

Late 1st-Millennium B.C.E. Levantine Dog Burials as an Extension of Human Mortuary Behavior

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Simple dog burials, dating primarily to the second half of the 1st millennium B.C.E. (Persian–Hellenistic periods [ca. 6th–1st centuries B.C.E.]), have been excavated at more than a dozen Levantine sites, ranging from a handful of burials to more than 1,000 at Ashkelon. This study systematizes previously discussed canine interments, distinguishing intentional whole burials from other phenomena (e.g., dogs found in refuse pits), and suggests a new interpretation in light of human mortuary practice in the Iron Age II–III-period (ca. 10th–4th centuries B.C.E.) Levant. The buried dogs seem to be individuals from unmanaged populations living within human settlements and not pets or working dogs. Frequent references to dogs in literary and epigraphic Northwest Semitic evidence (including Hebrew, Phoenician, and Punic personal names) indicate a complex, familiar relationship between dogs and humans in the Iron Age Levant, which included positive associations such as loyalty and obedience. At some point in the mid-1st millennium B.C.E., mortuary rites began to be performed by humans for their feral canine “neighbors” in a manner resembling contemporaneous low-energy–expenditure human burials. This behavioral change may represent a shift in the conception of social boundaries in the Achaemenid–Hellenistic-period Levant.

Keywords: dog burials; mortuary practice; Iron Age Levant; human–animal studies; zooarchaeology; archaeology of ritual; archaeology of Phoenicia; archaeology of ancient Israel; archaeology of Judah; animals in the Levant

Intentional dog burials sharing distinct characteristics have been recovered from Achaemenid Persian¹ and Hellenistic strata (ca. 6th–1st centuries B.C.E.) at several sites in the central and southern Levant (i.e., modern Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria). The interments involve the careful arrangement of a dog on its side in a shallow, seemingly unmarked pit, its feet and tail tucked beneath its body as if sleeping. In nearly every case, the dogs are unaccompanied by grave goods, though a few seem to have jar or other ceramic vessel

fragments placed over the body. Previous scholarship on this phenomenon, for the most part, has focused on the site of Ashkelon, where over 1,000 recovered dog burials of this type led excavators to suggest several possible cultic explanations (see below). Early studies characterized the phenomenon as “Phoenician,” positing an innovative and short-lived healing cult of various potential origins. More recently, Canan Çakırlar and her colleagues (2013) offered a systematic treatment of the broader Levantine scope of the burials, concluding that it was as yet impossible to pinpoint the beliefs, deity, or ritual represented by the practice. Indeed, the various sites that produced relevant dog burials dating to the second half of the 1st millennium B.C.E. have been independently associated with Aramaean, Phoenician, Israelite, Judahite, and Philistine cultures, indicating the need for an explanation transcending these regional collective identities.

The present study offers a new interpretation of late 1st-millennium B.C.E. Levantine dog burials, arguing

¹ Within this study, “Achaemenid,” “Persian,” and “Iron Age III” will be used interchangeably to indicate the period of Achaemenid rule in the Levant (ca. 539–332 B.C.E.).

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that the features characterizing these canine interments are consistent with the treatment of contemporaneous human remains in the Levant. Arrangement of the body in a simple pit grave, along with the absence of grave goods (with the exception, in a few cases, of broken ceramic vessels), suggests similarity between ritual behaviors applied to humans and dogs in the period in question. Rather than signifying the introduction of a new cult, the behavior may represent the extension of societal boundaries—and the postmortem signaling of these societal boundaries in ritualized burial—to include canine members of the community.

The Ashkelon Phenomenon

The densest concentration of 1st-millennium B.C.E. Levantine dog burials comes from the site of Ashkelon in what is today southern coastal Israel. At least 1,250 dog burials² were excavated over the course of seven years; one can hear the change in tone from electrified excitement to exhaustion in the publications as the canine remains continued to reveal themselves. The mortuary profile was one of feral animals;³ a complete range of ages was represented, with larger percentages of juveniles (in a study of 1,238 burials, 62% of the corpus were described as puppies [0–6 months in age]) than subadults (5% of the burials at 6–18 months old) and adults (33%) combined (Wapnish and Hesse 1993). Those that had suffered injuries detectable in the skeletal remains seem to have lived with those injuries long enough for them to have healed,⁴ and there was no evidence in the assemblage for traumatic cause of death (see below). The uniformity of the dog burials was as astounding as their quantity; each dog was positioned carefully in a small oval hole without grave goods. The burials do not seem to have been marked with tombstones or other monuments; no markers were preserved, and some of the graves were cut into by later burials. Remains were oriented in many different directions; some specimens were placed on their left side, some on their right side, with examples pointing in each of the cardinal directions.

² Paula Wapnish and Brian Hesse (1993) listed 1,238 burials; subsequently, Lawrence Stager referred to 1,500 “partial or complete burials” (King and Stager 2001: 93). This is now thought to be somewhat inflated, so I have adopted the phrase “at least 1,250” in this study as a conservative approximation of the total number of burials from the site.

³ Note that the term “feral” in this case refers to animals descended from domesticated populations but living unmanaged by human agents (whether in the wild or within human settlements).

⁴ “Pathologies and diseased bones are present in perhaps 5% of the adult and subadult specimens. . . . These include damaged paws, knitted breaks, dislocations, parasite infections, and dental anomalies” (Wapnish and Hesse 1993: 60).

The deceased dogs seem to have been buried in fill used to level an industrial quarter of Ashkelon, though it is clear that the interments continued beyond the three excavated squares to an unknown extent.⁵ The majority of burials were dated by the excavators to the 5th century B.C.E., but as Baruch Halpern noted, they were more precisely described as having been placed into a 5th-century matrix and may thus be later, perhaps 4th century B.C.E. in origin (2000: 137).⁶ No dog burials have been found in association with the earlier Iron Age II–period city of Ashkelon. Since at the time of the initial publication most of the comparable dog burials also came from Levantine Phoenician sites, the excavators pointed to the significance of Phoenician control of Ashkelon in the Persian period (Halpern 2000: 135) as a critical part of the dog burials’ interpretation (e.g., Stager 1991a). As has now become clear, however, the Levantine dog burial phenomenon is by no means limited only to culturally Phoenician sites, making a cultic explanation (as articulated by the excavators) more difficult to support. The cross-cultural appearance of similar canine interments seems to suggest a broader Levantine behavioral shift, as explored below.

