THE HUMAN NEED FOR CONTINUITY
SOME ANE AND OT PERSPECTIVES

Deryck Sheriffs

Summary

This paper presents a selection of evidence for the importance of a sense of continuity to individuals and their families by drawing on a variety of sources, including story, wisdom reflection, grave marker, inscribed memorial stone with portrait, ghost ritual, adoption document and will. The new covenant demonstrates God's response to this deep-seated human need for continuity.

I. Introduction

This paper deliberately selects continuity as a transposable concept that reaches into our contemporary life from its ancient roots. I shall argue that continuity is not simply a Mesopotamian or Hebrew concern but a human concern, cross-cultural, endemic and existential. This said, Yahwistic, and then Christian, faith each offer their own distinctive perspectives on how God responds to this deep-seated human need for continuity. In Israel and in the Ancient Near East, the concern for continuity operated at various scales. It extends from the continuity of the individual in the family to that of humanity as whole, with tribe, dynasty and nation occupying intermediate scaling positions.[1] Given the role of the palace and its scribes, a great deal of the written material that we have recovered has its focus in the continuity of the dynasty,[2]

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[1] This paper is an abbreviated version of the Tyndale OT Lecture 2003. That paper included a section on the survival of humanity and animals in the ANE and biblical Flood stories. Semitic texts supply the main data here; matters Egyptological are beyond my field of competence but are obviously not excluded from the concept of a cross-cultural concern with continuity in the world of the Ancient Near East.

[2] Nebuchadnezzar I (1125–1103) enhanced his legitimacy by citing a legendary ancestor from before the Flood: 'remote descendant of kingship, seed preserved from

but we will set aside this deeply ideological dynastic material for the purposes of this paper.

The appropriate base point from which to start a discussion of both individual continuity and human species continuity would be the human genome and the somewhat controversial genes-eye view of the Oxford biologist Richard Dawkins expressed in his best-seller, *The Selfish Gene*.[3] Space precludes as wide-ranging a discussion as this here, but we should never detach our theology from our biology, as the Incarnation itself reminds us. We simply note that the meta-narrative, started in Genesis and ending with Revelation, quickly introduces us, if not to genes, then to their expression in genealogies. Whatever the various forms of biblical genealogies legitimate, we find significant samples of genealogies at the beginning of both Testaments. They bear witness to the biological basis of the sense of continuity.

II. A Monument and a Name

If the human need for continuity expresses itself at primary level through biological reproduction, then no era has been so successful as our own. But when we look back at Judah and the Ancient Near East

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before the Flood, offspring of Enmeduranki, king of Sippar … offshoot of Nippur, primeval lineage' (*līpu rūqu ša šarrūti zēru naṣru ša lām abūbi … perʾu ṣâti*). He was following Hammurabi's precedent in this 'eternal seed of kingship' ideology, and was in turn emulated by Cyrus the Persian. The details are in W. G. Lambert, 'The Seed of Kingship' in *Le Palais et la Royauté*, ed. P. Garelli (CRAI 19; Paris: Libraire orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1974): 424-440. The text is BM 80328 (known by the abbreviation GHD for Genealogy of the Hammurabi Dynasty). Assyrian and Babylonian kings hoped for dynastic perpetuity and prayed like Sennacherib: 'may my posterity in perpetuity to distant days remain in its (the palace's) midst' (*ī līpūa dūr dāri ana ūmē rūqūti likūnu qerebša*, Nebi Yunus slab, D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, OIP 2, Chicago, 1924: 134, line 93 = *ARAB, 2*: 83, §433).

[3]   The following quotation illustrates Dawkins' viewpoint:

> A gene travels intact from grandparent to grandchild, passing straight through the intermediate generation without being merged with other genes … it does not grow senile; it is no more likely to die when it is a million years old than when it is only a hundred. It leaps from body to body down the generations, manipulating body after body in its own way and for its own ends, abandoning a succession of mortal bodies before they sink in senility and death. The genes are the immortals, or rather, they are defined as genetic entities that come close to deserving the title. We, the individual survival machines in the world, can expect to live a few more decades. But the genes in the world have an expectation of life that must be measured not in decades but in thousands and millions of years (*The Selfish Gene*, 2nd rev. ed., Oxford: OUP, 1989: 34).

we find that their societies valued this continuity through offspring enormously (see Ps. 127:3-5, 'sons are indeed a heritage from Yahweh …'). Reproduction and numerical increase forms a sub-plot to both Genesis and Exodus (Exod. 1:7), for instance. However, there is another angle on continuity altogether and that is the concern for the preservation of personal identity after death through commemoration by the living. Human beings want more than to be looked after by their children in old age. They want to be remembered after they are gone.

