

Placing and Displacing the Dead in the Book of Kings

Francesca Stavrakopoulou
University of Exeter

Society of Biblical Literature
San Diego, November 2007

Graves function as much for the living as they do for the dead. For the dead, graves might be understood as an unchanging, perpetual and specialised place of dwelling, or a transformative space in which one might enter into a new form of existence.¹ For the living, graves serve not only to hold the remains of the deceased, or to memorialise the existence of an individual but—significantly—a grave or collection of graves might also serve to mark the boundary of a given place or to signal possession or ownership of a territory.²

The interrelation of graves and boundaries is closely tied to the veneration of ancestors. Within ancient Near Eastern ancestor cults, perceptions of the continued existence of the dead were bound up with the family household; simply put, death did not break these domestic relationships, it merely altered the nature of family members' interaction with one another. The ancestors played an important dual role within the lives of their descendants: they bore some responsibility for the fertility and perpetuation of the family line, and they acted as guardians and guarantors of hereditary property and places, including the land upon which most Near Eastern families lived, worked, died and were buried.³ Ancestral tombs thus functioned as physical markers of the continued existence and permanent presence of the dead.

¹ For anthropological discussions of death and burial, see, for example, P. Metcalf and R. Huntington, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (second edn; Cambridge: CUP, 1991); A.C.G.M. Robben (ed.), *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

² See, for example, M. Bloch, *Placing the Dead: Tombs, ancestral villages, and kinship organisation in Madagascar* (London: Seminar Press, 1971); J. Glazier, 'Mbeere ancestors and the domestication of death', *Man* (ns) 19.1 (1984), pp. 133-147; M. Parker Pearson, *The Archaeology of Death and Burial* (Stroud: Sutton, 2003), pp. 124-141; K. Prag, 'The Dead Sea Dolmens: Death and the Landscape', in S. Campbell and A. Green (eds.), *The Archaeology of Death in the Ancient Near East* (Oxbow Monograph 51; Oxford: Oxbow, 1995), pp. 75-84; cf. I. Malkin, 'Land Ownership, Territorial Possession, Hero Cults, and Scholarly Theory', in R.M. Rosen and J. Farrell (eds.), *Nomodeiktēs: Greek Studies in Honor of Martin Ostwald* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 225-234; C.M. Antonaccio, *An Archeology of Ancestors: Tomb Cult and Hero Cult in Early Greece* (Lanham; Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995).

³ Institutional ownership of the land upon which many Near Eastern families worked need not preclude a familial, ancestral dimension to its character. Mario Liverani argues that, under certain circumstances, land granted or 'loaned' from temples and palaces often became 'private' land in practice; although

The Hebrew Bible offers many reflections (and refractions) of the importance of ancestral land and its boundaries.⁴ Included among these is Prov. 22:27-28, in which the Israelite is warned not to remove the ancient landmarks set up by his ancestors and not to pay off his debts by selling his ancestral estate and the family tomb within it (here reading מַשְׁכָּב as ‘grave’, rather than ‘bed’). Deut. 19:14 prohibits the removal of a neighbour’s boundaries, which, it is stated, were set up by past generations; and in 27:17, the reader is warned that a curse will fall upon the person who defies this instruction.⁵ Indeed, it is this emphasis upon the sacrosanct nature of the ancestral estate that explains Naboth’s refusal in 1 Kgs 21:1-4 to sell King Ahab his נַחֲלָה, his ancestral inheritance.⁶ There are clear indications within other texts that territorial boundaries might be marked by graves. Joshua is said to have been buried upon the boundary of his ancestral estate (Josh. 24:30; Judg. 2:9) and in 1 Sam. 10:2, Rachel’s tomb is located on the boundary of Benjamin. In Josh. 8:29, the grave of the defeated Canaanite king of Ai lies at the entrance of the city-gate and in 7:26, Achan’s corpse is buried in the Valley of Achor, which elsewhere is situated on the boundary between Benjamin and Judah (e.g., Josh. 15:7).