Other Late 1st-Millennium B.C.E. Levantine Dog Burials

The interpretation of late 1st-millennium B.C.E. Levantine dog burials has been hindered by the incomplete publication of archaeologically recovered canine skeletal material and a tendency to define the data set either too broadly or too narrowly. Several ritual behaviors are captured, for example, when studies include canine remains recovered from refuse pits or isolated ritual contexts (e.g., decapitated dog remains [see below]). While intentional dog interments can be found at archaeological sites ranging from the Neolithic to the Roman periods, the connections among these various types and traditions of canine burial are far from clear.

For the present study, the criteria for the primary dog-burial phenomenon in question may be defined as follows: (a) the burial dates to the mid–late 1st millennium B.C.E. (Iron Age II, Iron Age III/Persian, or Hellenistic

⁵ An unknown number of dog burials were lost to erosion on the western edge of the mound (west of Grids 50 and 57). The northern extent of the burials seems to have been reached in Grid 38, but the southern and eastern extents are unknown as far as published reports indicate (Stager 1991a; 2008; Wapnish and Hesse 1993).

⁶ Note that the remains in Grid 50 were “capped by architectural remains that establish a terminal date possibly as late as the first part of the fourth century” (Wapnish and Hesse 1993: 57), while the Grid 38 dog burials certainly continue into the Hellenistic period (see **Table 1**).

period, as defined by the excavators);⁷ (b) the majority of burials at a site contain a single dog (where no grave contains more than two); (c) the dog has been intentionally deposited;⁸ and (d) the dog remains seem to represent a primary burial of a skeletally intact animal (even if the remains are not fully preserved). Fourteen Levantine sites meeting these criteria characterize the primarily Persian–Hellenistic-period phenomenon, ranging from Tell Afis in the north to Ashkelon in the south and continuing inland to sites such as Gezer, Jerusalem, and even Hesban (see **Table 1**).⁹ While this corpus includes burials that were not carefully examined or well published, as noted in the table, I argue that the most parsimonious interpretation of these understudied interments is that they conform to the broadly articulated criteria outlined above: Post hoc discussions of these dog burials indicate they are initially ignored because they are thought to be intrusive, natural deaths, or singular examples (until several have accumulated, e.g., at Tell Afis). Because these unpublished burials did not attract the attention of excavators as ritual deposits (like many of those in **Table 2** [see below]) but are numerous enough to have been subsequently brought to bear on the dog burial debate in previous discussions, it seems reasonable to include them in **Table 1** as consistent with the phenomenon as observed at other better-studied sites.

An additional 11 Levantine sites featuring dog remains dating to the 1st millennium B.C.E. have been introduced to the debate in previous studies, but the dog

burials in this second corpus do not conform to the criteria outlined above; they are represented in **Table 2** alongside divergent burials from three of the sites from **Table 1** (i.e., Hesban, Ashdod, and Ashkelon). The descriptions of these 14 sites have been compiled on the basis of partial lists or notes from numerous previous publications, although several of the entries remain unpublished and are known only through word of mouth. This corpus includes dog remains found in contexts identified as refuse pits by the excavators, those with notably incomplete skeletal remains (especially where the preserved remains are missing skulls, possibly reflecting intentional decapitation), and other variants not adhering to this study's criteria as outlined above. The geographical distribution of the total set of dog burial sites detailed in **Tables 1** and **2** may be found in **Figure 1**.

In at least three cases from this second corpus, a clear argument can be made that the dog(s) was (were) interred (and perhaps killed) as part of a religious or magical rite: at Yavneh (found in a *favissa* associated with a Philistine temple), Ashdod (found in a room from a cultic precinct), and Tel Migne-Ekron (found near a cultic installation). Three other cases show probable cut-marks and may have been prepared for eating: the puppy at Tel Migne, a handful of bones—not yet fully studied and published—from Tell es-Safi/Gath (Lev-Tov 2012: 602), and the two puppies buried in pots from Ashkelon (Horwitz 2015: 147).¹⁰ In several cases, the incomplete (or absent) publication of the remains prevents full assessment. This second corpus of canine interments and the degrees of variation it represents must be taken into account in any theoretical explanation of the first, more homogeneous corpus; it seems clear that multiple attitudes toward dogs coexisted in the mid–late 1st-millennium B.C.E. Levant, and these attitudes were likely contextually specific. However, a new attitude toward dogs, imbuing them with what seems like a basic notion of “personhood,” seems to have emerged in a way that crossed existing cultural and political boundaries.

For the purposes of the present study, “personhood” describes anything recognized as having agentive membership in the human community or meaningful social identities (together termed “social persona”). Additionally, personhood may be assigned within a particular culture according to a degree or place on a spectrum rather than as a binary proposition. Given the limits of the archaeological data in question, personhood is detectable to us only through textual references (as yet absent in the cases in question) or through the commemoration of the

⁷ The chronological parameters for inclusion (within the 1st millennium B.C.E.) were determined post hoc; we simply do not have any examples of 1st-millennium B.C.E. dog burials of this type from Iron Age I strata. While religious or behavioral continuity with the phenomenon under discussion may yet be found in dog burials prior to the 1st millennium B.C.E., consensus opinion holds that the collapse of the Late Bronze Age world-system had a dramatic impact on the social structures of all affected Mediterranean and Near Eastern regions. Therefore, I argue that the Iron Age evidence should be understood independently from earlier precedents before making any such connection. Of course, it is worth noting that intentionally buried dogs (usually with grave goods, however, and often accompanying human burials) are a worldwide phenomenon and have been found as early as 14,000 years ago (cf. Morey 2006).