Qohelet and Ben Sirach: realism and ideal

The grim alternative of being gone and forgotten is well expressed by that realist Qohelet when he says:

> The living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no more reward, and even the memory of them is lost. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished; never again will they have any share in all that happens under the sun. (Eccl. 9:5-6)

Qohelet does not advocate an ancestor cult as a solution for preserving the memory of the departed.[4] The existence of ancestor cults in Judah is indeed much debated, but here we will explore continuity of personal identity via memorial in the stories of Absalom and Rachel for whom there is no evidence of an ancestor cult. To these we will add a variety of extra-biblical sources that may well be evidence for an ancestor cult but that certainly do highlight the concern for personal continuity.

But before turning to these, we first need to consider an opposite perspective to Qohelet's within the Wisdom tradition. This is how Ben Sirach puts it: some are dead and gone forever with no one who remembers them, except God. Yet, says Sirach, they have transmitted their faith down the generations, the fact that they begat children is itself a covenant blessing, and their descendants have remained in the

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[4] It seems quite probable that the antecedents of the sense of continuity with ancestors have very deep roots back in time indeed. A link with ancestors is the interpretation that G. O. Rolefson offers for burials beneath floors at pre-pottery Neolithic Ain Ghazal (c. 9000–5500 BC), and for the plaster effigies (6700 BC and later) and plastered portrait skulls recovered from Ain Ghazal, Jericho and other sites in the Jordan valley. U. Avner interprets some groups of standing-stones at Eilat and in the Negev of similar and earlier dates as venerated ancestors. The earliest intentional burials in the dwelling-place in Israel are actually of early modern *Homo sapiens* from Skhul cave, Mount Carmel and Qafzeh cave near Galilee. These burials are associated with Mousterian tool technology and date to around 90,000 years ago. Of course, we will never know what sense of continuity or afterlife beliefs, if any, were held by this early ancestral population.

covenant. Covenant, then, is a fundamental expression of continuity for observant Yahwists.

> Some of them have left behind a name,
> so that others declare their praise.
> But of others there is no memory;
> they have perished as though they had never existed;
> they have become as though they had never been born,
> they and their children after them.
> But these also were godly men,
> whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten;
> their wealth will remain with their descendants,
> and their inheritance with their children's children.
> Their descendants stand by the covenants;
> their children also, for their sake.
> Their offspring will continue forever,
> and their glory will never be blotted out.
> Their bodies are buried in peace,
> but their name lives on generation after generation.
> The assembly declares their wisdom,
> and the congregation proclaims their praise. (Sir. 44:8–15)

Absalom's life and death are the antithesis of this ideal of joining the peaceful dead, leaving descendants and being praised as a wise ancestor among those living in the covenant.

Absalom and Rachel: a lasting stone?

The phrase 'a monument and a name' captures the Near Eastern concern with preserving identity in the face of mortality and against the erosion of time. The ironies of Absalom's life and death throw this concern into high relief.

> They took Absalom, threw him into a great pit in the forest, and raised over him a very great heap of stones. Meanwhile all the Israelites fled to their homes.

> Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up for himself a pillar (לָקַח וַיַּצֶּב־לוֹ בְחַיָּו אֶת־מַצֶּבֶת) that is in the King's Valley, for he said, 'I have no son to keep my name in remembrance'(בַּעֲבוּר הַזְכִּיר שְׁמִי); he called the pillar by his own name (וַיִּקְרָא לַמַּצֶּבֶת עַל־שְׁמוֹ). It is called Absalom's Monument (יַד אַבְשָׁלֹם) to this day. (2 Sam. 18:18, NRSV)

Absalom is commemorated in three ways in this brief account. Two involve memorials in stone; the third is the story itself, written down and canonised. Ironically, the story succeeds where the stones fail. The pen is mightier than the monument in this case. Ironical too is the transformation of intent. Absalom intended to be remembered positively. He succeeded in memorialising his name, but he is

remembered for all the wrong reasons. His gravesite is forgotten, and his monument lost to archaeology, though the chances are that both might survive to this day, overgrown and defaced.

Our focus here is on Absalom's monument, the pillar or standing stone that he set up, and the reasons that he did so. The story writer tells us that 'he called the standing stone by his own name.' We are not told whether this naming involved inscribing the pillar with his name, though that would seem likely. Perhaps he included some details of his parentage and a wish to be remembered or to be blessed by Yahweh. It was a small enough community, and Absalom a well-known enough figure around Jerusalem, for this new standing stone erected in a public place to make its own point, and to become widely known as 'Absalom's Monument'. In highlighting that the memorial was erected 'in his lifetime', the account might imply that other people were commemorated by a stone memorial after their death. If so, we have no recovered examples of Judean memorial stones to document the custom, to my knowledge.