The placement of the dead plays an important ideological role in the book of Kings. One of the clearest examples is the formulaic attribution to almost every Davidic king of a burial place with his royal ancestors in the City of David.⁷ Whether

initially only the *obligations* on the land were heritable, the land itself soon was too (M. Liverani, ‘Land Tenure and Inheritance in the Ancient Near East: The Interaction between “Palace” and “Family”’, in T. Khalidi (ed.), *Social Transformation in the Middle East* [Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1984], 33-44).

⁴ See the important article by H. Brichto, ‘Kin, Cult, Land, Afterlife—A Biblical Complex’, *HUCA* 44 (1973), pp. 1-54.

⁵ This instruction exhibits an interesting tension between Deuteronomic land ideology and the socio-religious concerns of a more traditional culture, for it implies that the allocation of even God-given land must respect ancestral boundaries. For the possible socio-political motivations of Deuteronomic opposition to cults of the dead, see J. Blenkinsopp, ‘Deuteronomy and the Politics of Post-Mortem Existence’, *VT* 45 (1995), pp. 1-16. As N. Habel (*The Land Is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995], ch. 4) and others have observed, these two perspectives (God-given land/ancestral land) also appear to be merged within the territorial ideology of the book of Joshua.

⁶ See further T.J. Lewis, ‘The ancestral estate (נַחֲלָה אֲלֵהֶיָם) in 2 Samuel 14:16’, *JBL* 110 (1991), pp. 597-612.

⁷ The formula ‘and he was buried with his ancestors in the City of David’ is applied to most of Judah’s kings up to and including Ahaz (1 Kgs 14:31; 15:24; 22:50; 2 Kgs 8:24; 9:28; 12:21; 14:20; 15:7, 38; 16:20) with only minor variations: the subclause ‘(buried) with his ancestors’ is not included in the burial notices for David (1 Kgs 2:10), Solomon (11:43) and Abijam (15:8). Thereafter, the burial notices are inconsistent or non-existent: the burial places of Hezekiah and Jehoiakim are not given (2 Kgs 20:21; 24:6); Josiah is said to be buried in Jerusalem ‘in his tomb’ (23:30); Jehoahaz dies in captivity in Egypt (23:34); neither the deaths nor burials of Jehoiachin and Zedekiah are mentioned; and the burial places of Manasseh (21:18) and Amon (21:26) are located in the Garden of Uzza. There

this formula derives from an annalistic source, or has been created as a structural device,⁸ its repeated imaging of Judah's past kings gathered in the royal tombs in the ancestral city emphasizes the potency and durability of the Davidic dynasty. This schematic portrayal of an unbroken line of ancestors and descendants,⁹ stretching into the past and into the future, functions as a conceptual shorthand to emphasize the divinely-sponsored longevity of the Davidic house, its religio-political legitimacy as the guardian of YHWH's specially-selected dwelling place, and its permanent occupation of that place.

In contrast, the Kings Writer is inconsistent in applying a death and burial formula to his stories about the monarchs of the Northern Kingdom: only some are said to have 'slept with his ancestors' and the burial locations of just a few are given.¹⁰ As such, Northern kingship is portrayed as dynastically stunted and territorially fragmented, for its dead kings are frequently heirless and their burial places (if identified) are dispersed among various locations. The placing of the dead thus functions for the Kings Writer as a means of elevating the ancestral heritage of the Davidic line and its fixed location in Jerusalem whilst at the same time denigrating the weaker ancestral pedigree of the Northern kings and their transient possession of the land, further perpetuating the anti-Northern polemic pervading the books of Kings.