⁸ This may be judged on the basis of the manmade pit itself, as well as from the articulation, preservation, and immediate context of the skeletal remains: “[N]on-food animals, because they are not butchered, often remain intact. Microfauna and smaller mammals, such as dogs and cats, may be left where they die, or a malodorous carcass may be moved to a street or alley, empty field or dump. If the carcass is covered with dirt there is less likelihood of it being scavenged and a greater possibility of the skeleton remaining intact. Otherwise, accumulations of dirt and debris will eventually bury the carcass but the slower pace of this process will expose the bones to greater disturbance” (Wapnish and Hesse 1993: 56).

⁹ The site of Khaldeh is included despite the date of the burials remaining unclarified before the untimely death of the excavator.

¹⁰ For the suggestion that the consumption of dog meat was a marker of Philistine ethnic identity, see also Maeir, Hitchcock, and Horwitz 2013: 6–7.

TABLE 1. First-Millennium B.C.E. Levantine Dog Burial Sites Meeting the Specified Criteria

<i>Sites (North–South)</i>	<i>Number of Dog Burials</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Notes on the Burials</i>	<i>Publications</i>
Tell Afis (55 km south of Aleppo)	> 4	On the eastern side of the acropolis (Area G); associated with a subterranean paved courtyard (Building G) in its post–late 8th-century B.C.E. destruction phase	7th–6th-century B.C.E. deposits; unknown total number of dog burials (they were not drawn or studied, as they were originally thought to be intrusive)	Minunno 2016; for the Area G structure/Building G, see Soldi 2009: 100–105 and Cecchini 2014: 60–63
Beirut	7 exposed; > 3 more in adjacent balks	BEY020	3 covered by amphora sherds (5th century B.C.E.); 2 associated with flint flakes	Sader 1996: 24; Finkbeiner and Sader 1997: 130–32
Khaldeh/Khaldé	8	Near a 10th–8th-century B.C.E. human cemetery	Archaeological relationship with cemetery not clarified (unknown date)	Saidah 1967: 166; Sader 1996: 24; Finkbeiner and Sader 1997
Tell el-Burak	(a) 1 (b) 1; plus 6 scattered bones	(a) Area 3, 29/24, Locus 82 (b) Area 3, 29/25, Loci 3, 45	4th century B.C.E. (a) Covered in fragments of an amphora, 0–6 months of age (b) Possibly post–4th century B.C.E., 3–4 years of age (Çakirlar et al. 2013: 246)	Kamlah and Sader 2003: 149, fig. 8; Sader and Kamlah 2010: 132; Çakirlar et al. 2013
Tel Megadim/Tel Sahar	(a) > 2 (b) > 5	(a) 1967–1969 excavations (b) 1994 salvage excavations	Persian-period loci (a) minimum number of individuals (MNI) = 2, identified from faunal remains from the Magen Broshi excavations (b) 3 juveniles, 2 adults, and some dispersed bones	Sapir-Hen, Wolff, and Bar-Oz in press
Tel Dor	(a) 1 (b) > 7 (c) 12 2014 Total: 24 from Persian–Hellenistic levels	(a) Area B2, at the bottom of a pit containing ballistae (b) In the streets east and north of the “Magazine” building (c) Areas D5 (empty zone south of a street) and D2	(a) Hellenistic-period pit, sealed by a Roman floor (b) “Several dog burials and many pits” (especially 4th century B.C.E.) (Stern et al. 1997: 40) (c) Persian–early Hellenistic periods; 7 juveniles and 5 adults	(a) Stern, Gilboa, and Sharon 1992: 42–43; Stern and Gilboa 1993: 39 (b) Wapnish and Hesse 1993: 68–69; Stern, Gilboa, and Berg 1995: 65; 1997: 40; 1998: 39; Çakirlar et al. 2013: 256 (c) Sapir-Hen 2011; Sapir-Hen et al. 2014
Near Ben Gurion Airport and Lod/Lydda	Unknown	Unknown	[Summer 1992 excavation]	Wapnish and Hesse 1993: 68
Gezer	(a) 13 (b) 2 (c) > 3 nearby	(a) Area 14, 24, 33, 35 fills; Macalister Field VII, Stratum IV (b) 1 from within Fill 15011, 1 from Pit 35062; Macalister Field VII, Stratum IV (c) Tandy Institute for Archaeology excavations, Stratum V?	Persian–Hellenistic periods? (a) 4 complete, 4 almost complete, 3 with only incomplete postcranial remains, 2 with only skulls	Gitin 1990: 19–20, 311–65; Wapnish and Hesse 1993: 68–69; Ortiz and Wolff 2012: 8–9; Çakirlar et al. 2013: 256–57
Tell Hesban (see also Table 2)	(a) Scattered bones (b) 6 partial and complete	(a) Areas B and D (1960s excavations) (b) Area B (1976 excavation)	(b) Hellenistic period (197–63 B.C.E.); 6 burials spread across 5 loci (2 young dogs buried together in B2:80); described as “quickly and perfunctorily buried carcasses” (von den Driesch and Boessneck 1995: 73)	(a) Little 1969 (b) Weiler 1981: 170–173; Mitchel 1992; Wapnish and Hesse 1993: 69; von den Driesch and Boessneck 1995
Gan Sorek/Gan Soreq	Unknown	Unknown	Persian–Hellenistic periods? (not mentioned in ‘Ad and Dagot 2006)	Edrey 2008: 276 (recording personal correspondence with Uzi ‘Ad and Moshe Sade)
Ashdod (see also Table 2)	5	Area M, Square T/7	Strata IV–V (Persian); lying on sides, usually 1 dog to a pit; 1 perhaps interred with a person	Dothan and Porath 1982: 42–44; Wapnish and Hesse 1993: 68–69

