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gate, 2007), 16:510–11; M.D. Cassuto, "Birkat Kohanim," *Encyclopedia Biblica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1964), 358–59. But the association of the blessing with concerns over protection from evil is also very well attested in a variety of later evidence; see especially J. Naveh and S. Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1993), 25–27; B. Nitzan, *Qumran Prayers and Religious Poetry* (STDJ, 12; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 151–71; R. Hayward, "The Priestly Blessing in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan," *JSP* 19 (1999), 81–101; D.C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 162–65. For further on the use of the blessing in later Jewish traditions, see D.C. Timmer, "Sectarianism and Soteriology: The Priestly Blessing (Numbers 6,24–26) in the Qumranite *Community Rule* (1QS)," *Bib* 89 (2008), 389–96; M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 329–34; idem, "The Priestly Blessing and Its Aggadic Reuse," in R.P. Gordon (ed.), *The Place is Too Small for Us: The Israelite Prophets in Recent Scholarship* (Sources for Biblical and Theological Study, 5; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 223–29.

significance of its written-*ness*, display, and textuality—that is, the importance of its physicality as a written thing in a material space. The inscriptions from the sites of Ekron and Byblos, as I will argue below, bring context to the connection that the text of Numbers established between the priestly blessing (6:24–26), the Nazirite vow (6:1–21), and the dedication of the tabernacle altar (7:1–88).⁵ An examination of the role that inscribed blessings held in such temple spaces casts light on the spatial logic, or what I describe as the “textual mapping” of temple space in Num 5:1–10:10. Viewed against the background of the place that blessing inscriptions held in such temples, the incorporation of the priestly blessing in the text of Numbers in the textual space around the tabernacle may be productively understood as a textual adaptation of the very practice of inscribing and displaying blessings in temple space. More sharply, the placement of the priestly blessing in the text is not happenstance: the incorporation of this text echoes or appropriates the practice of inscribing blessings in temple spaces. The text of Numbers preserved the cultural memory of inscribed blessings while also bringing the full range of semiotic, ritual, and textual functions of such blessing to bear upon a new context, namely, that of a textual space.

THE LOCATION OF THE PRIESTLY BLESSING IN NUMBERS 1:1–10:10

In the book of Numbers, the instructions for the priestly blessing appear within a collection of instructions that conclude the revelation at Sinai before Israel’s journey into the wilderness (1:1–10:10).⁶

⁵ For previous discussion of the lexical and syntactic parallels between the priestly blessing and these inscriptions, see Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture*, 111–32. For further on the background of the priestly blessing formula, see K. Seybold, *Der aaronitische Segen* (Neukirchen: Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1977); Korpel, “The Poetic Structure of the Priestly Blessing,” 3–13; Freedman, “The Aaronic Benediction,” 37; O. Loretz, “Altorientalischer Hintergrund sowie inner- und nachbiblische Entwicklung des aaronitischen Segens (Num. 6, 24–26),” *UF* 10 (1978), 115–19 (117); M. Fishbane, “Form and Reformulation of the Biblical Priestly Blessing,” *JAOS* 103 (1983), 115–21 (116); C. Cohen, “The Biblical Priestly Blessing (Num. 6:24–26) in the Light of Akkadian Parallels,” *TA* 20 (1993), 228–38; J. Milgrom, *Numbers* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1990), 47–48; B.J. Diebner, “Der sog. ‘Aaronitische Segen’ (Num 6:24–26): Biblischer Text und Liturgische Praxis,” in H. Riehm (ed.), *Freude am Gottesdienst. Festschrift für F. Schulz* (Heidelberg: Selbstverlag, 1988), 201–18 (210–18); P.D. Miller, “The Blessing of God: An Interpretation of Numbers 6:22–27,” *Int* 29 (1975), 240–51 (245); S. Chavel, “The Face of God and the Etiquette of Eye-Contact: Visitation, Pilgrimage, and Prophetic Vision in Ancient Israelite and Early Jewish Imagination,” *JSQ* 19 (2012), 1–55 (19).

⁶ For discussion of the location of the priestly blessing in the composi-

Scholars often divide this literary unit into two smaller subsections. The first section, which is composed of 1:1–4:49, describes the organization of the Israelite camp around the tabernacle. The chapters in this subunit are organized into a description of what should constitute the outer camp (1:1–2:34), followed by a description of the personnel who should make up the inner camp (3:1–4:49).⁷ The section has a relatively clear structure, built around a movement from the outer camp to the inner camp. The second subsection, which is composed of 5:1–10:10, describes a final set of laws delivered by Yahweh to Moses from Sinai. The organization of the laws in this section is not as transparent and scholars have offered a variety of explanations of their compositional history and logic.⁸ They relate to concerns over purity in relation to the taber-

tion of Num 1:1–10:10, see H. Seebass, “YHWH’s Name in the Aaronic Blessing (Num 6:22–27),” in G.H. van Kooten (ed.), *The Revelation of the Name of YHWH to Moses. Perspectives from Judaism, the Pagan, Graeco-Roman World, and Early Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 37–54; J.C. Condren, “Is the Account of the Organization of the Camp Devoid of Organization? A Proposal for the Literary Structure of Numbers 1:1–10:10,” *JSOT* 37 (2013), 423–52; M.K. George, “Socio-Spatial Logic and the Structure of the Book of Numbers,” in idem (ed.), *Constructions of Space IV: Further Developments in Examining Ancient Israel’s Social Space* (New York: T&T Clark, 2013), 23–43; W. Lee, “The Conceptual Coherence of Numbers 5,1–10,10,” in T. Römer (ed.), *The Books of Leviticus and Numbers* (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 473–89; D. Kellermann, *Die Priesterschrift von Numeri 1,1 bis 10,10* (BZAW, 120; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1970); R. Achenbach, *Die Vollendung der Tora: Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Numeribuches im Kontext von Hexateuch und Pentateuch* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 499–517; C. Frevel and E. Zenger, “Die Bücher Levitikus und Numeri als Teile der Pentateuchkomposition,” in T. Römer (ed.), *The Books of Leviticus and Numbers* (BETL, 215; Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 35–74; T.L. Brodie, “The Literary Unity of Numbers: Nineteen Atonement-Centered Diptychs as One Key Element,” in *The Books of Leviticus and Numbers*, 455–72; M. Douglas, *In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 21–26; B.A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 4A; New York: Doubleday, 1993); Milgrom, *Numbers*, 362–67; J. de Vaulx, *Les Nombres* (Paris: Gabalda, 1972), 103; V. Hurowitz, “The Priestly Account of Building the Tabernacle,” *JAOs* 105 (1985), 21–30.

⁷ Knierim and Coats, *Numbers*, 27. For discussion of the division of 1:1–10:10, see also D. Olson, *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New: The Framework of the Book of Numbers and the Pentateuch* (BJS, 71; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 32; Douglas, *In the Wilderness*, 39; M. Haran, “The Character of the Priestly Source: Utopian and Exclusive Features,” in Y. Kaplan (ed.), *Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1983), 131–38; A.B. Leveen, “Variations on a Theme: Differing Conceptions of Memory in the Book of Numbers,” *JSOT* 27 (2002), 201–21.

⁸ For a survey of past discussion of these chapters, see Knierim and Coats, *Numbers*, 9–26.

nacle (see 5:1–4, 11–31; 6:1–21; 8:5–55; 9:1–14). Beyond this theme, however, it is difficult to determine a specific coherent theme.