But this is not the only way in which the placing of the dead plays a prominent role in the books of Kings. Of particular significance is the tradition about the prophecy and burial of the Man of God at Bethel (1 Kgs 13:1-32) and the related story of the disinterment and burning of bones during Josiah's reform (2 Kgs 23:15-20). The former text tells the story of a Judahite Man of God who prophesies that Josiah will slaughter priests and burn bones upon Bethel's altar; upon his death, the Man of

are good reasons to suspect that the garden burials of Manasseh and Amon mark their deliberate displacement from the ancestral line at the hands of the Kings Writer (despite the historical probability that this was a most suitable location for royal tombs); see further F. Stavrakopoulou, 'Exploring the Garden of Uzza: Death, Burial and Ideologies of Kingship', *Biblica* 87 (2006), pp. 1-20.

⁸ On use and nature of the death and burial formulae in Kings, see, for example, N. Na'aman, 'Death Formulae and the Burial Place of the Kings of the House of David', *Biblica* 85 (2004), pp. 245-254; S.R. Bin-Nun, 'Formulas from Royal Records of Israel and Judah', *VT* 18 (1968), pp. 429-432; B.O. Long, *1 Kings with an Introduction to Historical Literature* (FOTL 9; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 22-28.

⁹ The historicity of this portrayal of the Davidic line's steady continuity is best viewed through a skeptical lens given the disruptive occurrences of coups, counter-coups, assassinations and foreign captivities in the biblical traditions concerning Judah's kings.

¹⁰ Jezreel, Tirzah and Samaria figure most prominently in locating the dead kings of Israel. For an overview of biblical references, see E. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (JSOTSup 123; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), pp. 116-117.

God is buried at Bethel in the ancestral tomb of a local prophet. In the latter text, Josiah pulls down Bethel's altar, empties the surrounding tombs of their bones, and burns them on the altar, thereby fulfilling, so it is claimed, the prophecy of the Judahite Man of God, whose tomb is left undisturbed. Several features of these related stories suggest that both the placing and displacing of the dead serves a dynamic ideological purpose in Kings. Accordingly, these texts warrant close attention, and form the focus of the rest of this paper.

Josiah's destruction of Bethel is set against the backdrop of his purge of the Jerusalem cult (2 Kgs 23:4-14). As is well known, the king is said to have rid the Jerusalem temple and the Judahite sanctuaries (במזוֹת) of their idolatrous cults. The destruction of these cults is heavily emphasized throughout the text: priests are deposed, sanctuaries and sacred buildings are broken down, and altars are smashed. The destruction of sacred objects devoted to a variety of deities is similarly comprehensive; the reader is told no less than three times that these cult objects are removed from the temple and burned (vv. 4, 6, 11). As if to underscore further the eradication of these cults and their objects, the narrator claims that the burned remains of sacred vessels were scattered on graves (v. 6) and that the defiled sanctuaries in Jerusalem were filled with human bones (v. 14).

Several peculiarities in the text are suggestive of a complex compositional history, but the narrator states that Josiah's attention then turned to Bethel (v.15), where he dismantled the altar and burned the sanctuary and its asherah. The most distinctive feature of the reform at Bethel, however, is the emptying of nearby tombs and the burning of the bones they had housed. The purpose of this action would initially appear to be straightforward, for the narrator explains that 'Josiah took the bones out of the tombs, and burned them on the altar and defiled it' (v. 16). It seems odd that Josiah should *burn* the bones on the altar in an effort to defile it. After all, simply bringing a sacred site into contact with human bones is presented in the same chapter (v. 14) as being a sufficient means of defiling the Jerusalem sanctuaries. Why, then, are the bones said to be *burned* on the altar?