TABLE 1.—*continued*

<i>Sites (North–South)</i>	<i>Number of Dog Burials</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Notes on the Burials</i>	<i>Publications</i>
Jerusalem (City of David)	2	Area G, Locus 1207; under the northern tower of “Nehemiah’s wall,” on the eastern fortification line	500–450 B.C.E.; possibly Hellenistic? 2 adults (buried concurrently?), found on top of fill containing late 6th–early 5th-century B.C.E. ceramics	Mazar 2009: 28; Raban-Gerstel et al. 2015
Shoham/Khirbet Abu Hamid	7	Area D; southwestern part of the tell	Persian period; burials made in a fill layer; 1 sealed by a possible Persian-period fortification wall	Nadelman 1994: 80
Ashkelon (see also Table 2)	> 1250	Grid 38: Dogs in streets or thoroughfares between buildings in the northeastern area of the tell Grid 50: Leveling fill over a warehouse on the southwestern side of the city Grid 57: Leveling fill south of Grid 50	ca. 450–400 B.C.E. (Grids 50 and 57); ca. 450–370 B.C.E. (Grid 38)	Stager 1991a; 1991b; Wapnish and Hesse 1993 (reprinted as Wapnish and Hesse 2008)

TABLE 2. First-Millennium B.C.E. Levantine Sites with Dog Burials in Other Configurations

<i>Sites (North–South)</i>	<i>Number of Dog Burials</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Notes on the Burials</i>	<i>Publications</i>
Abu Danneh/Abou Danné (25 km east of Aleppo)	(a) > 8 (b) Several incomplete Total: 14–15	(a) “Fosse 1” (b) “Fosse 2”	150–100 B.C.E.; greyhound-type dogs (a) 2 juveniles, 6 adults, in pit with remains of chicken, cattle, and goat (b) Miscellaneous dog bones in pit with pig, cattle, donkey, horse, human, and camel bones	Doyen and Gautier 1985; Wapnish and Hesse 1993: 68–69
Kamid el-Loz	11	(Not mentioned in Bökönyi 1990)	Iron Age	Bökönyi 1990: 35, 66–71
Akko	“several”	(No details published)	1st millennium B.C.E.	Heltzer 1998: 49, n. 5 (documenting personal communication with Michal Artzy)
Tell Hesban (see also Table 1)	1 (headless)	Area B	Hellenistic period (197–63 B.C.E.)	Weiler 1981: 170–73; Mitchell 1992; Wapnish and Hesse 1993: 69; von den Driesch and Boessneck 1995: 73–74
Tel Dor (see also Table 1)	Scattered remains from a MNI of 4	(Not mentioned in Sapir-Hen et al. 2014)	5 bones ascribed to Iron Age I, 2 to Iron Age I/II, and 12 (from a MNI of 2 dogs) to Iron Age II	Sapir-Hen et al. 2014: 89
Batash/Timnah	1	Refuse pit dug into Iron Age layers	Persian period; Persian-period vessel covering the body; considered refuse by excavators	Wapnish and Hesse 1993: 69; Kelm and Mazar 1995: 172
Yavneh	A few scattered bones (no cut-marks)	Locus 15 near the bottom of a <i>favissa</i> pit	Iron Age II; pit with ceramic bowls, cult stands, animal bone fragments, etc., probably associated with a nearby Philistine temple	Edrey 2008: 275; Horwitz 2015
Ashdod (see also Table 1)	(a) Unknown (b) 1 (c) 1	(a) Area D, refuse pit (b) Area M (c) Area H, Room 5321	(a) Stratum III (Hellenistic); adults and juveniles (b) Stratum VIIa; juvenile (c) Strata IX–VIII (9th–8th-century B.C.E.) room, probably part of a cultic precinct; older adult dog with pathologies	(a) Haas 1971: 212 (b) Dothan and Porath 1982: 38 (c) Maher 2005: 286–88

TABLE 2.—*continued*

<i>Sites (North–South)</i>	<i>Number of Dog Burials</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Notes on the Burials</i>	<i>Publications</i>
Tel Migne–Ekron	(a) 1 (headless) (b) Scattered remains	(a) Locus 36052, cut into Floor 36040 (b) Field IV	(a) Decapitated juvenile (4–6 months) with its head between its legs (b) Iron Age I; mostly adult animals, some bearing cut-marks Total (Lev-Tov 2012): Iron Age I = 14 bones; Iron Age II = 14 bones	Wapnish and Hesse 1993: 68–69; Dothan 2002: 17; Lev-Tov 2012: 610 (citing Lev-Tov 2000 and Maher 2004); Edrey 2013
Apollonia-Arsuf	(a) > 1 (b) > 4 (no articulated burials)	(a) Area H (b) Areas H and D (refuse pit)	(a) Early Persian (late 6th century–450 B.C.E.) (b) Late Persian (ca. 450–350 B.C.E.); incomplete skeletal remains in loci with remains of cattle, sheep/goat, horse, pig, camel, deer, birds, and fish Dog remains interpreted as herders	Sade 1999
Tell el-Hesi	(a) 1 (headless) (b) 1 (headless)	(a) Pit (b) Mud-brick silo	(a) Stratum V (Persian period); juvenile dog in a pit (b) Stratum IV (late Persian–Hellenistic periods); part of the pit fill with rim, neck, and shoulder of an amphora nearby	Bennett and Blakely 1989: 64; Bennett and Schwartz 1989: 261–62; Wapnish and Hesse 1993: 68–69
Tell Qasile	1	No details published	Persian period; found buried in or under a jar (possibly others?)	Stager 1991c: 33 (recording personal communication with Amihai Mazar)
Tell es-Safi/Gath	3 bones? (“a number of dog bones” [Lev-Tov 2012: 602])	No details published yet	Iron Age IIA; a few with cut-marks (perhaps from butchering or skinning)	Lev-Tov 2012: 602, 610
Ashkelon (see also Table 1)	2 juveniles	Grid 38; Phase 18 southern building	Early Iron Age; skinned and placed in a cooking pot as part of a foundation deposit	Stager et al. 2008: 266

social persona in ritual mortuary behavior. Discussion of the culturally constructed boundaries of personhood in the sense intended here has generated an extensive anthropological literature, especially surrounding work on prehistoric cultures, but has not yet been brought to bear on the Iron Age cultures—and canines—under examination here.¹¹

Previous Explanations

A number of solutions or explanations for the dog burials in both **Tables 1** and **2** have been suggested; a survey of the published studies may be found in **Table 3**, categorized into four families of explanations or “models.” Two of these involve cultic or religious suggestions, one focuses on the emotional bond between individual humans and animals, and one on an economic relationship.