The section consisting of 5:1–10:10 contains the following materials:

- A. Instructions to exclude the unclean (5:1–4)
- B. Laws of restitution (5:5–10)
- C. Case of the suspected adulteress (5:11–31)
- D. Law of the Nazirite vow (6:1–21)**
- E. Instructions for the priestly blessing (6:22–27)**
- F. Dedicatory offerings for the altar (7:1–89)**
- G. Instructions for the lamp stands (8:1–4)
- H. Consecration of the Levites (8:5–22)
- I. Age requirements for the Levites (8:23–26)
- J. Instructions for the Passover (9:1–14)
- K. Description of the tabernacle march (9:15–23)
- L. Instructions for the silver trumpets (10:1–10)

Previous commentators were skeptical about whether any discernable logic may be found in the literary unit. These studies offered a variety of explanations for why the instructions for the priestly blessing were located among this material. Several argued that the priestly blessing was set in the unit as part of a “miscellaneous” collection of laws that did not fit easily elsewhere in the legal materials of Exod 19–Num 10. These arguments followed Martin Noth’s oft-cited statement in his commentary that these chapters of the book are of “varied scope . . . with no recognizably close relationship, as subject-matter is concerned. . . .”⁹ Others have offered similar negative assessments of the organizational logic of

⁹ M. Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1968), 58. For similar sentiments, see Davies, who observes, “It is difficult to discern any logic behind the inclusion at this point in Numbers of the remaining material contained in chs. 5f” (E. Davies, *The New Century Bible Commentary: Numbers* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 43). Gray offered a very similar perspective on the organization of the book, arguing that, “The contents of Numbers are very miscellaneous in character. The connection between subjects successively treated of frequently consists in nothing more than the fact that they are associated with the same or successive scenes or periods; and the whole book may be said, in a measure, to be held together by this geographical or chronological skeleton” (G. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1903], xxii).

these chapters, referring to them as “the junkroom of the priestly code.”¹⁰

By contrast, recent studies have expressed optimism over the possibility of discerning the literary coherence of the unit.¹¹ Several studies have emphasized that the unit of material in which the priestly blessing appears (5:1–6:27) was an originally independent scroll, which represented a collection of laws dealing with the subject of purity and the laity’s approach to the tabernacle. For instance, Milgrom has drawn attention to the repeated use of the terms “priest” (כהן), “impure” (טמא), “be unfaithful” (מעל) and “woman” (אשה) in the unit.¹² Similarly, Baruch Levine has argued that, “A frank evaluation of Num 5–6 leads to the conclusion that various matters bearing on the purity of the Israelite encampment and its Tabernacle were stated (or restated) in anticipation of the actual dedication of the Tabernacle, an event recorded in ch. 7.”¹³ While such arguments have merit, they do not provide a satisfactory explanation for the inclusion of the instructions for the priestly blessing within the unit. Attempting to remedy the difficulties involved in understanding the coherence of these chapters, several studies posit that the blessing was located after the law of the Nazirite “to show God’s blessing as a response to acts of voluntary

¹⁰ K. Seybold, *Der aaronitische Segen: Studien zu Numeri 6:22–27* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1977), 54, cited in Condren, “Is the Account of the Organization of the Camp Devoid of Organization,” 424.

¹¹ See especially Condren, “Is the Account of the Organization of the Camp Devoid of Organization,” 431–52; H. Seebass, “Moses’ Preparation of the March to the Holy Land: A Dialogue with Rolf P. Knierim on Numbers 1:1–10:10,” in J. van Ruiten and J.C. de Vos (eds.), *Land of Israel in Bible, History, and Theology: Studies in Honor of Ed Noort* (VTSup, 124; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 99–110; N. Lunn, “Numbering Israel: A Rhetorico-Structural Analysis of Numbers 1–4,” *JOT* 35 (2010), 167–85.

¹² Milgrom, *Numbers*, xiv. Milgrom adds further, “The laws comprising chapters 5–6 are inserted into these preparations for the march since they have as their common denominator the prevention and elimination of defilement in Israel’s camp. Thus 5:1–4 banishes the bearers of severe impurity; 5:5–8 prescribes reparation for the desecration of God’s name in false oath; 5:11–31 ordains a test for the suspected (defiled) adulteress; 6:1–21 highlights the law of the defiled Nazirite” (ibid.).

¹³ Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, 65. Later, Levine states, “As is true of certain other sections of Numbers, chapter 5 is not a coherent unit but rather a collection of diverse laws and rituals. There are, to be sure, suggestive thematic links pertaining to such subjects as impurity and betrayal, but as a whole Numbers 5 is best seen as a repository of priestly legislation appropriate to the needs of Israelites after their ‘encampment’ (*mahaneh*) had become operational” (Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, 181). For further discussion of the importance of the purity of the camp in relation to the spatial boundaries of the tabernacle, see George, “Socio-Spatial Logic and the Structure of the Book of Numbers,” 32–33.

devotion like a Nazarite vow.”¹⁴ Such studies attribute a theological reason for the editing of this unit, whereas, the perspective here considers the function of such written blessings in contemporaneous ritual spaces.

Several other recent studies contend that the unit 5:1–6:27 coheres around the subject of “priestly expertise” in the use of spoken utterances.¹⁵ Such studies examined how the laws in this unit describe the priests as ritual experts in the use of verbal utterances at the tabernacle. In particular, two recent studies drew attention to the way in which both the law of the suspected adulteress and the instructions for the priestly blessing envision the priests as ritual experts in the use of words/incantations.¹⁶ Yet, a close reading of the ritual of the suspected adulteress in Num 5:11–31 reveals that the spoken elements of the ritual are complemented by the act of writing out the spell and incorporating the dissolved text with the dust from the tabernacle floor.¹⁷ In this passage, the

¹⁴ J. Sturdy, *Numbers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 54. For a similar interpretation, see T. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 43.

¹⁵ See Budd, who notes, “Looking at Num 5–6 as a whole the author has evidently succeeded in marking out a role for the priests in the community, depicting them as the ones who, through their various privileges and responsibilities, safeguard the purity of the people and bring divine blessing and well-being upon them” (P. Budd, *Numbers* [WBC, 5; Word Books, 1984], 77).

¹⁶ Seebass, “YHWH’s Name in the Aaronic Blessing (Num 6:22–27),” 4. Seebass describes the placement of the instructions for the priestly blessing in the unit 5:1–6:27 as a way to display the giving of the blessing as “the highest possible valuation of the priests.” I follow Seebass, arguing that, “the location of the instructions for the priestly blessing within the literary unit of 5:1–6:27 provides substantial help in conveying the performative setting of the blessing in the Israelite cult. By placing the instructions for the blessing alongside the descriptions of the priests officiating rituals at the entrance of the tabernacle and displaying their skill in the use of ritual language, the author of Numbers sought to replicate certain elements in the original performance of the blessing in the realm of the text” (Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture*, 80). For further discussion of the Ketef Hinnom amulets in relationship to the law of the suspected adulteress in Num 5:11–31, see Smoak, “May YHWH Bless You and Keep You from Evil,” 202–36; F. Stavrakopoulou, “Making Bodies: On Body Modification and Religious Materiality in the Hebrew Bible,” *HeBAI* 2 (2013), 532–53.

¹⁷ On the ritual of the suspected adulteress, see D. Miller, “Another Look at the Magical Ritual for a Suspected Adulteress in Numbers 5:11–31,” *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 5 (2010), 1–16; A.K. de Hemmer Gudme, “A Kind of Magic? The Law of Jealousy in Numbers 5:11–31 as Magical Ritual and as Ritual Text,” in A.K. de Hemmer Gudme and H. Jacobus (eds.), *Studies on Magic and Divination in the Biblical World* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2013), 149–67; M. Fishbane, “Accusations of Adultery: A Study

spell is construed as efficacious, combining the written words with physical elements of the ritual space, that is, the dust from the tabernacle.¹⁸

The observations of these studies advance an understanding of the coherence of 5:1–6:27. They do not, however, explain how this unit and the description of the dedication of the altar in 7:1–88 are conceptually related. These studies have not explained why the priestly blessing was associated with the tabernacle laws in the first place and do not offer a satisfactory explanation for the connection that Numbers draws between the blessing and the dedication of the altar. In what follows, I argue that the literary organization of these chapters is more productively approached by examining the material evidence in the architectural space of Iron Age Levantine temples; and specifically, by examining the place that inscribed blessings and dedicatory and votive offerings shared in such spaces. Rather than viewing this section of Numbers as “the junkroom of the priestly source,” I demonstrate how the organization of the text of Numbers itself preserves spatial memory—specifically, a discursive mapping of temple space.