The suggestion that the ashes would permeate the stone, rendering the altar irreversibly defiled,¹¹ has not been taken particularly seriously. William Boyd Barrick offers an alternative proposal. He argues that bone-burning is not intended simply to

¹¹ M. Haran, *Temple and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), p. 138.

defile the altar, but to inflict post-mortem punishment upon the past inhabitants of Bethel.¹² Certainly, the danger of disinterment was strongly felt by most ancient Near Eastern peoples, who feared a restless existence after their deaths and displacement from their ancestral cults if their bones were removed from their tombs. This is well attested in numerous texts and inscriptions, including the so-called ‘Royal Steward’ inscription from Judah,¹³ and is vividly illustrated in a Neo-Assyrian text in which Ashurbanipal describes his desecration of Elamite royal tombs:

The tombs of their former and latter kings, (who had) not revered Ashur and Ishtar, my lords, (who had) harassed my royal ancestors, I (Ashurbanipal) ravaged, tore down and laid open to the sun. Their bones I carried off to Assyria, thus imposing restlessness upon their spirits, and depriving them of food offerings and libations.¹⁴

This text presents disinterment as a punishment imposed upon enemies and their ancestors, a motive also exhibited in Jer. 8:1-2. In these verses, YHWH declares that the bones of Judah’s kings, princes, priests and prophets and those of all citizens, will be disinterred, spread out in full view of the heavenly host they had worshipped, and left, ungathered and unburied, to become dung upon the ground.¹⁵ It is possible, then, that in disinterring bones and destroying them—perhaps to prevent their reburial—Josiah’s actions at Bethel are to be understood as a post-mortem punishment of those who had worshipped at what is presented by the Kings Writer here and in 1 Kgs 12–13 as an unlawful sanctuary.

This also finds some support in 2 Kgs 23:19-20, in which Josiah’s reform extends to the sanctuaries in Samaria. Here, he slaughters priests on their own altars and burns bones upon them. These verses are widely regarded as an addition, perhaps specifically crafted to reflect anti-Samaritan or anti-Samaritan tendencies,¹⁶ but it is interesting to note that they present Josiah’s bone-burning in a slightly different way:

¹² W.B. Barrick, *The King and the Cemeteries: Toward a New Understanding of Josiah’s Reform* (VTSup 88; Leiden: Brill, 2002), ch. 8; see also W.G. Dever, ‘The Silence of the Text: An Archaeological Commentary on 2 Kings 23’, in M.D. Coogan, J. C. Exum and L.E. Stager (eds.), *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), p. 158.

¹³ N. Avigad, ‘The Epitaph of a Royal Steward from Siloam Village’, *IEJ* 3 (1953), pp. 137-152; P.K. McCarter, ‘The Royal Steward Inscription’, in W.W. Hallo and K.L. Younger (eds.), *The Context of Scripture, Volume Two* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 180.

¹⁴ For a discussion of this text and its translation, see M. Cogan, ‘A Note on Disinterment in Jeremiah’, in I.D. Passow and S.T. Lachs (eds.), *Gratz College Anniversary Volume* (Philadelphia: Gratz College, 1971), pp. 29-34, esp. p. 30.

¹⁵ Cf. Cogan, ‘A Note on Disinterment’, pp. 29-34.

¹⁶ Cf. M. Cogan, ‘A Slip of the Pen? On Josiah’s Actions in Samaria (2 Kings 23:15-20)’, in C. Cohen, A. Hurvitz, and S.M. Paul (eds.), *Sefer Moshe* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004), pp. 3-8.

although in these verses it is claimed that Josiah destroyed the Samaritan sanctuaries in just the same way he had the cult at Bethel, the punishment appears to be directed not at *past generations* of worshippers, but at the current idolators, for the bones burned on the altars would seem to be those of the newly-slaughtered priests, rather than those of the long-since-dead. Significantly, this neatly complements the Man of God's prophecy against Bethel's altar in 1 Kgs 13:1-2, for this too portrays the bones to be burned on the altar as those belonging to the priests Josiah will sacrifice; the oracle contains no reference to the emptying of tombs. This also seems to be the way in which the Chronicler understood Josiah's actions. In his version of Josiah's reform, in which, interestingly, bone-burning takes place not in the north but in Jerusalem and Judah,¹⁷ the bones of the high-place priests are burned on their own altars in punishment of their illegitimate worship, just as the ashes of destroyed cult statues appear to be scattered over the graves of those who had worshipped them (2 Chr 34:4-5). Again, there is no mention of disinterment.