These four models may be characterized as (1) animal associated with divine beings, (2) sacrifice or ritual slaughter, (3) pet or working dog, and (4) byproduct of dog trading. A brief discussion of each model and the problems it poses follows.

Explanatory Model 1: Animal Associated with Divine Beings

As is evident from the **Table 3** summary, most theories—those of Amir Fink, Halpern, Michael Heltzer, and Stager—propose that the dogs were considered sacred to a particular deity (Stager describes them as likely “revered as sacred animals” [e.g., 2008: 565]) and were thus afforded a ritual burial, probably upon natural death, in accordance with this cultic importance. A variety of deities of Mesopotamian (Gula, Nin-isina), Aegean (Asklepios, Aphrodite, Hekate), and Levantine (Aštart, Eshmun, Melqart, Resheph-Mukol, Atargatis) origins have been explored as possible beneficiaries of the hypothetical cult, with comparanda drawn from iconography and ritual practices from the 3rd millennium B.C.E.

¹¹ Most of the work on “personhood” has been generated in the philosophical or legal fields to define and limit protections of the law and the role of government. For a general and updated bibliography on the subject, see Shir-Vertesh 2017. See also n. 58 below.



Fig. 1. Map of the locations of dog burial sites listed in Table 1 (blue); Table 2 (red; note that Abu Danneh and Tell Afis are off the map, far to the north); and sites listed in both tables (purple). (Map by C. Wuthrich)

TABLE 3. Published Explanations for the Dog Burial Phenomenon

<i>(Model) Published Explanation*</i>	<i>Notes</i>	<i>Publication</i>
(1) Part of a healing cult associated with Phoenician presence at the site	Dogs probably roamed free (without specific care) around an as-yet undiscovered temple; compared with the 33 dog burials found at the 1st-millennium B.C.E. temple of Gula at Isin	Stager 1991a; 1991b; 2008
(1) Connected with the Persian-period cult of Astart/Astarte or Atargatis	Linked to cults of Astart on Cyprus (i.e., <i>CIS</i> 86 or the Kition plaque) and Sicily (referencing 4th–3rd-century B.C.E. coins from Eryx and Segesta featuring Aphrodite/dogs and two Hellenistic inscriptions mentioning “Astarte of Eryx”)	Heltzer 1998
(1) Asklepios/Gula worshipped as Eshmun (or Melqart?) at Ashkelon	Western spread of Asklepios cult, coupled with a popular naive linguistic association between “Ashkelon” and “Asklepios”	Halpern 2000
(1) Dogs as animal sacred to Astart	Reflecting attitudes toward dogs from RS 24.258, in which <i>ʿttrt wʿnt</i> feed a dog with food for the gods (though this causes a “chain of misfortunes”)	Fink 2003: 51–52
(2) Part of a southern Levantine cult involving ritual slaughter of dogs	Isa 66:3 interpreted as evidence for ritual dog killing; extant dog burials should be seen as part of the same phenomenon as those at Gilat (in the Chalcolithic), Tel Haror (in the Middle Bronze Age), etc.; the dogs may have been used in healing or purifying rituals (burials become a ritual deposit precinct, perhaps like a tophet)	Edrey 2008; 2013
(3) Buried selectively, reflecting a personal relationship and emotional attachment to each dog	Phoenicians develop a “strong bond” with puppies and adults alike, as “hunting dogs, sheepdogs, guard dogs, and possibly pets” (Miller 2008: 493)	Miller 2008: 491–94
(4) Buried for expediency’s sake as a by-product of the Phoenician dog trade	Phoenicians at Ashkelon were storing and trading dogs for economic reasons; the dead dogs were buried in the commercial district, where the trade took place, as a convenience, on an as-needed basis	Smith 2015

* Arranged in chronological order.

onward. Several problems with this model are evident, some of which are readily expressed by their proponents.

First and foremost, no contemporaneous temple or other cultic structure has yet been found in direct association with any of the published interred dog remains from **Table 1**, including those at Ashkelon.¹² While this need not preclude a cultic significance for the burials, the notion of the “animal associated with divine beings” is based on analogous archaeological configurations that are indeed centered on temple structures (such as the 1st-millennium B.C.E. dog burials excavated near the

temple of Nin-isina/Gula at Isin in modern southern Iraq). At those sites where it was possible to establish a broader context for the burials—for example, Beirut, Dor, and Ashkelon¹³—the burials seem to have been made in streets or alleys, or in fill associated with major structural features (such as city walls or storehouses). In other words, the spaces selected for the burial of the dogs seem to have been centrally located—often along well-used thoroughfares—but not overtly shaped, protected, or marked to passersby in a way that survives in the archaeological record. The lack of grave goods or accompanying cult objects might also be evidence against their status as sacred animals.

Second, there is scant evidence for dog-shaped figurines or other dog-centered iconography in the Levant during the Achaemenid period,¹⁴ as might also be ex-

¹² The unknown number of dog burials from Tell Afis may have been exceptional in this regard; they were found in post-destruction layers (described by the excavators as a fill or refuse area accessed during the 7th and 6th centuries B.C.E.) above or near a short-lived open-air structure of unknown, but possibly civic ceremonial, function (Building G). This structure was located about 25 m east of the “sacred area” on the acropolis, which continued to be used as such (Temple A1) during the Iron Age III period at the site, but Building G was constructed at a lower level than surrounding structures with no evidence of architectural links (or openings in the structure itself!). If the site retained some kind of cultic significance, either through association with the sacred area or through some memory of the significance of Building G (the latter of which seems unlikely, given that at least some of the material found in the vicinity seems to indicate its use as a refuse dump), the Tell Afis dog burials might be the only whole-dog burials (i.e., the only site from the **Table 1** corpus) to have been found in proximity to a cultic structure. The unpublished burials and their possible religious significance are discussed in Minunno 2016. For a description of Building G and its surroundings, see Cecchini 2014.