INSCRIBED BLESSINGS IN TEMPLE SPACE IN THE IRON AGE LEVANT

Inscribed blessings discovered in Iron Age Levantine contexts elucidate the role that writing held in the architectural and ritual spaces of temples. Two dedicatory inscriptions from the Iron Age Levant contain lexical and syntactic parallels to the priestly blessing.¹⁹ The

of Law and Scribal Practice in Numbers 5:11–31,” *HUCA* 45 (1974), 25–45; J. Milgrom, “The Case of the Suspected Adulteress, Numbers 5:11–31: Redaction and Meaning,” in R. Friedman (ed.), *The Creation of Sacred Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 69–75.

¹⁸ Smoak, “May YHWH Bless You and Keep You from Evil,” 234–36.

¹⁹ The blessing formulae at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud also contain very close parallels to the priestly blessing, but it is beyond the scope of the present study to give a full description of their contents. In addition, though the blessings at this site do contain close lexical and syntactic parallels to the priestly blessing, they represent a very different context for the blessing than Ekron and Byblos. The blessings at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud are found within epistolary contexts and the function of the site is highly debated. Still, I would argue that the phraseology of the inscriptions at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud draw upon stock apotropaic formulae and serve as further evidence of the apotropaic function of the blessings at the site (see Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power*, 104; J.D. Smoak, “Prayers of Petition in the Psalms and West Semitic Inscribed Amulets: Efficacious Words in Metal and Prayers for Protection in Biblical Literature,” *JSOT* 36 [2011], 75–92 [81–84]). For further discussion of the inscriptions from this site and their relevance for the background of the priestly blessing, see Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power*, 16–35; idem, “Kuntillet Ajrud’s Pithoi Inscriptions and Drawings: Graffiti or Scribal-Artisan Drafts?,” *MAARAV* 20 (2015), 53–81; idem,

inscriptions are particularly relevant here not only because of such linguistic parallels, but because they offer windows into the different contexts in which inscribed blessings functioned in temple spaces. For this reason, they provide the background for understanding the association that the book of Numbers draws between the priestly blessing and the tabernacle. The first inscription comes from the site of Ekron, located thirty-five kilometers west of Jerusalem. In 1996, the excavators of the site discovered a large limestone inscription on the floor of the main temple of the city (Temple Complex 650).²⁰ The inscription had been originally placed into the interior of the western wall of the temple, near what the excavators called the “focal point” of the inner chamber.²¹

The context in which the inscription was discovered led the excavators to date it to the late seventh century, perhaps just before Nebuchadnezzar’s campaign to Philistia in 603.²² The temple design conforms to the types of temples found in Assyria, which

“The Iron Age *Pithoi* Drawings from Horvat Teman or Kuntillet Ajrud: Some New Proposals,” *JANER* 2 (2002), 91–125; W.M. Schniedewind, “Understanding Scribal Education in Ancient Israel: A View from Kuntillet Ajrud,” *MAARAV* 21 (2016), 53–81; Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture*, 116–21; A. Mandell, “‘I Bless You to YHWH and His Asherah’: Writing and Performativity at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud,” *MAARAV* 19 (2014), 131–62; Z. Meshel, *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud: An Iron Age II Religious Site on the Judah-Sinai Border* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2012); Z. Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 396.

²⁰ The *editio princeps* was published by S. Gitin, T. Dothan, and J. Naveh, “A Royal Dedicatory Inscription from Ekron,” *IEJ* 47 (1997), 1–16; see also K.L. Younger, Jr., “The Ekron Inscription of Akhayus (2.42),” in W.W. Hallo (ed.), *Context of Scripture Online* (Leiden: Brill Online, 2014). For further discussion of the content in the inscription, see S. Gitin, “Israelite and Philistine Cult and the Archaeological Record in Iron Age II: The ‘Smoking Gun’ Phenomenon,” in W.G. Dever and S. Gitin (eds.), *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past. Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palestine. Proceedings of the Centennial Symposium, W.F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research and American Schools of Oriental Research Jerusalem May 29–31, 2000* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 279–95; J. Naveh, “Achish-Ikausu in the Light of the Ekron Dedication,” *BASOR* 310 (1998), 35–37; R.G. Lehmann, “Studien zur Formgeschichte der ‘Ekron-Inschrift des ’KYŠ und den phönizischen Dedikationstexten aus Byblos,” *UF* 31 (1999), 255–306; C. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in Ancient Israel: The Epigraphic Evidence* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2010), 49–51; A. Lemaire, “Hebrew and West Semitic Inscriptions and Pre-exilic Israel,” in J. Day (ed.), *In Search of Pre-exilic Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (JSOTSup, 406; London, 2004), 374; R. Byrne, “Philistine Semitics and Dynastic History at Ekron,” *UF* 34 (2002), 1–23.

²¹ Gitin et al., “The Ekron Inscription,” 6.

²² *Ibid.*, 6.

included both a large courtyard as well as a columned-hall sanctuary.²³ The inscription was written on a block of limestone similar to the other blocks that were used in the temple's construction. The inscription was discovered in the northwest corner of the sanctuary, about 20 cm from the western wall of the building. This "find-spot" strongly indicates that the inscription had originally been set into the western wall of the building as a display for those who entered the room.²⁴ The room in which the inscription was discovered also contained the remains of ceramic vessels, several iron and gold objects, and a bronze scepter.²⁵

The inscription is composed of five lines of text, with each word separated by a dot, or "word-divider." The inscription reads:

1. *bt.bn.'kyš.bn.pdy.bn.*
2. *ysd.bn.'d' bn.y'r.sr 'q*
3. *rn.lptgyb.'dth.tbrkb.wt*
4. *šm[r]b.wt'rk.ymb.wtbrk*
5. *[']ršb*

1. The temple (which) he built, 'kyš son of Padi, son of
2. Ysd, son of Ada, son of Ya'ir, ruler of Ekron,
3. for Ptg**y**h his lady. May she bless him, and
4. guar[d] him, and prolong his days, and bless
5. his [l]and.

The inscription begins with the standard dedicatory formula describing the dedication of the temple (*bt*) of Ekron by a certain 'kyš, the son of Padi. The Annals of Sennacherib refer to Padi in the description of the Assyrian king's campaign to the Levant in 701. Lines 1–2 describe the forefathers of 'kyš and identifies 'kyš as the ruler (*šr*) of Ekron.²⁶ Line 3 identifies the deity for whom the temple was built, namely, a certain Ptg**y**h, identified as "his lady." The exact identity of the goddess remains unclear, though several studies have argued for a connection to the Greek goddess Gaia.²⁷

²³ See R. Reich, "Palaces and Residences in the Iron Age," in A. Kempinski and R. Reich (eds.), *The Architecture of Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1992), 214–22; G. Loud, "An Architectural Formula for Assyrian Planning Based on the Results of Excavations at Khorsabad," *RA* 33 (1936), 153–60.