Thus in spite of the repetition of the bone-burning motif in the accounts of Josiah's reform in both Kings and Chronicles, the incident at Bethel in 2 Kgs 23:16 remains distinctive, for it deals not with the ritualised slaughter of priests and the burning of their bones, but with the deliberate disinterment of the surrounding tombs and the burning of bones taken from them. Yet whilst this can be understood as a form of post-mortem punishment, there is likely a further reason motivating this portrayal of bone-burning at Bethel. A clue lies in the way in which Josiah is said to have dealt with the idolatrous cults in Jerusalem.

Despite the narrator's disdain for these cults, their sacred status is underscored in the very nature of their destruction, for the cult objects devoted to foreign gods are burned to ashes in the Kidron valley (vv. 4, 6, [see also 11, 12]). Whilst their burning is to a degree familiar—it is reminiscent, for example, of descriptions of ritual destruction in biblical and Ugaritic literature—the location of the burning is also significant. The Kidron valley is presented in several texts as a boundary of Jerusalem (e.g., 1 Kgs 2:37; Jer. 31:40) and so in this regard it is unsurprising that archaeological evidence attests to its important function as a burial site throughout the second and

¹⁷ Barrick, *King and the Cemeteries*, pp. 61-63, argues that the Chronicler's version of events, set in Jerusalem, reflects the original (and historical) location of Josiah's bone-burning activities.

first millennia BCE.¹⁸ Within the context of the city's sacred geography, this valley was likely perceived in mythic-symbolic terms as a sacred boundary, a liminal space simultaneously marking three interrelated places: the transitional space between the ordered city and the uncultivated wilderness, the roots of the holy hill upon which the heavenly and earthly realms met, and the intersection of the earthly realm and the underworld.

Accordingly, and contrary to some interpretations, the burning of these cult objects in the Kidron valley is not akin to the incineration of rubbish on the outskirts of a city, but rather, a ritual effecting the transformative 'decommissioning' of sacred vessels and their destructive transference across this boundary from one realm to another, thereby effecting their total annihilation. In the text, this is apparent in the claim that the ashes of the cult objects are cast upon the graves in the Kidron valley.¹⁹ It is thus striking that the bones taken from the tombs in Bethel are subjected to a similar, though inverted process. They are taken from one sphere—an entrance to the underworld—and ritually burned in another, suggesting that, like the cult objects taken from the Jerusalem Temple, they too were perceived to be sacred.

In ritually destroying sacred bones at Bethel, Josiah's actions might be better understood not simply as a post-mortem punishment inflicted upon idolatrous worshippers, but as the deliberate eradication of Bethel's ancestral cult. The important role of Bethel in the Jacob traditions suggests that the sanctuary's ancestral credentials were, in certain circles at least, a crucial aspect of its religious profile. So it is perhaps unsurprising to find that in the book of Kings, what looks to be an attack on Bethel's ancestral cult forms the climax of its denigration of this sanctuary.

The prominent focus upon Bethel's tombs in the account of its desecration is also significant given that it is often presented in the Hebrew Bible as a boundary sanctuary, lying between the territories of Ephraim and Benjamin (Josh. 16:1-2; 18:13) and in close proximity to the boundary between the northern and southern kingdoms. As observed at the outset of this discussion, graves and tombs were often

¹⁸ See, for example, L.Y. Rahmani, 'Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs: Part Two', *BA* 44 (1981), 229-235; D. Ussishkin, *The Village of Silwan: The Necropolis from the Period of the Judean Kingdom* (trans. I. Pommerantz; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Fund, 1993); see too A. Kloner, 'Iron Age Burial Caves in Jerusalem and Its Vicinity', *BAIAS* 19-20 (2001-2002), pp. 95-118, and literature cited there.