Absalom's motive for his monument is made explicit: 'for he said, "I have no son to keep my name in remembrance."' So it is partly a son and heir issue. If particular legal implications for land or property inheritance are involved, they are not spelled out, whereas being remembered, having an historical existence that continues in the community is made explicit ('to keep my name in remembrance').

Absalom's story bears testimony to three driving forces in the Judean psyche: the biological drive to self-perpetuate, the cultural valuing of the male as representative of the family line (in his case thwarted) and the psychological need for continuity of memory rather than extinction. Absalom's concerns are not about the afterlife. They are about terrestrial continuity. This threefold cord of concerns proves itself to be a cross-cultural and extremely durable one.

Rachel is an example of a significant ancestor, cherished in her lifetime and mourned in her death. Yet her story, too, is full of irony. She and Leah are locked in a reproductive arms race, described by Rachel as a sibling wrestling match (Gen. 30:8). To Jacob she says, 'Give me children, or I shall die!' (v. 1). And die she does – in the process of giving birth.

> Rachel was in childbirth, and she had hard labour. When she was in her hard labour, the midwife said to her, 'Do not be afraid; for now you will have another son.' As her soul was departing (for she died), she named him Ben-oni; but his

father called him Benjamin. So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), and Jacob set up a pillar at her grave (וַיַּצֵּב יַעֲקֹב מַצֵּבָה עַל־קְבֻרָתָהּ); it is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day. (Gen. 35:16b–20, NRSV)

The continuity that the story underlines is that of Rachel, the ancestress, being still visibly present in her own right among her nation through her grave and its marking pillar. To some small degree, this female gravestone counterbalances the dominant patriarchality of the tribal stories.

The Hebrew phrase translated 'at her grave' (*al-qevuratah*, v. 20a), that indicates where the gravestone was placed, suggests a simple interment. The word for 'grave' (*qevurah*) is repeated in the second half of the verse, but is there translated 'tomb' by NRSV which is misleading. The verb 'set up' (*n-ts-b*) with the noun 'pillar' (*matsevah*) is used for this grave marker and memorial. This was the usage for Jacob's pillar commemorating his encounter with God in his dream (Gen. 28:18, 22). Evidently, the site of Rachel's grave was still well known as a landmark in Saul's day (1 Sam. 10:2). Rachel's gravestone was likely unsculpted and uninscribed, a stone to hand like Jacob's pillar, and as natural as death itself. The Genesis narrator remarks that Rachel's standing stone is still there 'to this day' (35:20b),[5] a reminder to us of the many visual prompts to memory in Israel, now lost to us.

These visual reminders of continuity would complement ritual expressions of continuity such as the Passover, and commemoration in the community through story. We should not underestimate the power of ritual and storytelling, alongside visual prompts, as media supporting memory and tradition and reinforcing the sense of continuity within a community. When a stone memorial becomes the focus of a story, as it does in the case of Absalom and Rachel, we can sense this interplay between the individual, continuity of memory and the community.

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5   Compare the burial of Jonathan Maccabeus, noted as visible 'to this day':
    Simon sent and took the bones of his brother Jonathan, and buried him in Modein, the city of his ancestors. All Israel bewailed him with great lamentation, and mourned for him many days. And Simon built a monument over the tomb of his father and his brothers; he made it high so that it might be seen, with polished stone at the front and back. He also erected seven pyramids, opposite one another, for his father and mother and four brothers. For the pyramids he devised an elaborate setting, erecting about them great columns, and on the columns he put suits of armour for a permanent memorial, and beside the suits of armour he carved ships, so that they could be seen by all who sail the sea. This is the tomb that he built in Modein; it remains to this day. (1 Macc. 13:25-30)

III. A Babylonian Memorial Stone

To broaden the discussion cross-culturally and justify speaking of a human perspective on the need to memorialise and commemorate and to see oneself in a continuum of ancestors and offspring, we will look at an intriguing monument on display in the British Museum, WA 90834 (figure 1). It is 41cm high, made from a valuable imported stone, sculpted with skill and dates from the ninth century BC. First I provide a translation and then make some comment on its iconography and theology.[6]

> Marduk-balatsu-iqbi, his eldest son, made this image of Adad-etir, sword-bearer of Marduk, proper person of Sin, Shamash and Nergal, fearer of Nabu and Marduk, reverer of his lord, the king. He (M-b-i) set up (the memorial) for his offspring and descendants into the remote future. Whoever subsequently destroys this image and memorial stone (*ṣalmu u narâ*), by whatever nefarious means he uses to obliterate it, may Marduk, the great lord, look in fury on that person and obliterate his name and offspring. May Nabu, recorder of everything, cut short that person's longevity. In contrast, may Nabu reward the person who preserves the memorial with a life of prosperity.