²⁴ Gitin et al., "The Ekron Inscription," 7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁷ See especially C. Schäfer-Lichtenberger, "PTGYH—Göttin und Herrin von Ekron," *BN* 91 (1998), 64–76; *idem*, "The Goddess of Ekron and the Religious-Cultural Background of the Philistines," *IEJ* 50 (2000), 82–91; Younger, "The Ekron Inscription," 164 n. 4; N. Na'aman, "Ekron

The most relevant part of the inscription for this study appears in lines 3–5. These lines contain a request that the goddess of Ekron “bless” and “guard” the ruler of Ekron, prolong his days, and “bless” his land. The blessing formula in these lines exhibits several similarities to the first line of the priestly blessing, as several studies have noted.²⁸ The following shows the similarities:

tbrkḥ.wtšm[r]h

“May she bless him and may she guard him” (lines 3–4)

ybrkḥ ybhwh wyšmrk

“May Yahweh bless you and may he guard you” (Num 6:24)

Beyond the lexical and syntactic parallels highlighted here, the inscription is relevant because of its location in the temple of Ekron. The inscription attests to the act of writing and *displaying* blessings as components of dedicatory practice in temple space in the late Iron Age Levant. The inscription itself formed an important part of the décor of the temple; this artifact marked the convergence of discourse and the materiality of the temple. The inscription conveyed a semiotic and material statement about the importance of the blessing within the larger visual and aesthetic design of the building. The size of the inscription together with its location within the focal point of the temple complex pointed to its physical and visual significance within the building. The inscription weighs one hundred kilograms and measures 60 x 39 x 26 centimeters. The incorporation of the inscription into the stones of the interior of the building located the blessing in a place within the materials of the structure.

The presence of the dedicatory inscription with a blessing or wish for wellbeing is not unique to the site of Ekron. The Ekron inscription betrays similarities to other dedicatory inscriptions

under the Assyrian and Egyptian Empires,” *BASOR* 332 (2003), 81–91; Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 138 n. 25; I. Ziffer, “The Iconography of the Cult Stands,” in R. Kletter, I. Ziffer, and W. Zwickel (eds.), *Yavneh 1: The Excavation of the “Temple Hill” Repository Pit and the Cult Stands* (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2010), 87–88. For a critique of the connection to the Greek goddess, see M.D. Press, “(Pytho)Gaia in Myth and Legend: The Goddess of the Ekron Inscription Revisited,” *BASOR* 365 (2012), 1–25. For further discussion of the identity of the goddess at Ekron, see A. Demsky, “The Name of the Goddess of Ekron: A New Reading,” *JANES* 25 (1997), 1–5; S.B. Noegel, “The Ekron Inscription,” in M.W. Chavalas (ed.), *The Ancient Near East: Historical Sources in Translation* (London: Blackwell, 2006), 372–75; V. Sasson, “The Inscription of Achish, Governor of Eqrone, and Philistine Dialect, Cult, and Culture,” *UF* 29 (1997), 627–39.

²⁸ J. Tigay, “The Priestly Reminder Stones and Ancient Near Eastern Votive Practices,” in M. Bar Asher et al. (eds.), *Shay: Studies in the Bible, Its Exegesis and Language Presented to Sara Japhet* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 2007), 339–55; Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture*, 113–16.

found at several other sites in the Levant. Most notably, the Ekron inscription resembles the content of an inscription discovered at the site of Byblos, along the Lebanese coast.²⁹ This is the so-called Yehawmilk inscription, which dates to the fifth century B.C.E. The French discovered part of the inscription in 1869. The other part of the inscription was discovered in 1920 and now resides in the Beirut Museum. Presumably, the inscription was commissioned by the king of the city of Byblos to be displayed in the courtyard of the temple of the goddess of the city. The inscription is much longer than the Ekron inscription, consisting of fifteen lines of text on a limestone stele. At the very top of the stele stands a relief of the goddess of the city issuing a blessing to the king of Byblos. The stele measures 130 cm in height and 56 cm in width.

The relevant part of the inscription appears in lines 8–10:

(8) The Lady of Byblos, she heard (my) call and gave me peace. May the Lady of Byblos bless (*tbrk*) Yehawmilk, (9) king of Byblos, and may she keep him alive, and may she prolong his days and years over Byblos, for he is a righteous king. (10) And may the mistress, the Lady of Byblos, give him favor (*hn*) in the eyes of the gods and in the eyes of the people of this land and favor <for> the people of this land.

The inscription begins by identifying the king of Byblos as the one who constructed the temple. The inscription also describes several cultic items that the king of Byblos dedicated to the temple. The inscription states that the king made an altar of bronze and a winged solar disc, which was set into the blessing scene at the top of the stele (lines 4–5, 11–12).³⁰ Following the description of the

²⁹ C. Clermont-Ganneau, “La stèle de Byblos,” in idem, *Études d’archéologie orientale*, vol. 1 (Paris: Vieweg, 1880), 1–36; *CIS 1/Tabulae*, Pl. 1; M. de Vogüé, “Stèle de Yehawmelek, Roi de Gebal,” *CRAI* 19 (1875), 24–49; M.J. Halevy, “L’inscription de Byblos,” *JA* 7 (1879), 50–62; M. Dunand, “Encore la Stèle de Yehavmilk, Roi de Byblos,” *BMB* 5 (1941), 57–85; A. Dupont-Sommer, “L’inscription de Yehawmilk, Roi de Byblos,” *Sem* 3 (1950), 35–44; G. Garbini, “Analisi di iscrizioni fenicie,” *AION* 37 (1977), 403–16 (403–8); E. Puech, “Remarques sur quelques inscriptions phéniciennes de Byblos,” *RSF* 9 (1981), 153–68; J.B. Pritchard, *ANET* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 656; J.C. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*, vol. 3: *Phoenician Inscriptions Including Inscriptions in the Mixed Dialect of Arslan Tash* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 95; M. Leuenberger, “Blessing in Text and Picture in Israel and the Levant. A Comparative Case Study on the Representation of Blessing in Hîrbet el-Qom and on the Stela of Yehawmilk of Byblos, Teil 1,” *BN* 139 (2008), 61–77; idem, “Blessing in Text and Picture in Israel and the Levant. A Comparative Case Study on the Representation of Blessing in Hîrbet el-Qom and on the Stela of Yehawmilk of Byblos, Teil 2,” *BN* 141 (2009), 67–89.

³⁰ Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*, 93.

dedicatory items, the inscription describes how the goddess of Byblos heard the king's plea and gave him peace. The last few lines of the inscription contain a blessing requesting the goddess of the city to "bless" the king and prolong his days.

The lexical parallels between this inscription and the priestly blessing are significant, even if not as obvious as the Ekron inscription. Similar to the priestly blessing, the Byblos inscription contains the verb *brk* (line 8) and has the deity as the subject of the verb. The request for the goddess of Byblos to keep the king alive and prolong his days is not thematically dissimilar to the request that the Israelite god "guard" or "keep" in the priestly blessing. Finally, the request for the goddess to give the king "graciousness/favor" (*hm*) bears a lexical resemblance to the request in the priestly blessing for the Israelite god to "be gracious."

More relevant here is the observation that the Byblos inscription represents another instance of the practice of inscribing and displaying blessings in temple space. Similar to the Ekron inscription, the Byblos inscription draws attention to the importance that written blessings held as part of the dedication and décor of such space. To be sure, the inscription was not placed in the same location in the temple as the Ekron inscription. By contrast the Byblos inscription was erected and displayed in the courtyard of the temple of Byblos. But it is noteworthy that the Byblos inscription connects the description of the divine blessing to the king's construction of the bronze altar and the completion of the temple. That is, both the placement of the inscription in the courtyard of the temple at Byblos and the content of the inscription itself draw spatial connections between blessings, the altar of the deity, and the dedication of the building. In this way, the text of the Byblos inscription served as a textual microcosm of the spatial layout of the courtyard of the temple, by describing the altar, inscription, and dedication in the space of the stele.