¹⁹ Notice that the phrase **בְּנֵי הָעָם** here need not be rendered 'common people', but may mean something like 'generations of people'; cf. Ug. *bn* (pl.), 'family', 'clan', 'heirs' (G. del Olmo Lete and J. Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition, Part One* (trans. W.G.E. Watson; Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 224).

placed on territorial boundaries as a means of marking territorial partitions and ownership of land. Thus it is notable that Josiah's excursion to Bethel has been taken by many as evidence of Judah's territorial expansion into the north,²⁰ either during the reign of Josiah himself,²¹ or at some point in the Neo-Babylonian period, when Bethel was probably the chief sanctuary in the region,²² or during the early Persian period, when Bethel was replaced by Jerusalem.²³ It is also possible that ownership of this crucial site was claimed and contested by northern and southern territories at several points throughout its history, as might be suggested by some of the inconsistencies in biblical boundary lists. Therefore, if the tradition in 2 Kgs 23:15-20 should allude to the annexing of Bethel, the bone-burning motif could well reflect the possibility that territorial gains could be marked by the ritualised destruction of the ancestors who had guarded the boundaries and so occupied the land.

This suggestion finds some resonance with one of the other key features of the story of Josiah's assault on Bethel: his instruction to leave undisturbed the tomb housing the bones of the Judahite Man of God. The reader is told:

He said, 'What is that (memorial) marker I see?' The people of the city told him, 'It is the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and predicted these things that you have done against the altar at Bethel'. He said, 'Let him rest; let no one move his bones.' (2 Kgs 23:17-18a).

Although certain features of the Man of God's oracle against the altar at Bethel do not directly match its claimed fulfilment in 2 Kgs 23:15-20,²⁴ the Kings Writer is careful to address the matter of the burial in Bethel of the Judahite Man of God. In keeping with the emphasis in Kings upon the placement of the dead, the Man of God is buried away from his ancestral tomb as a punishment for his disobedience to YHWH: in agreeing to dine with the prophet from Bethel, he ignores the divine command against eating and drinking in Bethel (1 Kgs 13:21-22, cf. vv. 8, 16). Instead, his body is

²⁰ Cf. N. Na'aman, 'Josiah and the Kingdom of Judah', in L.L. Grabbe (ed.), *Good Kings and Bad Kings* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), pp. 189-247.

²¹ See the discussion in F.M. Cross and G.E. Wright, 'The boundary and province lists of the Kingdom of Judah', *JBL* 75 (1953), pp. 202-226; see also I. Finkelstein and N.A. Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001), pp. 345-353.

²² See the discussion in J. Blenkinsopp, 'Bethel in the Neo-Babylonian Period', in O. Lipschits and J. Blenkinsopp (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), pp. 93-107, and the literature cited there.

²³ See, for example, P.R. Davies, 'Josiah and the law book', in L.L. Grabbe (ed.), *Good Kings and Bad Kings* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), pp. 65-77, esp. 75-76.

²⁴ In 1 Kgs 13:2-3, the threat of disinterment is notably absent.

buried in Bethel in the family tomb of his prophetic host (v. 30). Yet in placing the tomb of the Judahite Man of God in Bethel, the Kings Writer sets himself up to score another winning point against the sanctuary. In describing the disinterment and burning of bones at Bethel, the motif of ancestral destruction is employed to denigrate and disempower the cult at Bethel. As an important aspect of this, the tomb of the Judahite Man of God is protected and left unharmed, its grave marker prominently displayed, seemingly staking an ideological claim on this place by memorialising the Judahite, prophetic word of judgement against the ‘illegitimate’ cult there.²⁵

The preceding analysis inevitably raises questions concerning the likely compositional context of this polemic against Bethel in Kings. The story of Josiah’s destruction of the sanctuary is often played as a trump card by both those supporting and contesting theories of a pre-exilic edition of Kings. In the broadest of terms, and as has been observed already, the tradition would (in theory, at least) suit a range of historical settings: perhaps it derives from the territorially-expansionist ambitions of the seventh century king Josiah, or it may reflect competitive hostilities between Jerusalem and Bethel during the Neo-Babylonian or Persian period.