The familiar blessings and curses protect the stone from defacement as do so many other inscriptions on stone that commemorate royal deeds. Yet Marduk-balatsu-iqbi is not a king; his father was a Babylonian royal official of some standing with the title 'sword-bearer of Marduk'. The stone commemorates Adad-etir, the father; it carries his 'image' (*ṣalmu*). Yet the son also expresses his commemorative purpose in terms of subsequent generations, namely, his offspring: 'he (Marduk-balatsu-iqbi) established (the memorial) for his offspring and descendants into the remote future' (*ana ṣāt ūmē ana zērīšu u piriʾšu ukin*). This places Marduk-balatsu-iqbi in the middle of the genetic chain, and we are surely right to see this memorial as expressive of Marduk-balatsu-iqbi's own sense of identity as son and then father. There is no mention of his father's death, but since deceased people are portrayed as alive in other memorial art that we will mention later, the stone may have been commissioned to commemorate Adad-etir after

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[6]WA 90834 was published in L. W. King, *Babylonian Boundary Stones and Memorial Tablets in the British Museum* (London, 1912): no. 34, pp. 115-116, plate XCII. It seems to have escaped recent scholarly comment. In normalised Akkadian, the text reads as follows: *ṣalmu Adad-eṭir nāš patri Marduk simat Sin Šamaš u Nergal paliḫ Nabû u Marduk karib šarrīšu bēlīšu Marduk-balaṭsu-iqbi mārušu rabû epušma ana ṣāt ūmē ana zērīšu u piriʾšu ukin mannu arku ša ṣalmu u narâ anna ubbatu lū ina šipir nikiltu uḫalliqu Marduk bēlu rabû ezzīš likkilmešuma šumšu u zēršu luḫalliq Nabû ṭupšar gimri mināt ūmēšu arkūti līšakri naṣiršu laʾî balāṭi līšbi.*

his death. At a guess, the larger figure on the left is the son, Marduk-balatsu-iqbi, and the smaller figure opposite is the father – because the son commissioned the memorial and the major flow of greeting seems to be right-handed and from left to right, from larger to smaller. The symmetry of design for the greeting figures has made the smaller figure into a left-handed swordsman. Also the smaller figure, if anything, looks the older of the two by paunch and jowl.

If the stone served other religious or legal purposes, then it must be said that the symbols of the gods, the inscription and the two greeting figures give us no clue as to what these purposes might be. Indeed, the stone may be simply what it is at face value – a memorial.[7] Perhaps Marduk-balatsu-iqbi conceived of commissioning this memorial as part of his filial duty on assuming head-of-household responsibility as the 'the chief son' (*māru rabû*). Perhaps setting up the portrait stele was part of a household ancestor cult with appropriate rituals.[8] However, the primary evidence of the portrayal of Adad-etir and the explicit reference to future generations marks this stone itself as the memorial that keeps alive the likeness, the name and the social status of Marduk-balatsu-iqbi's father.

Portrait Memorials from mixed backgrounds

Widening the cross-cultural comparisons further, we can mention two seventh century Aramaic memorials, each about a metre tall, from Nerab near to Aleppo in Syria. They are heavily influenced by Mesopotamian religion. They commemorate deceased priests of the moon god, Sahar.[9] The first shows Sin-zer-ibni standing with his right

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[7]   The word *narû* ('stele') offers no special clue. The visual resemblance to a Babylonian *kudurru* is misleading since the inscribed content of these *kudurru* entitlement deeds and their placement in temples gives them a clear function to do with legal rights to land, inheritance and tax concessions – see K. E. Slanski, 'Classification, Historiography and Monumental Authority: The Babylonian Entitlement *narû*s (*kudurru*s)', *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 52 (2000): 95-114. The phrase 'image and stele' (*ṣalmu u narâ*) is likely a hendiadys expressing 'portrait stele', meaning a monument which bore the likeness (*ṣalmu* – 'likeness, image') of Adad-etir. The syntax of the opening line goes 'Image: PN$_1$, [3 titles], PN$_2$, [title], made, and …'.

[8]   We would expect more memorial stones to have survived if a stone such as this was the normal focus of ritual commemoration of dead ancestors in Babylonia. For a helpful overview of funerary and caring rituals, see J. A. Scurlock, 'Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Mesopotamian Thought' in *Civilisations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. Sasson, vol. 3 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000): 1883-93.