The inscribed blessings attested at Ekron and Byblos described in this study evidence a strikingly different context for blessings than evidenced at the site of Ketef Hinnom. At Ketef Hinnom, a blessing formula with very close parallels to the priestly blessing of Num 6:24–26 appears on two silver amulets dating to the eighth-seventh centuries BCE. The amulets were discovered in a tomb complex just outside of the Old City of Jerusalem, indicating that versions of a blessing similar to that found in the priestly blessing may have held specific applications to concerns over death and the demonic realm in late Iron Age Judah.³¹ Although a number of studies have worked to elucidate the parallels between the blessing on the amulets and the text of Num 6:24–26, few of such studies have adequately emphasized the importance that the objects

³¹ On the importance of the mortuary context of the amulets, see most recently Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power*, 123–43.

hold in providing further testimony to the ritual significance that the writing of the blessing held in ancient Judah.³² This is because initial studies focused largely upon questions about the date of the objects and what their presumed date may indicate about the dating of the priestly blessing in the book of Numbers.³³ But, I would argue that their larger significance lies in what they demonstrate about the importance of inscribing the blessing in a ritual space—first, in the ritual space of an amulet and second, on the space of a body, and then third, in the space of a tomb.³⁴ That is, the amulets give further testimony to the importance of having the blessing in written form, perhaps in the case of Ketef Hinnom, for the specific purpose of bodily protection in a mortuary context (i.e., burial, afterlife, etc.). In this way, the use of the blessing at Ketef Hinnom would appear to stand close to the use of the blessing formula in the late Iron Age tomb at Khirbet el-Qom.³⁵ Although the blessing formula evidenced at Khirbet el-Qom does not parallel the priestly blessing formula as closely as the Ketef Hinnom amulets do, it speaks to the increasing function that *written*, or perhaps better *inscribed*, blessings held in mortuary contexts in late Iron Age Judah.³⁶ Taken together, the blessings at Ketef Hinnom and Khir-

³² For exceptions to this, see Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture*, 35–42.

³³ E. Waaler, “A Revised Date for Pentateuchal Texts? Evidence from Ketef Hinnom,” *TynBul* 53 (2002), 29–55; H.N. Rösel, “Zur Formulierung des aaronitischen Segens auf den Amuletten von Ketef Hinnom,” *BN* 35 (1986), 30–36; see also M. Haran, “The Priestly Blessing on Silver Plaques: The Significance of the Discovery at Ketef Hinnom,” *Cathedra* 52 (1989), 77–89 [Hebrew]; K. Jaroš, “Die ältesten Fragmente eines biblischen Textes: Zu den Silberamuletten von Jerusalem,” *AW* 28 (1997), 475–77.

³⁴ On the importance of the Ketef Hinnom amulets as protective items for the body, see Stavropoulou, “Making Bodies,” 532–53.

³⁵ For the original publication of the blessing inscription from Khirbet el-Qom, see W.G. Dever, “Iron Age Epigraphic Material from the Area of Khirbet el-Qôm,” *HUCA* 40–41 (1969–70), 139–204. For subsequent discussion, see especially Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 259–70; idem, “The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription Mentioning a Goddess,” *BASOR* 255 (1984), 39–47; J.M. Hadley, “The Khirbet el-Qom Inscription,” *VT* 37 (1987), 50–62; A. Lemaire, “Les inscriptions de Khirbet El-Qôm et l’ashérah de YHWH,” *RB* 84 (1977), 595–608; Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 220–26; B. Margalit, “Some Observations on the Inscription and Drawing from Khirbet el-Qôm,” *VT* 39 (1989), 371–78; M. Leuenberger, *Segen und Segenstheologien im alten Israel: Untersuchungen zu ihren religions- und theologiegeschichtlichen Konstellationen und Transformationen* (Zürich: TVZ, 2008), 138–55.

³⁶ For recent discussion of the Khirbet el-Qom blessing inscription, see Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture*, 52–58; also Schmidt, who notes, “the location of Yahweh’s blessings at Ketef Hinnom becomes even more significant in the light of the Khirbet el-Qom inscriptions, which also exhibit a concern that Yahweh’s blessings would

bet el-Qom indicate that the ritual importance of the blessing in written form stretched beyond the ritual spaces of temples to the realms of tombs, bodies, and amulets.³⁷

THE TEXTUAL MAPPING OF TEMPLE SPACE

The Ekron and Byblos dedicatory inscriptions offer new insight into the question asked at the beginning of this study: what is the background and significance of the association that the book of Numbers draws between the priestly blessing and the descriptions of votive and dedicatory offerings? Or, if indeed the descriptions of the tabernacle in Numbers reflect aspects of the temple cult, is there external evidence that such blessings were incorporated into the physical spaces of other Iron Age temples? Past studies have largely focused upon certain perceived difficulties in this part of the book of Numbers by recourse to reconstructed stages of redaction. Knierim and Coats summarize this tendency well:

The best explanation for the diverse aspects and the uncoordinated relationship of the units in 5:1–10:10 is that this part in its present structure reflects to a large extent *the history of the growth of the text in successive accretions* in which, from situation to situation, new units involving important aspects were added (italics added).³⁸

While there should be little doubt over the composite nature of the text in question here, I contend that the inscriptions from Ekron and Byblos be used to encourage scholars to reflect more upon the influence that the memory of space may have had upon literary technique and organization. Certain perceived incongruities or difficulties in the text may only actually exist in the minds of scholars who approach the materials as if they must conform to scholarly paradigms of textual growth rather than memories of ritual space, ritual objects, and the ritualizing of text. We must remember, as Thomas Driver reminds us, that, “The point is not that scripture took the place of ritual, as some might imagine, but that ritual was modified so as to embrace the Torah texts and exalt them as sacred.”³⁹ Driver’s statement should remind scholars to give more consideration to how the organization of literary materials in texts might have been motivated by the need to relocate, remember, and

extend into the grave and protect the deceased” (Schmidt, *The Social Matrix of Early Judean Magic and Divination*, 288).

³⁷ See also the comments on this aspect of the blessing in R. Hendel, “Other Edens,” in J.D. Schloen (ed.), *Exploring the Longue Durée: Essays in Honor of Lawrence E. Stager* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 185–89.

³⁸ Knierim and Coats, *Numbers*, 33.

³⁹ T. Driver, *The Magic of Ritual: Our Need for Liberating Rites that Transform Our Lives and Our Communities* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 141.

transform certain rituals *and ritual objects* from the realm of ritual space to the realm of ritual texts.

An increasing number of studies have attempted to redefine the ways in which we think about the relationship between text and rituals as it relates to the composition, reception, and function of the Torah and other texts in the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁰ These studies, however, have failed to address the influence that ritual space—the *place* of dedicatory inscriptions, votive inscriptions, etc.—might have exerted upon the shaping and organization of certain texts preserved in the Hebrew Bible.⁴¹ This is not to diminish the importance of observations on the redaction history of these chapters, but to suggest that the cultural memory of space might have been a significant factor in their shaping. In the specific case of these chapters of Numbers, given that we do not actually have any rituals preserved from ancient Israel or Judah, as Wesley J. Bergen notes, we might do well to consider how ritual spaces and the presence of blessings, curses, and other formulae in them may have influenced the shape or “literary organization” of certain biblical texts.⁴²

⁴⁰ See especially, J.W. Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); idem, “The Rhetoric of Ritual in Leviticus 1–7,” in R. Rendtorff and R.A. Kugel (eds.), *The Book of Leviticus: Composition and Reception* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 79–100; idem, “Using Ezra’s Time as a Methodological Pivot for Understanding the Rhetoric and Functions of the Pentateuch,” in T.B. Dozeman, K. Schmid, and B.J. Schwartz (eds.), *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 489–506; idem, “The Three Dimensions of Scriptures,” in J.W. Watts (ed.), *Iconic Books and Texts* (London: Equinox, 2013), 9–32; B.D. Bibb, *Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds in the Book of Leviticus* (LHBOTS, 480; New York: T&T Clark, 2009); M.K. George, *Israel’s Tabernacle as Social Space* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2009); W.J. Bergen, “Studying Ancient Israelite Ritual: Methodological Considerations,” *RC* 1 (2007), 579–86; W.K. Gilders, *Blood Ritual and the Hebrew Bible: Meaning and Power* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); A.K. de Hemmer Gudme, “How Should We Read Hebrew Bible Ritual Texts? A Ritualistic Reading of The Law of the Nazirite (Num 6,1–21),” *SJOT* 23 (2009), 64–84; idem, “A Kind of Magic?,” 149–67; F.H. Gorman, Jr., *The Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time and Status in Priestly Theology* (JSOTSup, 91; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990).