But these possibilities are complicated by indications of confusion within the texts. In 1 Kgs 13:32 and 2 Kgs 23:19-20, the focused assault on Bethel slides into a general attack on Samaria’s sanctuaries, though it is unclear whether this place name refers to the city or to the region. A similar problem also arises with the terminology employed of the old prophet buried in the tomb housing the Judahite Man of God; in 1 Kgs 13:11 he is said to come from Bethel, but in 2 Kgs 23:18 he is described as ‘the prophet who came out of Samaria’;²⁶ again, it is unclear whether this designation refers to the city or to the region.²⁷ These problems are often blamed on a clumsy redactor, keen to extend the cult crimes and punishment of Bethel to a broader

²⁵ The preservation of the bones of the ‘prophet from Samaria’, whom most identify as the prophet of Bethel known from 1 Kgs 13, does not eclipse this ideological claim on Bethel, for the preservation of his bones appears to be incidental, rather than intentional. The implied supremacy of the Judahite prophetic word over that of Bethel is intimated in the Bethel prophet’s apparent and humbling ‘adoption’ of the Judahite Man of God as his new (or perhaps replacement) kinsman (1 Kgs 13:30) and his wish to be interred with his prophetic brother (v. 31).

²⁶ In view of the tradition in 1 Kgs 13, most commentators detect a redactional or scribal error here, and assume the prophet from Bethel is the intended referent. J.A. Montgomery (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Kings* [ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1951], p. 535) also assumes an error here, suggesting that Judah is the correct toponym, for he prefers to read in this verse a double-reference to the bones of the Judahite Man of God (‘and they left his bones alone, the bones of the prophet who came from Samaria’).

²⁷ Cf. 1 Kgs 13:32 and 2 Kgs 23:19, in which reference to the ‘cities of Samaria’ indicates that the term is employed here as a regional designation.

northern population, including, perhaps, the foreigners and ‘Samaritans’ (שַׁמְרִיִּים) said in 2 Kgs 17:24-41 to live in the territories of the former Northern Kingdom.²⁸ The apparent confusion of Bethel and Samaria seems likely to occupy redaction critics for some time yet, but also inhibits a more robust contextualization of the Bethel polemic in Kings.

The portrayal of Josiah’s specific attack on Bethel’s tombs is also difficult to contextualize in this way, for an ideological interest in the placing and displacing of the dead is not easily pinpointed to a particular stage within the likely compositional history of Kings. Certainly, the importance and legitimacy of Bethel’s ancestral credentials is reflected positively in biblical traditions associating Jacob with the sanctuary (Gen. 28:11-22; 31:13; 35:1-15; cf. Hos. 12:3-5), contrasting sharply with the negative treatment of its ancestral tombs and bones in 2 Kgs 23:15-20. But whilst this suggests that Bethel’s status was a contested issue in certain circles, both the positive and negative traditions arising from these disputes could also be placed at a range of points stretching from the latter part of the Neo-Assyrian period through the Neo-Babylonian and well into the Persian period, during which time the regional standing of both Bethel and Jerusalem waxed and waned at various times. It is possible that an emergent post-exilic discomfort with practices associated with ancestor cults played a role in the shaping of the tradition, and that a developing interest in the lives, deaths and tombs of prophetic figures underscores some of its details,²⁹ but the episode itself is not easily identified with a precise stage in the composition- or redaction-history of Kings.

One final observation remains. The ideological interest in the placing and displacing of the dead is not a theme exclusive to Kings. In particular, several post-monarchic texts exhibit a concern for the placement and displacement of dead Davidic kings. The Chronicler tailors his burial notices to suit his theological appraisal of each monarch, so that, for example, the favoured Hezekiah, whose burial place is not given in 2 Kgs 20:2, is accorded an honourable burial beside his royal ancestors in 2 Chr.