[9]   The Aramaic texts appear with notes in J. C. L. Gibson, *Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975): nos. 18 & 19, 97ff.; translation of Si'gabbar by P. Kyle McCarter in *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 2, ed. W. W. Hallo

hand raised in greeting (figure 2). He is described as 'deceased' (*mt*). It is 'his portrait and his grave' (*wznh ṣlmh wʾrṣth*). The second with a longer text engraved above it has Si'gabbar seated with his feet on a footstool, his left hand on his knee and his right raising a cup at mouth level (figure 3). In front of his knees stands a table laden with bowls, and beyond that a far smaller male figure in attendance, perhaps a servant, who stands waving a fly-whisk above the table. The Si'gabbar text reads:

> Si'gabbar, priest of Sahar in Nerab. This is his picture (*ṣlmh*). Because of my righteousness in his presence, he gave me a good name and prolonged my days. On the day I died, my mouth was not deprived of words, and with my eyes I beheld children of the fourth generation. They wept for me and were greatly distraught. But they did not place any silver or bronze with me; they placed me (here) with (only) my clothes, so that in the future my remains would not be carried off. Whoever you are, you who do (me) wrong and carry me off, may Sahar, Nikkal and Nusk make his death ignominious, and may his posterity perish (*wʾḥrth tʾbd*).

In both inscriptions, the concept of 'the name' is important. In Sin-zer-ibni's memorial, a curse will remove the name, that is, the identity and person of a would-be grave-robber: 'May [the four named gods] tear your name and your place from life' (*DNN₄ ysḥz šmk wʾtrk mn ḥyn*, lines 9-10). In Si'gabbar's, the moon god bestows on him 'a good name (*šm ṭb*)', that is the reputation and standing that goes with the career status. Notice that blessing brings not only a long life but continuity of generations: 'with my eyes I beheld children of the fourth generation' (cf. the ideal in Job: 'he saw his children and his children's children, four generations', Job 42:16). Yet this form of continuity through offspring is not sufficient in itself, or rather it is only part of the story. The monument with its engraved representation of the deceased Si'gabbar and the memorial meal provide the rest.

   We take it that the picture of the laden table, and the honoured deceased raising his bowl to drink, dramatise the fellowship of the commemoration meal. The primary funerary meal might have been

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and K. Lawson Younger (Leiden: Brill, 2000): 185; photos of Sin-zer-ibni and Si'gabbar memorials in *ANEP*: p. 86, no. 280 and p. 208, no. 635 respectively. The Mesopotamian gods are more familiar as Sin, Shamash, Ningal and Nusku. Hebrew *ṣelem* ('image') is cognate with Akkadian *ṣalmu* and Aramaic *ṣalmā*. Hadadyisᶜi, the ninth century governor of Gozan on the Habur, used the Akkadian *ṣalmu* and the Aramaic *ṣlm* and *dmwtʾ* in his bilingual to refer to his three-dimensional life-sized statue that he set up before Adad for his blessing (A. Abou Assaf, P. Bordreuil, A. R. Millard, *La Statue de Tell Fekherye et son Inscription bilingue assyro-araméenne* (Etudes Assyriologiques, ERC 7; Paris, 1982).

repeated ritually by the family on a monthly or annual basis under the leadership of the male heir and new head of household as a way of keeping the name alive and, perhaps, invoking the blessing of the deceased. The missing piece of information that the inscriptions do not supply is the whereabouts and spiritual state of the deceased or what his survivors believed they would achieve by commemorating Si'gabbar and Sin-zer-ibni. In the inscribed text we hear Si'gabbar's deceased voice speaking to us from the grave as witness to his family's mourning of him: 'they wept for me and were greatly distraught' (*bkwny whwm ʾthmw*, lines 5-6). This 'voice from the grave' effect is a dramatic convention that we can also document in Phoenician sources, namely the coffin inscriptions of Tabnit and Eshmunazar of Sidon from the fifth century BC with their typical pleas to be left undisturbed and their supporting curses.[10]

The Nerab memorials help with the interpretation of earlier uninscribed tombstones from the Early Iron Age at Carchemish, Hama and Marash, from around the eighth to ninth centuries BC. A fragmentary inscribed memorial from Marash depicts two women seated opposite each other at a table. The one on the left holds a cup in her raised left hand and a spindle in her right at chest level. Opposite sits a woman with a mirror in her raised right hand and a spindle in her left hand at chest level. The Luwian inscription in Hittite hieroglyphs is badly damaged but identifies one woman as 'Tarhuntiwasatis, wife of Azinis'. Since it is the deceased person who is usually depicted drinking from the cup, Hawkins suggests that the memorial may depict Tarhuntiwasatis twice, on the left with the cup, as a deceased participant in the funerary meal, and on the right with the mirror, as alive prior to her death.[11]