¹³ In Beirut (BEY 020), the burials were deposited in an open area formed by layers of debris above an Iron Age fortification glacis at the edge or foot of the city tell and outside the city walls (Finkbeiner and Sader 1997). At Dor, the dog burials were excavated in two areas: D5, in an area no bigger than 3 × 3 m in an empty zone to the south of a street (Sapir-Hen 2011); and in D2, in the streets north and east of a Persian-period storehouse or magazine building (a structure at least 20 m long [e.g., Stern et al. 1997: 40]). At Ashkelon, canid burials in Grid 38 were found in streets and alleys; those in Grids 50 and 57 were associated with leveled areas near warehouse structures (e.g., Stager 1991a: 24).

¹⁴ It may be argued that the identification of many roughly made figurines as simply “quadrupeds” in excavation reports could obscure some dog figurines. Certainly, some dog amulets and figurines are known from the Iron Age Levant, but they do not represent a high

pected to accompany a cult in which the dog was a sacred animal or central concept (and which does appear in association with the above-mentioned burials from Isin in the form of plaques and figurines clearly dedicated to the goddess).¹⁵ As Hélène Sader has pointed out,¹⁶ the sanctuary of Eshmun (Bustan esh-Sheikh) near Sidon is a contemporary space associated with healing rituals (as attested by its inscribed votive remains). Here, in particular, one might anticipate some connection to dog iconography if these were allied in the Phoenician religious sphere. Philistine iconography has proved similarly bereft of dog imagery.¹⁷

Several of the scholars referenced in **Table 3** mention the possible influence of Zoroastrian (or, more accurately, proto-Zoroastrian Persian) beliefs on this proposed cult,¹⁸ for the reason that the dog was considered second only to humans in the world view of our earliest extant Zoroastrian texts.¹⁹ However, the surviving Zoroastrian textual evidence seems to directly contradict the Levantine burial behavior, as several of the **Table 3** authors point out,²⁰ since in Persia the corpses of dogs were considered pollutants that could not be placed directly

proportion of the total animal iconography. A notable outlier may be found in a single late 6th–early 5th-century B.C.E. inscribed seal from Amrit, Syria, featuring a smiting god holding the ears of a large female dog or wolf (Pierre Bordreuil calls it simply “un mammifère”), who is suckling four small humans (De Clercq Collection 2506; Bordreuil 1986: 39, seal no. 31). Note that Brian Peckham interprets the wolf as a reference to western iconography (i.e., the Roman story of Romulus and Remus), characterizing this along with Persian and Egyptian elements in the seal imagery as “a fresh rendering of eastern and western Mediterranean traditions” (2014: 404–6).

¹⁵ However, note that representations of dogs are also uncommon in early Iranian art (the three sculpted dogs from Persepolis are a notable exception), where Zoroastrian influence might have been expected to leave an impact (Kawami 1986: 261).

¹⁶ See the write-up by an unnamed reporter in *Biblical Archaeology Review* 22 (5): 24.

¹⁷ Only one zoomorphic figurine from Tel Migne-Ekron was identified as a dog (Ben-Shlomo 2010). Special thanks to the anonymous reviewer of *BASOR* who brought this to my attention.

¹⁸ In particular, see Stager 1991a: 33 (and Wapnish and Hesse 1993: 71–72); Halpern 2000: 138–39; and Edrey 2008: 271, 276–77; 2013: 15. Geoffrey David Miller (2008: 498) mentions possible Zoroastrian influence on the book of Tobit in relation to its positive representation of dogs.

¹⁹ For an early summary of Zoroastrian views on the dog as evinced in textual sources, see Boyce 1975: 302–3.

²⁰ E.g., Wapnish and Hesse 1993: 72: “It seems clear then, that dogs would not have been buried directly in the ground in ancient Persia . . .” (Halpern 2000 cites Wapnish and Hesse on this point). Stager argued that “[a]lthough the Persian preference for dogs might have influenced the practice at Ashkelon, a Zoroastrian would not have laid the corpse of a human or a dog directly in the ground without a lining of stones or the like to protect the earth from the corpse, which was considered a highly charged pollutant” (1991a: 33; Heltzer 1998 cites this work by Stager on Persian attitudes toward dogs); in 2008, Stager wrote more broadly that “other ethnic groups, such as the Egyptians or the Persians,

into the earth, as the Levantine dog burials listed in **Table 1** were.”²¹ Textual evidence and archaeological remains from everyday practice do not always align, however, and a few whole-dog burials are known from Achaemenid Iranian sites,²² although this evidence is scattered and not always well understood or published.²³

Explanatory Model 2: Ritual Slaughter/Sacrifice

Edrey sees the ritual slaughter or sacrifice of dogs as the impetus for the dog burial phenomenon, including burials from both **Tables 1** and **2** as part of the same cultic milieu. In this model, all the buried dogs (including perhaps those of earlier periods) should be seen as sacrificial offerings to one or more Levantine deities. Edrey’s position has found support from scholars such as Liora Kolska Horwitz, who sees “strong evidence that the dogs were intentionally killed and interred in accordance with a rite” (2015: 147). While this is reasonable for cultic sites like Yavneh and others, it is difficult to generalize to the full corpus of dog burials. None of the complete, well-studied dog burials referenced in **Table 1** was noted to have suffered skeletally evident traumatic injury violent enough to have been the cause of death. In other words, no cut-marks, broken cervical vertebrae, or blows to the skulls were detectable on the studied animals. Wapnish and Hesse note that poisoning, strangulation, and drowning leave at most microscopic evidence in the skeletal (especially dental) remains; nevertheless, they conclude that among the 1,238 Ashkelon burials studied for their 1993 report, there was no evidence to suggest the dogs were sacrificed or deliberately killed. The mortuary profile of the dogs at Ashkelon further suggests that no selective killing was taking place, since all age ranges were represented and there seemed to be no burial clustering by age, size, or evident health.