⁴¹ For an exception to this, see George, “Socio-Spatial Logic and the Structure of the Book of Numbers,” 23–43; idem, “Analyzing Embodied Space in Ancient Israel’s Tabernacle: A Biblical Studies Perspective,” in M.K. George and D. Pezzoli-Olgiati (eds.), *Religious Representation in Place: Exploring Meaningful Spaces at the Intersection of the Humanities and Sciences* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 63–74.

⁴² Bergen, “Studying Ancient Israelite Ritual: Methodological Considerations,” 580.

I have argued that the incorporation of the priestly blessing in Numbers and its association with the law of the Nazirite and the dedication of the tabernacle altar might be productively examined against the background of dedicatory inscriptions, and their emplacement in temples. As such, we might reimagine these chapters as a literary archive preserving the different types of offerings that would have been associated with the dedication of temples and placed in courtyards and other rooms of temples (votive offerings, dedicatory inscriptions, dedicatory offerings, lampstands, “memorial offerings,” silver trumpets, etc.). In a manner similar to the description of the different items of furniture that were placed in the tabernacle according to Exod 25:1–31:18, we might view the composition of Num 5:1–10:10 and the priestly blessing’s location in the unit as an attempt to map spatially those offerings that were donated to deities and placed in the courtyard of temples in connection to dedication ceremonies.⁴³

Few studies have attended to the emphasis upon physical objects in the rituals described in Num 5:11–31 and 6:1–21. Both the ritual of suspected adulteress and the law of the Nazirite emphasize that the offerings brought to the altar are offerings of “remembrance” or “memorial offerings,” which as Anne Katrine de Hemmer Gudme summarizes, were “intended to make Yahweh remember the worshipper.”⁴⁴ In a recent study on the tabernacle texts of Exodus, Gudme argued that the detailed description of the furniture and priesthood of the tabernacle might be understood through the lens of cultural memory.⁴⁵ She argued that the descrip-

⁴³ For a description of the types of votive offerings discovered in such contexts, see R. Osborne, “Hoards, Votives, Offerings: The Archaeology of the Dedicated Object,” *World Archaeology* 36 (2004), 1–10; J.P. Bodel, “‘Sacred Dedications’: A Problem of Definitions,” in J.P. Bodel and M. Kajava (eds.), *Dedicatio sacra nel mondo greco-romano. Diffusione, funzioni, tipologie* (Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae, 35; Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2009), 17–30; for a discussion of the meaning of the votive offerings, see A.K. de Hemmer Gudme, “Barter Deal or Friend-Making Gift? A Reconsideration of the Conditional Vow in the Hebrew Bible,” in M. Satlow (ed.), *The Gift in Antiquity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013), 189–201; M. Satlow, “Giving for a Return: Jewish Votive Offerings in Late Antiquity,” in D. Brakke, M. Satlow, and S. Weitzman (eds.), *Religion and the Self in Antiquity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 91–108; J. van Baal, “Offering, Sacrifice and Gift,” *Numen* 23 (1976), 161–78.

⁴⁴ A.K. de Hemmer Gudme, “Dyed Yarns and Dolphin Skins: Temple Texts as Cultural Memory in the Hebrew Bible,” *Jewish Studies* 50 (2014), 1–14.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* For other recent attempts to apply cultural memory theory to the study of the composition of the biblical texts, see especially R. Hendel, “Culture, Memory, History: Reflections on Method in Biblical Studies,” in T.E. Levy (ed.), *Historical Biblical Archaeology and the Future: The New Pragmatism* (London: Equinox, 2010), 250–61.

tion of the tabernacle might be understood as a type of “memory bank” of the temple or a textual storehouse of sorts for the ritual competency of the priesthood, or a way of storing ritual efficacy in a textual space. In other words, the descriptions of such offerings are evocative of the types of votive and other objects that were brought and left by worshippers in temples. Indeed, Gudme’s observations remind us that it is not solely the “memory” of space and objects that may have motivated the composition of these chapters, but the interest to relocate their ritual function in new settings. Hence, we must nuance our use of the term “memory” as we apply it to the description of these texts. It is not that the text replaced the ritual function of these inscribed and other objects, but rather that the text became a new place in which to embed, encode, and reimagine their ritual character.

I would argue that Gudme’s observations form a heuristic tool for understanding what the inclusion of the priestly blessing in the text of Numbers achieved. While it is tempting to see the instructions for the blessing as reflecting an oral performance, as many studies argue, we should also consider the possibility that its appearance in the text of Numbers reflected the importance that inscribed or written blessings held in temple spaces. In other words, the writing/placement/contextualizing of the blessing in Numbers *ritualized* its power within a new physical and performative context by re-contextualizing the significance of its written-ness from the realm of the temple to the realm of a text. As Gudme notes, “The preservation of a written down ritual is just as good as the performance of it.”⁴⁶ Indeed, given that we have written blessings discovered in temple space in the ancient Levant, we should be drawn to ask how the writing of the priestly blessing within the text of Numbers could have been an appropriation and adaptation of this practice. In other words, evidence of physical blessings set within the spaces of temples should force us to reevaluate our concern to see the writing of the blessing as reflective of an oral performance as opposed to a written performance. It is, after all, the text of Numbers that constructs a memory of the blessing as an oral recitation of the priesthood.

Seen in this light, this aspect of the text may indicate that we should reconsider the conceptions that we bring to discussions of the composition of a text such as Numbers. We might use the inscriptions from Ekron and Byblos—and the corpus of votive inscriptions—to reevaluate the ways in which scholars have explained the composition of this section of the book and suggest that it may be better approached as a type of “remembering,” “preserving,” and “mapping” of the space of the furniture found and the objects offered in such temples. The royal dedicatory inscriptions such as those found in Ekron and Byblos attracted other

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

dedicatory inscriptions offered to the deity by worshippers, and that these “smaller” dedicatory offerings, in certain cases, contained small inscriptions themselves. Quite a number of such votive or dedicatory offerings are known from a variety of temples excavated in the Levant and wider Near Eastern world and one of the more common features of such objects is the presence of inscribed formulae on their surfaces.⁴⁷ In the West Semitic inventory of such dedicatory and votive offerings, it is precisely the word “bless” that occurs most frequently on such objects.⁴⁸ The presence of such dedicatory or votive offerings in other Iron Age temples in the Levant provides a possible context for understanding the back-

⁴⁷ See especially A.K. de Hemmer Gudme, *Before the God in this Place for Good Remembrance: A Comparative Analysis of the Aramaic Votive Inscriptions from Mount Gerizim* (BZAW, 441; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013); J.F. Healey, “‘May He Be Remembered for Good’: An Aramaic Formula,” in K.J. Cathcart and M. Maher (eds.), *Targumic and Cognate Studies: Essays in Honour of Martin McNamara* (JSOTSup, 230; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 177–86; M. Lidzbarski, *Handbuch der nordsemitischen Epigraphik nebst ausgewählten Inschriften*, vol. 1: *Text* (Weimar: Verlag von Emil Felber, 1898), 165–69. For examples from Mesopotamia, see W.W. Hallo, “Letters, Prayers, and Letter-Prayers,” in D. Krone (ed.), *Proceedings of the Seventh World Congress of Jewish Studies (1977)*, vol. 2: *Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1981), 25–26.