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[10] Tabnit : 'I alone am lying in this coffin. Do not open my cover and disturb me for such a thing would be an abomination to ʿAshtart! And if you do open my cover and disturb me, may you have no offspring among the living under the sun (*zrʿ bḥym tḥt šmš*), or a resting-place with the Repha'im (*wmškb ʾt rpʾm*)' (P. K. McCarter's translation in *CoS* 2: 182). Eshmunʿazor: 'I was snatched away (when it was not my time), a man of a limited number of days, an invalid, an orphan, the son of a widow; and (now) I am lying in this coffin, in this grave in a place that I built … let him have no resting-place with the Repha'im, let him not be buried in a grave, and let him have no son or offspring to take his place! (*bn wzrʿ tḥtnm*)' (*CoS* 2: 182-183).

[11] J. D. Hawkins 'Late Hittite Funerary Monuments' in *Death in Mesopotamia: RAI 26*, ed. B. Alster (Mes 8; Copenhagen: Akademisk forlag, 1980): 213-225, esp. 218 with plates VII, a, b and c; *ANEP*: 207, no. 631. Other monuments from Marash, understood as funerary scenes, are pictured in plate VI b (man and wife with grapes and mirror) and *ANEP*: 207, no. 632 (man attended by two women with mirror and

Memorial stones for these non-royals reveal the human concern for continuity with the dynastic ideology stripped away. The stones show husbands and wives seated together, or a couple with their son who is embraced by his mother, or a mother with a son who is a scribe standing on her lap as though he were a three year old. Bonatz, who has studied a wide range of Syro-Hittite funerary monuments, traces these family scenes of non-royals back to the royal ancestor cult of the Hittite Empire in the second millennium, including the use of symbols such as the distaff and spindle that appears in the hands of women.[12] Leaving aside the royal images and dynastic rituals of the early Ancient Near Eastern period,[13] we note that the motive for the erection of a private memorial stele is not related to any self-legitimating claim by the living that is obvious to us. Rather, the depictions seem to be meeting the human need to visualise, remember and commemorate, and to sense a continuity that is not abolished by death.

Ghostly Ancestors

Perhaps we can take the wording of a Mesopotamian ritual for dealing with the troublesome attentions of the unhappy dead, namely of a ghost (*eṭemmu*), as a pointer towards a happier state when the family's ancestors were restful. The ritual relating to family continuity says:

> If someone has been 'espoused' to a dead man (*mīti*) and a ghost (*eṭemmu*) has seized him, you place a chair for the spirits of his family (*ana eṭemmē kimtīšu*) to the left of the cult installation, you place chairs to the left for the spirits of his family, you make a food offering for the spirits of the family, you give them

spindle). See further Hawkins, 'More Late Hittite Funerary Monuments' in *Anatolia and the Ancient Near East: Studies in Honor of Tachsin Õzguç*, ed. K. Emre et al. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1989): 189-197.

[12] He interprets the spindles as 'symbols of constant rotation in the sense of regular regeneration' as part of essence of ritual commemoration: 'On the stelae the sense of the repast as renewal is symbolized by the attributes held in the hands of the dead … the Hittite word for spindle ^{GIS}*ḫuĩša* can be derived from *ḫuĩš* – "to live"' – D. Bonatz, 'Syro-Hittite Funerary Monuments: a Phenomenon of Tradition or Innovation?' in *Essays on Syria in the Iron Age*, ed. G. Bunnens (ANE Studies Supplement 7; Louvain: Peeters , 2000): 189-210.

[13] The early Ebla, Sargonid and Mari evidence has been reviewed again recently by B. B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Tradition* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996). The following essays by W. W. Hallo are particularly important for the early period: 'Texts, Statues and the Cult of the Divine King' in *Congress Volume Jerusalem 1986*, ed. J. A. Emerton (VTSup 40; Leiden: Brill, 1988): 54-66; 'Royal Ancestor Worship in the Biblical World' in *Sha'arei Talmon: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East presented to Shemaryahu Talmon*, ed. Fishbane et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992): 381-401.

presents, you praise them, you honour them (*kispa takassip qīšāti taqassunūti tuššaraḫšunūti tukabbassunūti*).[14]

The family is perceived to span the living and the dead. We tend to hear more about family continuity from Mesopotamia when things go wrong and when binding curses need to be released, curses that exercise generational effects. However, this form of family dys-functionality provoked by the restless dead seems to be the flip side to a more positive sense of continuity – with properly buried and commemorated ancestors. We can say this because we can document prayer for help made to benevolent ancestors after offerings and libations. Those invoked were 'my father, my grandfather, my mother, my grandmother, my brother, my sister, my family, kith and kin, as many as are asleep in the netherworld' – in fact, the close relatives of living memory.[15] The relationship with ancestors is not a dead issue in today's world. In contexts from Asia to Africa, and in spiritist circles elsewhere, ritual attempts at communication with the dead are express-ive of indigenous religions and of some uneasy Christian syncretism. The living rely on this continuity for attribution of meaning to present circumstances and for success in future projects.