Of course, not all the dog burials listed in **Table 1** were subjected to osteological analysis, making it difficult to

might have had an influence on Phoenician attitudes and rituals concerning dogs . . .” (2008: 565).

²¹ Meir Edrey (2008: 276–77) maintains that despite Zoroastrian prohibitions against killing or wounding dogs, Persian rule may nevertheless have provided fertile ground for the autochthonic Levantine cult he proposes, comparing the increase in evidence for ritualistic dog killing in Caria and Lydia (in modern Turkey) during the Persian and Hellenistic periods.

²² See, e.g., faunal reports from Median (i.e., pre-Parthian) levels at Tepe Nush-i Jan (Bökönyi 1978: 27). Jason Silverman (2011: 155; 2012: 86) notes that the exposure of human corpses may also have taken hold only after the Achaemenid period in Persia, as there are human burials attested at Persepolis (citing Schmidt 1957: 117–23).

²³ It is tantalizing to consider proto-Zoroastrian influence on the changing social conception of the dog as described in this article; however, at this stage, such a suggestion would be purely speculative.

draw conclusions about the homogeneity of the practice attested by that data (although, as mentioned above, the very fact that many were ignored by excavators as intrusive or natural deaths indicates something about their perceived normalcy). In addition, the small number of animals buried at most of the sites precludes any generalizations about the mortuary profile of the buried dogs as it relates to contemporary living (feral) populations. The position that the dog burials reflect ritual killings is still technically tenable but requires us to assume that (a) every killing represented by the studied burials in **Table 1** was conducted in a skeletally undetectable way: ritually slaughtered via severance of the soft tissue of the trachea and esophagus with no accidental breaking of bones or cutting of cervical vertebrae despite the small size of some of the animals;²⁴ (b) the ritual(s) was (were) practiced by inhabitants from many Levantine regions and cultures; (c) the age, size, sex, and health of the dog were not important to the completion of the ritual; and (d) the **Tables 1** and **2** burials represent a continuum of acceptable places, methods, and steps for accomplishing the ritual, for which (e) our only preserved textual evidence from the relevant Levantine traditions comes from a single biblical verse: Isa 66:3.

Explanatory Model 3: Pet/Working Dog

Miller (2008) argues that the act of burial as represented in the **Table 1** specimens must reflect a personal emotional bond with a particular animal and its value as a pet or working dog. In other words, Miller sees the dogs as affiliated with specific families or individuals who wished to honor their beloved animal in death (and he would therefore discard the dissimilar burials described in **Table 2** as unrelated phenomena).

The primary argument against the pet or working dog model is circumstantial—namely, the general lack of grave goods and grave markers. The dogs are in nearly every case unaccompanied by personalized grave goods or any indication of familial or “occupational” affiliation. In late classical and Hellenistic Greece, for example, preserved dog remains or the memorialization of dogs in sculpture,

literary texts, or other media often reflect the dog’s role as family pet, guard dog, or hunting companion. The only possible exception to the absence of grave goods among the **Table 1** sites are two burials from Beirut, which were found in close association with flint pieces (one of which was found on the chest of an animal). However, as the excavators point out, “as flints are also part of the surrounding sediment, it is not clear whether they are grave-gifts” (Finkbeiner and Sader 1997: 130), and the potential symbolic or commemorative connection between a dog and a flint chip or tool is opaque.

At sites with multiple dog burials, the graves seem not to have been marked in any way that would make them visible in the urban landscape; later burials not infrequently cut into earlier burials, despite the relatively short life-span of the dog burial sites (where dates can be determined). In all published cases, though the dogs seemed carefully arranged within their shallow pit graves, the graves themselves are described as irregularly organized. Finally, in the few sites where urban context may be reconstructed, the dogs do not seem to be buried in locations close to domestic structures or residential neighborhoods, perhaps indicating that they were not being memorialized for their close association with individual families. While Miller’s suggestion that the animals were cherished as individually bonded pets or working dogs seems untenable, it does seem that the granting of ritualized mortuary treatment to (some) Levantine canines in the late 1st millennium B.C.E. reflects a unique social status granted to dogs—and no other animals—in the cities and villages under consideration.

Explanatory Model 4: By-product of the Dog Trade

In the most recent study of the Ashkelon dogs, Anne Marie Smith (2015: 105) suggests that the burials at that site may have been a by-product of a booming Phoenician trade in dogs for commercial or even religious use throughout the Mediterranean, and they were buried in the commercial district as a convenience. She suggests that this commercial zone may also have been where the breeding, raising, and/or trading of dogs took place in order to keep the smell and noise of this enterprise from residential neighborhoods, and deceased dogs were buried nearby on an as-needed basis (since burning dog corpses would have been too expensive, and other methods would raise problems of disease or contamination). Smith argues that the modern presence of certain hunting-specific dog breeds at Phoenician-settled sites across the Mediterranean reflects the legacy of this trade.

Smith’s argument is an intriguing one, though for our purposes three problems must be addressed. First, no account is made of similar dog burials at other con-

²⁴ Cut-marks found on ritually slaughtered animals indicate their having been eaten afterward, and a cleanly conducted sacrificed animal would not necessarily evince cut-marks at all. (I thank one of BASOR’s anonymous reviewers for pointing this out.) The dog remains from Yavneh and Tell Mozan (Urkes, where piglet and puppy remains were found in a pit adjoining the palace, dated to ca. 2400 B.C.E.) are noted as bearing no cut-marks, despite being buried with the cut-mark-bearing remains of other sacrificial animals. Though this observation regarding sacrificial slaughter would be true under ideal circumstances, the small size of some of the canine specimens as well as the sheer numbers of burials studied still make it notable that no freshly broken bones or evidence of hasty slaughter was detected.