⁴⁸ For examples, see especially the corpus of Punic votive inscriptions and Phoenician dedicatory inscriptions, which very frequently contain or conclude with blessing formulae. For examples and discussion of the Punic materials, see K. Jongeling, “The Concluding Formulae in Punic Votive Inscriptions,” *DS-NELL* 4 (1999), 39–79. For discussion of the Phoenician dedicatory inscriptions, see W. Röllig, “The Phoenician Language: Remarks on the Present State of Research,” in P. Bartoloni (ed.), *Atti del I congresso internazionale di studi fenici e punici, Roma 5–10 Novembre 1979* (Collezione di studi fenici, 16; Rome: Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche. Istituto per la civiltà fenicia e punica, 1983), 375–85 (383–84); K.J. Baranowski, “A Blessing in The Phoenician Karatepe Inscription?,” *JSS* 60 (2015), 317–30; M.L. Barré, “An Analysis of the Royal Blessing in the Karatepe Inscription,” *MAARAV* 3 (1982), 177–94 (180–81); Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*, 43; R. Marcus and I.J. Gelb, “The Phoenician Stele Inscription from Cilicia,” *JNES* 8 (1949), 116–20 (117–18). Importantly, Baranowski notes that the verbal form *ybrk* in the Phoenician inscriptions is typical of the dedicatory genre as opposed to the perfect form *wbrk*, which is more common to the genre of the royal inscription (Baranowski, “A Blessing in the Phoenician Karatepe Inscription,” 328). For a discussion of the blessing formula in the Azitawada inscription, see especially A. Schade, *A Syntactic and Literary Analysis of Ancient Northwest Semitic Inscriptions* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 2006), 47–48; K.L. Younger, Jr., “The Phoenician Inscription of Azatiwada: An Integrated Reading,” *JSS* 43 (1998), 11–47 (13–18). For a summary and discussion of references to blessings in later Hebrew and Aramaic dedicatory and votive inscriptions, see Gudme, *Before the God in This Place*, 127–54.

ground of both the description of the Nazirite bringing votive offerings to the altar in 6:1–21 as well as the description of the tribal leaders of Israel bringing dedicatory offerings to the altar in Num 7:1–88.⁴⁹

I do not mean to suggest here that the tabernacle texts recalled any one specific space, i.e., a temple. Rather, I contend that the editing or shaping of Num 5:1–10:10 drew upon cultural memories of temple space and the memory of the place that objects held in this space.⁵⁰ Such a space was then mapped in the realm of the text of Numbers. In other words, the space of the text of Num 5:1–10:10 formed an anthology of sorts of the memory of the ritual space of temples in the Iron Age Levant. And, the “remembering” of such spaces may have included the role that inscribed blessings held in such spaces. Such a context clarifies why the instructions for the priestly blessing were connected to the descriptions of offerings of the Nazirite and the description of the bringing of dedicatory offerings to the altar in the book of Numbers. The proximity that the editors of Numbers drew between the priestly blessing and the votive offering of the Nazirite and description of dedicatory offerings by the tribal leaders mimicked the spatial connections that existed between such artifacts and rituals in temple space in the Iron Age Levant. While past studies have noted the reciprocal relationship that would have existed between the oral performance of blessings and the giving of votive offerings, I would argue that their proximity in the text of Numbers might just as well reflect the physical space that they shared in temples.

⁴⁹ Levine has argued that the list of dedicatory offerings in Num 7:1–88 closely mimics the form of archival lists of votive offerings known from northwest Semitic texts. His study showed that 7:1–88 likely reflected to a large extent the *realia* of the written archival lists of votives gifts that would have been placed in Levantine temples during the Iron Age. As noted above, however, I suggest that we take Levine’s observations a step further and consider the spatial relationship that would have existed between such votive or dedicatory gifts and the main dedicatory inscription of a temple. The bringing of votive or dedicatory gifts to the temple would have in certain cases resulted in physical proximity between the main dedicatory inscription in the wall or courtyard of the building and the deposit or collection of such offerings (B. Levine, “The Descriptive Tabernacle Texts of the Pentateuch,” *JAOIS* 85 [1965], 307–18).

⁵⁰ For further on the concept of cultural memory, see S. Hübenal, “Social and Cultural Memory in Biblical Exegesis: The Quest for an Adequate Application,” in P. Carstens, T.B. Hasselbalch, and N.P. Lemche (eds.), *Cultural Memory in Biblical Exegesis* (PHSC, 17; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2012), 175–99; M.B. Hundley, “The Way Forward is Back to the Beginning: Reflections on the Priestly Texts,” in E. Ben Zvi and C. Levin (eds.), *Remembering and Forgetting in Early Second Temple Judah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 209–24.

I might further suggest that even if the texts do not have a physical object in mind in every case (i.e., an inscribed blessing), the memory of the physical proximity that such votive inscriptions, dedicatory inscriptions, and other objects shared in temple space may have formed a significant influence in the literary connection that is drawn between them in the book of Numbers. In other words, the ritual reciprocal relationship that existed between altars, dedicatory inscriptions, and votive offerings might explain their literary proximity in the realm of the text of 5:1–10:10. Indeed, we might push this further to suggest that the “remembering” aspect of such votive objects was a significant factor in the decision to describe, recall, remember, and textualize them in a material space. The reassembling of the objects and blessings in the textual space of Numbers moved their ritual significance from the realm of “inscribed” to “described” votive offerings.⁵¹ But the description of the objects in the realm of the text may still be understood as a type of “indexing” of memory even though such indexing was qualitatively different than the placement of an object in the space of a temple. By describing the blessing and surrounding rituals of dedication and offerings, the text of Numbers still “indexed” the objects and as a result caused them to be remembered, albeit in a new space.

This is not to argue that the spatial mapping evident in this section of Numbers reflected the *realia* of a specific temple, as I noted above. Instead, I would emphasize that the inscriptions discussed in this study warrant a conclusion that these chapters of Numbers might be viewed as a location in which the types of artifacts found in the courtyards of Levantine temples could be displayed in the space of a text. The text of Num 5:1–10:10 became an anthology of sorts, capturing the memory of temple space in the ancient Levant.⁵² The instructions for the priestly blessing in Num 6:22–27 were located next to the description of the dedication of the altar (7:1–88), the description of the Nazirite’s votive offering (6:1–21), and the description of the lampstands (8:1–4) because blessings were placed (and offered) next to such physical offerings in such spaces. As Jeffrey Tigay succinctly observes, “The divine

⁵¹ On the importance of the concept of “remembrance” in the priestly materials, see A.K. de Hemmer Gudme, “Out of Sight, Out of Mind? Dedicatory Inscriptions as Communication with the Divine,” in C.L. Crouch, J. Stökl, and A.E. Zerneck (eds.), *Mediating between Heaven and Earth: Communication with the Divine in the Ancient Near East* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 9–10.

⁵² For a similar argument about the description of the tabernacle in Exod 25–31, see P. Carstens, “The Torah as Canon of Masterpieces: Remembering in Archives,” in P. Carstens, T.B. Hasselbalch, and N.P. Lemche (eds.), *Cultural Memory in Biblical Exegesis* (PHSC, 17; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias), 309–23.

favours requested in the Priestly Benediction—blessing, protection, favor, and wellbeing—are typical of the types of favours requested in *votive inscriptions*” (italics mine).⁵³ That is, the bringing of votive or dedicatory gifts to the temple would have in certain cases resulted in physical proximity between the main dedicatory inscription in the wall or courtyard of the building and the deposit or collection of such offerings.⁵⁴ Here, I would take Levine’s observations one step further and argue that the displaying and describing of the votive and dedicatory offerings on both sides of the instructions for the priestly blessing in Numbers mimicked the spatial and ritual relationship that such objects shared with blessings, both oral and written, in temple space. Indeed, the tangible blessings found in such spaces press us to consider that it was the very memory and ritual significance of the written-ness of the blessings, not the recording of its past use as a oral recitation, that motivated its inclusion in the text of Numbers.