²⁸ Is the sliding of designations in these texts informed in some way by the tradition in 2 Kgs 17:27-28 that (a) priest(s) from Samaria relocated to Bethel to offer religious instruction to the local inhabitants?

²⁹ Cf. H. Niehr, ‘The Changed Status of the Dead in Yehud’, in R. Albertz and B. Becking (eds.), *Yahwism After the Exile: Perspectives on Israelite Religion in the Persian Era* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003), pp. 136-155, esp. pp. 138-140, 154; J.N. Lightstone, *The Commerce of the Sacred* (BJS 59; Chico: Scholars Press, 1984), pp. 67-78. Traditions concerning the lives, deaths and burial places of the prophets are also reflected in *The Lives of the Prophets*; see further D.R.A. Hare, ‘The Lives of the Prophets’, in J.H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Volume 2 (New York, Doubleday, 1992), pp. 379-399

32:33, whilst reprobates and diseased kings (suffering on account of their sin), including Asa (16:13-14), Uzziah (26:23) and Ahaz (28:27) are excluded from the Davidic tombs. In Jer. 22:19 and 36:30, Jehoiakim is divinely threatened with a dishonourable burial,³⁰ and many commentators take Ezek. 43:7-9 as a priestly appeal that the royal dead be disinterred and removed from their position of close proximity to the Jerusalem temple.³¹ These texts hint at a persistent interest in the precise whereabouts of the dead kings,³² despite the cessation of the monarchy and the re-invention of the formerly royal Jerusalem temple cult in the post-exilic period.³³ The extent to which this is to be related to religio-political realities underlying the literature is uncertain. But as this discussion has explained, burial placement is an ideological feature of both literary representation and historical realism: one of its primary functions is the symbolic marking of territorial boundaries; the placement and displacement of the dead plays a crucial role in demonstrating the occupation and possession of territory. In this sense, then, it is more than likely that the placing of Jerusalem's royal dead was a live issue for those supporting or contesting a claim to post-monarchic Jerusalem.

³⁰ On Jehoiakim's burial in the 'Garden of Oza' in 4 Kgdms Lucianic 24:6, see Stavrakopoulou, 'Exploring the Garden of Uzza', pp. 3-4, and S. Delamarter, 'The Vilification of Jehoiakim (a.k.a. Eliakim and Joiakim) in Early Judaism', in C.A. Evans and J.A. Sanders (eds.), *The Function of Scripture in early Jewish and Christian Tradition* (JSNTSS 154/SSEJC 6; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 190-204, esp. 196-198.

³¹ On the possibility that these verses refer to memorial monuments, see D. Neiman, 'PGR: A Canaanite Cult Object in the Old Testament', *JBL* 67 (1948), pp. 55-60. Others suggest that these verses refer not to royal tombs but to offerings made within the cult of dead kings; see further J.H. Ebach, 'PGR = (Toten-)opfer? Ein Vorschlag zum Verständnis von Ez. 43,7.9', *UF* 3 (1971), pp. 365-368; M.S. Odell, 'What was the Image of Jealousy in Ezekiel 8?', in L.L. Grabbe and A.O. Bellis (eds.), *The Priests in the Prophets: The Portrayal of Priests, Prophets, and Other Religious Specialists in the Latter Prophets* (JSOTSup, 408; London and New York: T&T Clark, 2004), pp. 131-148; Niehr, 'The Changed Status of the Dead in Yehud', pp. 138-140.

³² This is also attested by the memorial plaque of King Uzziah of Judah, dated to the first century BCE and inscribed with the statement, 'The bones of Uzziah, king of Judah, were brought hither; not to be opened'; see further E.L. Sukenik, 'The Funerary Tablet of Uzziah', *PEQ* 2 (1931), pp. 217-221.

³³ It is possible that texts such as Isa. 57:3-13; 65:1-4; 66:17 (cf. Ezek. 43:7-9) allude to post-exilic cults of the royal dead; see further T.J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); Stavrakopoulou, 'Garden of Uzza', pp. 1-20.