Production and Reproduction in Israeli Family Religion

Kerry M. Sonia

Kerry M. Sonia is a Research Associate in the Women in the Study of Religion Program at Harvard Divinity School. She received an A.B. in Religious Studies from Brown University (2007), an M.T.S. in Hebrew Bible from Harvard Divinity School (2009), and a Ph.D. in Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean from Brown University (2017). Her first book, The Enduring Dead: Kinship, Cult, and Death in Ancient Israel (forthcoming with SBL Press), examines the cult of dead kin in the context of Israeli family religion, and her current project focuses on the social and ritual dimensions of childbirth in ancient Israel.

ABOUT

In ancient West Asia, the close association between the formation of the human and different modes of household production, such as pottery and weaving, points toward the fundamental role of materiality in the construction of social and ritual actors. This role is particularly clear in descriptions of childbirth in the Hebrew Bible, where the formation of humans and bearing of children is often compared to ceramic production. Clay, it seems, is a potent medium for this discourse—it is both malleable and incredibly durable. It is both mundane, coming from the ground itself, and subject to formation and inscription by elite systems of power. In addition, clay is the raw material for the built environment of different social spheres, including the domicile, temple, and palace. Examining the materiality of childbirth ritual, including clay imagery and ritual objects, helps us understand not only the dynamics of Israeli family and household religion but also the ways in which biblical writers leverage these rituals to make broader theological claims about Yahweh and Israel.

WHEN
March 11, 2020
12:00 pm

WHERE
Hirschfeld House
163 George St
Seminar room #101

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No RSVP required