CONCLUSION: THE PRIESTLY BLESSING AND TEXTUAL SPACE

The present study has attempted to provide an alternative way to approach the location and function of the priestly blessing within the composition of the book of Numbers. The inscribed blessings from Ekron, Byblos, and Ketef Hinnom have been used to problematize the appearance of the priestly blessing in Numbers in order to reframe the ways in which we view its placement within Num 5:1–10:10. I have argued these inscriptions warrant a conclusion that the location of the priestly blessing next to the description of the dedicatory offerings is explained by the close spatial relationship that existed between inscribed blessings and dedicatory offerings in temple space in the Iron Age Levant. As a result, the organization of these materials in the book of Numbers met the conventions of temple ritual space in important respects, which required that blessings and dedications occupy the same space,

⁵³ As Tigay succinctly observes in “The Priestly Reminder Stones,” 344.

⁵⁴ As Gudme notes regarding the space of the Gerizim temple, “Just as the dedicatory inscription is placed in the wall surrounding the inner sanctuary in the immediate proximity of the deity, so is the worshipper by means of a proxy brought to the deity’s attention and is therefore granted good remembrance ‘before the god in this place.’ The request of the worshipper to be remembered favourably by the deity is effected by the materiality of the dedicatory inscription” (Gudme, “Out of Sight, Out of Mind?,” 11). Although Gudme’s observations are directed toward an interpretation of the Gerizim temple, there is no reason to doubt that a similar situation for the temples at Ekron and Byblos. And, I would argue here, that the space that such objects shared in temples might be invoked as a way to understand the spatial mapping of the materials in Num 5:1–10:10.

whether in the realm of temple or text. In this way, we might see the writing and placement of the priestly blessing (and surrounding materials) in Numbers as an echo of the role that priests or other persons played in the ritual installation of dedications and blessings in temple spaces.

The text of Numbers formed an innovative space in which the ritual authority of the priestly blessing could be located or given new ritual expression. We should avoid the temptation to see the relocation of the blessing from the realm of temple space to textual space as a reduction of its perceived ritual importance or efficacy. Instead, the present study has sought to emphasize that the textualization of the blessing in the space of Numbers represented an important modification or re-contextualization of its ritual importance. But we should not overlook the importance that the appeal to or mapping of the temple space in the realm of the text played in preserving and recontextualizing its ritual significance and the ritual authority of those who used the blessing. Indeed, as Maurice Halbwachs showed, space provides one of the more significant venues through which collective memory is preserved, transmitted, and constructed.⁵⁵ Indeed, we might suggest that the recollecting of the blessing's "place" in temple space in the text of Numbers heightened its ritual legitimacy for the priesthood and community.⁵⁶ By locating the blessing within the legal material in Numbers, the editors of the text constructed a collective memory of the association that the blessing had with the temple in Jerusalem.

In this way, the association that the text of Numbers draws between the blessing and the sons of Aaron represents a major difference between the inscribed blessings described above. The instructions for the blessing in Num 6:22–27, compared to its use at Ketef Hinnom and compared to the use of similar blessings in dedicatory inscriptions, highlight its performative function as an oral blessing spoken by the priests. This emphasis upon the spoken

⁵⁵ M. Halbwachs, "Space and Collective Memory," in L.A. Coser (ed. and trans.), *On Collective Memory* (Heritage of Sociology Series; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 52–53. For further on the spatial aspect of collective or cultural memory, see P.H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover/London: University of New England, 1993), 75–84; P. Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 48.

⁵⁶ See Watts, "Ritual Legitimacy and Scriptural Authority," 416; see especially his comments, ". . . it was the authority of the Jerusalem temple's ritual traditions that established the Pentateuch's prestige. That authority was grounded in the assertion that the priests were practicing the ancient ritual traditions for that local cult. The validity of that claim was defended by invoking a book that claimed to be much older than the disruptions in cult practice caused by the destruction of the first temple and the Babylonian exile."

performance of the blessing also aligned its ritual character with the other legal material found in Num 5:1–6:27 (see especially the law of the suspected adulteress in 5:11–31). As several studies have noted, the instructions in this pericope highlight the role of the priests as experts in the use of words.⁵⁷ And, this linking of the blessing with the priesthood rather than the temple paved the way for its continued use in the community outside of the context of a temple. Indeed, we should not overlook the importance that such an association would have had for the priesthood's legitimacy as heirs to temple rituals. By embedding the blessing within instructions to the sons of Aaron, the text of Numbers advanced the legitimacy of the priesthood.⁵⁸ In addition, the connection that the text of Numbers established between the blessing and the sons of Aaron served to reinforce notions that its performative power stemmed from the divine and the priesthood rather than its setting in the temple.

Moreover, we should emphasize here that the textualization of the blessing in Numbers not only *reflects* the use of blessings in temples in the Iron Age Levant, but that it *constructs* a collective memory of the association of blessings with *temple space*. That is, the text of Numbers recalls the blessing in association with the temple and the priesthood rather than in association with the tomb. This is not to suggest that the written blessing in Numbers is a copy or reflection of a specific written blessing in an Israelite or Judean temple, but to emphasize that the written-ness of the blessing in the text of Numbers reflects the cultural memory of the ritual significance *and* the ritual space that inscribed blessings held in Iron Age Levantine temples. In this way, the space of the text of Numbers served as a location in which the editors of the book could create an idealized temple of the past, which was an anthology of sorts of the physical aspects of temple space in the Levant. By setting the blessing between the law of the Nazarite and the description of the dedicatory offerings the editors of Numbers recreated the audiences of the blessings within the space of this idealized temple of the past. Just as the ritual acts of bringing votive and dedicatory offerings to temples served as an “indexes” to the memory of visits to such spaces, we might view the descriptions of such “physical objects” (dedicatory offerings, votive offerings, well-being offerings) in the space of the text as a way to index the memory of the space or event, or as a way to textualize what the book of Numbers itself refers to as a “remembrance” (see Num 10:10).⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture*, 70–75.

⁵⁸ For a similar line of thought concerning the role that the ritual legislation of the Torah played in legitimizing the sons of Aaron, see J.W. Watts, “Scripturalization and the Aaronide Dynasties,” *JHS* 13 (2013), 1–15.

⁵⁹ On the concept of “indexing” material objects, see especially A.

At the same time, the textualization of the blessing in Numbers aligned its materiality with the textual descriptions of rituals rather than with the materiality of temple space. The writing of the blessing in the text of Numbers scripturalized the blessing, leading to a type of remembering and preserving that linked the blessing to the memory of temple space while also recasting its authority in the space of a text. The text became the new stage within which ritual performances—both oral and written—could be relocated for future ritual expression. It is within this relocating of the memory of the blessing from the realm of temple to text that the references to the sons of Aaron in vv. 22–23 take on significance. The blessing, disembodied from its temple context, was recontextualized in the text through the textual linking of the blessing with the instructions to the sons of Aaron. The text remembered the blessing’s association with the temple while explicitly invoking its association with the priesthood. And, since the function of the placement of such inscribed objects in temple spaces was to cause the “remembrance” of a ritual action or the person who performed the action, we might consider the writing about such objects and the descriptions of attendant rituals as a different way in which to place their remembrance in a textual rather than temple space. Just as the placement of the dedicatory blessing inscriptions in temple spaces served to provoke the deity to remember those who offered gifts in such spaces, so we might imagine that the act of describing the offering of gifts in the text of Numbers would similarly provoke the deity to bless those who recited the blessing *and* now the text in a new ritual context.

Jones, *Memory and Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For an application of the idea of indexing to the biblical texts, see Gudme, “Out of Sight, Out of Mind?” 1–15.