Adoptions and Wills

Continuity between the living and deceased individuals appears in legal documents as a matter for planning and enactment. Wills from twelfth century Emar in Syria can legally 'convert' daughters into sons for inheritance purposes so that they take over filial duties towards family gods and ancestors. An example is the case of a priestess who inherits everything from her father. Aha-madu may have been of high status as a priestess, but other testaments suggest that ordinary lay daughters could be 'converted' to male heirs as well, with the same ritual responsibilities.

> I have now made Aha-madu, the *qadištu*-priestess, both male and female in status. She shall reverence my gods and my dead (*ilāniya u mētēya liplaḫmi*). And I have given to my daughter Aha-madu my house, my possessions, and my

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[14] *CAD E, eṭemmu*: 399 from H. Zimmern, *BBR* 2 (Leipzig, 1901): no. 52, also quoted in A. Malamat's discussion of the royal ancestor cult (*Mari and the Early Israelite Experience*, Schweich Lectures 1984; Oxford: OUP, 1989: 98).

[15] See B. R. Foster, *Muses 2* (1996): 562-563. 'To Family Ghosts' (Ebeling, *KAR 227, rev. 3:8–24 = Ebeling, TuL*: 131-132). The summary statement with the euphemism of 'sleeping' (*ṣalālu* 'to lie down, to sleep') reads: *kimtiya nišūtiya u salātiya mala ina erṣetim ṣallū.*

inheritance portion, as much as my father gave to me. And Aha-madu shall give her possessions to whoever should honour her. And my brothers shall not make a complaint against my daughter Aha-madu concerning house or field. And now my brothers have lost the tablet concerning my household. If that tablet should turn up, this tablet will break it.[16]

The continuity factor secured by the will itself is strongly in evidence. There is the look back ('as much as my father gave to me') plus the immediate forward look ('I have given to my daughter Aha-madu') and then the further continuity of her eventual bequeathing ('and Aha-madu shall give her possessions to whoever should honour her'). Concern with the material possessions runs in parallel with concern with the immaterial, that is with the spirits of the deceased.

The verbs *palāḫu* ('to fear, reverence, honour') and *nabû* ('to invoke') suggest a religious dimension most naturally fulfilled through ritual in the form of recited words accompanying symbolic acts. Invoking the name (*šuma zakāru*; *zākir šumi* 'a speaker of the name') is a natural way of keeping alive the link between the dead and the living that runs in parallel with begetting offspring – hence the phrase 'he will have an heir who will name his name' (*apla zākir šumi iraššī*).[17] But more than naming the name is involved. Some testamentary texts use *kunnû,* the D form of the verb *kanû* ('to care for') that suggests provisioning, for example with food offerings and libations. Nuzi wills speak of 'spirits' (*eṭemmū*) where Emar uses 'the dead' (*mētū*): for example, 'If Ashte dies, whoever among my daughters who holds my fields and houses, (and) is dwelling in my house, shall honour the gods and my spirits (*ilāni u eṭemmūya ipallaḫšu*)'.[18] The wording of these

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[16] RE 86:11–32, a testament witnessed by the king of Carchemish (Gary Beckman, *Texts from the Vicinity of Emar in the collection of Jonathan Rosen*, History of the Ancient Near East/Monographs 2, Padova: Sargon srl, 1996: 107-108). Other examples include texts 1 and 2 referring to the daughters Unara and Al-hati in J. Huehnergard, 'Five Tablets from the Vicinity of Emar', *Revue d'Assyriologie* 77 (1983): 11-43.

[17] *CAD Z*, 18: *zakāru* 2.c′ for further references.

