Votive Objects from Palestine

With my PhD project *Votive Objects from Palestine* it is my aim to assess votive objects from Palestine from the Iron Age, Persian and Hellenistic periods in order to receive an impression of votive practice in Palestine in these periods.

The background for this project was set during my work on my Prize Thesis in which I exposed '*the law of the Nazirite*' in Numbers 6:1-21 to a ritualistic reading. The Nazirite vow led me on to conditional vows in the Hebrew Bible and in the Ancient Near East and thus I arrived at an interest for votive practice in general.
I hope to make a thematic presentation of votive practice in Palestine in the Iron Age, Persian and Hellenistic periods, and to compare this practice with what is mentioned of votive practice in the Hebrew Bible.
Among other things I hope that an investigation of this kind may cast light on one of the generally overlooked types of sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible, namely the votive-offering, *nædær*, and its related subgroups of the *shelamim*-sacrifice, the thanksgiving offering, *todah*, and the free-will offering, *nedabah.*
Further more I wish to compare votive practice in Palestine with votive practice in the Aramaic-speaking Syrian area, Phoenicia and Greece and perhaps to draw lines to votive practice in Palestine in the Roman Imperial period.

One of my working hypothesises, to be confirmed or disproved, is whether votive practice in Palestine and in the Hebrew Bible was increasingly influenced by the Hellenistic culture.

So far I am concentrating on votive *inscriptions*. My main body of material is the votive inscriptions from Mount Gerizim published by Yitzhak Magen in 2004.[1]
The group from Gerizim includes some 400 inscriptions written in Aramaic, Hebrew and Samaritan. Unfortunately they are all found in secondary contexts. The inscriptions are written on building material such as building stones, paving stones and pillars and none of these are believed to be in situ.[2]
I have decided to include the very limited number of votive inscriptions from Iron Age II as well. This I have done primarily because of the unusual examples of intermediary votive inscriptions found in Khirbet el Kom and Kuntillet 'Ajrud.[3]

The project implies the following methodological considerations; firstly a question of terminology: the term 'votive' is used in its broad sense about more or less every kind of gift given to a deity or a sanctuary. Usually sacrifices are not considered votive objects. I propose a more nuanced terminology, subdividing votive practice and votive objects into 'votive/vow-based', 'dedicatory' and 'intermediary'. This should help to place votive practice more accurately in relation to the categories of sacrifice and prayer.

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[1] Magen, Yitzhak, Misgav, Haggai and Tsfania, Levana, 2004, *Mount Gerizim Excavations*, Volume 1, Israel Antiquities Authority, Jerusalem.
[2] Magen 2004, p. 13-14.
[3] The term intermediary votive practice is my own. I describe this phenomenon in greater detail in the paper itself. The inscriptions in question can be found in Sandra Landis Gogel, *A Grammar of Epigraphic Hebrew*, Society of Biblical Literature, Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia. K. el-Kom 3, p. 412, and K. Ajrud 14 and 15, p. 414-15.

Secondly, comparing archaeological material with references to ritual behaviour in the Hebrew Bible, demands a critical methodological evaluation of whether a historical religious and ritual system is presented in the Hebrew Bible and how scholars should work with such a system.

The paper that I shall present at the 2008 OTSEM meeting in Oslo is a discussion on terminology and I expect it to become one of the very first chapters of my dissertation.
In the paper I describe the present state of terminology on votive practice and I propose that we use a broad definition when we speak of votive practice in general.
Furthermore I put forward a way of subdividing votive objects within this broad definition.

Since the chapter on terminology is one of the opening chapters of the dissertation I touch upon several topics which I shall return to in later chapters. These topics are the dynamics of gift giving, the spontaneity of votive practice, the sacrificial system in the Hebrew Bible, conditional vows in the Hebrew Bible, intermediary votive practice and the transcription, translation and interpretation of the Palestinian votive inscriptions that I use as examples.