[18] BC 5142: rev. 27-31. For a careful discussion of these texts, see W. T. Pitard, 'Care of the Dead at Emar' in *Emar: The History, Religion, and Culture of a Syrian Town in the Late Bronze Age*, ed. M. H. Chavals, Maryland: CDL, 1996: 123-140 and B. B. Schmidt, 'The Gods and the Dead of the Domestic Cult at Emar: A Reassessment': 141-163. Both authors make a good case for distinguishing the ancestors from the deities in the Nuzi and Emar texts. The exact nuance of *nubbû*, assuming it is the D form of the root *nabû* 'to name, call, invoke' is a moot point – to pronounce the name to keep it alive as a commemorative act; to invoke the name to call up the dead to be present; to invoke the ancestors for their blessing or help; to invite them to be present in order to receive the offerings. Necromancy, that is getting information or divinatory guidance from the ancestors, should not be assumed without additional contextual support.

wills fall short of saying explicitly that the beneficiary must honour the testator's spirit upon his death, but that would be the most natural inference to draw, the more so since we have adoption contracts with the following phrasing:

> As long as PN$_1$ [the adopter] lives, PN$_2$ [the adopted] shall honour her (*ipallaḫši*). When PN$_1$ dies, PN$_2$ her 'daughter' shall pour water for her (*mê inaqqīši*).

> In my lifetime you shall give me food. When I die, you shall make funerary offerings for me (*mitakuma kispa takassipa*).[19]

The honouring and the feeding simply continue the care that was given to the testators in their old age into the afterlife. To be deprived of this provision of an heir and 'water pourer' (*aplu nāq mê*) is a misfortune that features in the extensive corpus of gruesome fates wished upon miscreants in curses (e.g. from Esarhaddon's loyalty oath imposed on the Medes: 'may there be no carer as water-pourer for your ghost' (*eṭemmakunu pāqidu nāq mê ay irši*, EVT §47, line 452, 7th century). The dead to some extent depend on the living for their continued existence, or at least for their restful existence.

III. Concluding Reflection

If Mesopotamian and some Syrian and Phoenician cultures expressed their need for survival in the memories of those above ground under the sun through portrait memorials, wills and an ancestor cult, orthodox Yahwism apparently responded differently to this human problem since we hear nothing in the Old Testament that encourages ritual communication with the dead. Indeed, there are canonical statements that go so far as to say that the dead themselves remember nothing (Eccl. 9:5: 'for the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing'). In Israelite society that lived with genealogies and a developed sense of a meta-narrative, there came the point sooner or later when the vast majority of forebears were gone and forgotten as though they had never lived. Absalom, Rachel and the names in the genealogies and stories of the Old Testament turn out to be exceptions whose names survived. Yet these preserved names have themselves rapidly parted from 'the

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[19] BE 14: 40 (Nippur, Middle Babylonian) lines 11ff and *MDP* 23: 285 (Susa) lines 15ff discussed in M. Bayliss, 'The Cult of Dead Kin in Assyria and Babylon', *Iraq* 35 (1973): 115-123, esp. p. 120.

name' in its fuller Semitic sense. The names and even the vignette stories are but a weak witness to the fullness of the identity, being, existence and life experience of the person herself or himself. Qohelet rightly remarked: 'their love and their hate and their envy have already perished'.[20] 'For there is no enduring remembrance of the wise or of fools, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten' (Eccl. 9:6; 2:16; compare 1:11). It is inevitably so for the vast majority.

In the face of this, Ben Sirach opted for the theological continuity of covenant, supplemented with recognised heroes of faith. He was on the right track. The author of Hebrews built on this covenant and faith continuity but radically updated it (Heb. 11). Theologically, covenant was and is God's response to our human need for continuity. The new covenant inaugurated by Jesus in the upper room in continuity with remembering the Passover (Luke 22:15) looks back but also looks forward. It offers covenant members an ongoing relationship, in which names are known, and it offers an identity that death does not terminate. Apparently, though mysteriously, new covenant manages to take up a continuity with our first bodily existence and identity, but in the process it eclipses that continuity encoded in our genes and genealogies in favour of the resurrection body. The longings and anxieties of the ancient world and the engraved memorial pictures of the deceased are not thereby disparaged. Rather a new way of being human and of real continuity has come to light in the hope of the resurrection.

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[20] Our contemporary monuments, gravestones and war memorials – prolific in London where this paper was written – attest to the same basic human instinct to memorialise and commemorate. Who knows what will remain of them in 3000 years time or more, the equivalent stretch of time forwards as back to the memorials discussed here? Few South African tourists could say anything now about the statue of Smuts that stands behind Winston Churchill facing Westminster Abbey in Parliament Square, though he was general, prime minister, statesman and vice-chancellor of Cambridge University, and has another statue to his memory in Cape Town.

Fig. 1 Babylonian Memorial Stone
WA90834

Fig. 2 Sin-zer-ibni

Fig. 3 Si'gabbar