temporaneous Levantine sites (only Ashdod and Dor are mentioned in passing [Smith 2015: 103]), which presumably would not have been under the same environmental and economic pressure to bury many dogs in a commercial setting. Second, it is not clear why the individual burial of dogs (i.e., buried one by one “in the debris which had been used to shore up the western foundation of the commercial building, which was just outside the entrance of the holding facility” [Smith 2015: 103]) would have been more expedient than a rubbish-pit burial, if the dogs were conceived of as simple commodities. A rubbish-pit burial might involve several dogs being buried at once with other detritus in a single event of waste disposal rather than large-scale open pits filled with decaying corpses. This hypothetical practice may have resulted in more variety in the arrangement of the dead dogs and more than one burial per pit. But the consistent and numerous single burials, with each dog arranged as if sleeping, seems to contradict the expediency hypothesis (her suggestion that the dogs had all curled up when they died seems implausible). Presumably, the individual pit digging for even puppy corpses would not have been the “quickest way” to dispose of them, as she claims (Smith 2015: 103).

Third, Smith’s argument is based in large part on the general assumption that Phoenicians were the primary trade intermediaries between east and west throughout the 1st millennium B.C.E. Though she traces the use of dogs as specialized hunting companions to the Late Bronze Age, she sees Tyrians establishing a centralized trade in dogs at Ashkelon only in the Persian period. To establish the likelihood of this premise, she argues that “the Phoenicians are known to have traded in other kinds of animals” (Smith 2015: 106), and several dog breeds known for hunting have a history of being distributed throughout the Mediterranean at sites known to have been occupied by, or traded with, Phoenicians. While Smith’s arguments here are not incorrect, they do not seem sufficient to explain the phenomenon of Persian and Hellenistic dog burials. The evidence for Phoenician trade in horses, monkeys, or other animals (e.g., 1 Kgs 10:22; Ezek 27:14) comes from other time periods, scales of trade, or processes than what is represented by the dog burial corpus.²⁵ If there were another centralized trade

depot of the sort she proposes, we might expect to have found further large-scale animal burial patterns, reflecting the same problems of noise, smell, and concerns with the disposal of bodies in a commercial setting. But the ritualized mortuary treatment given to the Levantine canines in question seems not to have been granted to any other animal from the 1st millennium B.C.E., let alone others known to have been traded (by Greeks or Phoenicians), as far as current data indicates. Whether or not dogs were being bred and traded at Ashkelon, the purposeful interment of individual dogs—and dogs alone—across such a variety of sites is a question worthy of further investigation.

Dogs as Members of Society?

As an alternative to the above explanatory models, I suggest that these dog burials should be examined not according to how dogs were worshipped, sacrificed, traded, or otherwise used by humans but in light of how dogs were socially conceived. A long-standing relationship with feral dogs living in human settlements seems to have been rethought or reconceptualized, as represented in the mortuary behavior evinced by the dog burials at **Table 1** sites.

Current scholarship on the process of canid domestication posits a scenario in which the animals lived in close proximity to human groups, scavenging their food refuse and offering early warning or perhaps even protection against animal or human threats.²⁶ This “self-domestication,” caused by higher survivorship among more sociable individuals,²⁷ likely established

mortuary treatment of these animals. A third point was that the trade in horses was for war purposes, and the animals most likely died on the battlefield and were not buried.

These assertions might not preclude Smith’s explanatory model, but they do suggest the circumstantial nature of the arguments (since we have no comparable trade situation to the one Smith proposes for dogs in the 1st-millennium B.C.E. Mediterranean, and no literary or inscriptional testimony supporting the theory).

²⁶ Darcy Morey (2010) provides a useful summary of canine domestication theories and mechanisms. Current evidence suggests that the process of domestication may have happened more than once, from distinct wolf populations (cf. the recent study of Laurent Frantz and his colleagues [2016], which compared the genetic material from hundreds of modern dogs with the mitochondrial DNA from 59 European dogs living between 3,000 and 14,000 years ago, along with a high-coverage nuclear genome [sequenced 28 times] of a dog from a Neolithic human grave in Ireland ca. 2800 B.C.E.).

²⁷ “Sociability” in canids is marked by a lower cortisol response to human proximity and perhaps also higher oxytocin levels during gaze behavior toward the human face (on fear and stress tolerance, cf. Jensen 2014; on oxytocin, Bentosela et al. 2016, but see Fiset and Plourde 2015 on criticisms of the connection between oxytocin and domestication). On self-domestication of dogs more generally, see Lobell and Powell 2010.

²⁵ One of BASOR’s anonymous reviewers pointed out that, according to the biblical account, the Phoenicians did trade in other animals (e.g., 1 Kgs 10:22 and Ezek 27:14), but the 1 Kings instance was describing the time of Solomon, a period much earlier in the Iron Age than the time in which the dogs were buried in Ashkelon, and the prophecies by Ezekiel are thought to date to the end of the Iron Age, after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. The reviewer also noted that the quantities of monkeys and peacocks traded were much smaller, as the expeditions to Ophir were limited, which may be why there was no ritualized

the normative relationship between dogs and humans for many thousands of years: Dogs lived within or near human groups but without social status as pets or family members. While there is strong evidence that Near Eastern herding and hunting dogs were prized for their specialized contributions even in earlier periods,²⁸ this particular social value did not, as far as we are aware, translate into ritualized mortuary behavior on a regional scale. Further, evidence from modern Near Eastern communities indicates the two conceptions of dogs (pets/working dogs vs. dogs fending for themselves in or near human settlements²⁹) are not mutually exclusive.³⁰ The late 1st-millennium B.C.E. Levantine behavioral shift toward providing mortuary rites for feral dogs living within human settlements therefore is probably a new regional demonstration of a long-standing dog-human relationship, in which some kind of unique social role is afforded to dogs that are not pets or working animals.

The Levantine dog burials listed in **Table 1** should therefore be viewed in light of how the human dead were treated in the second half of the 1st millennium B.C.E. The canine interments seem most comparable to mid-late 1st-millennium B.C.E. human burials with the lowest levels of energy expenditure, usually explained as the graves of lower-class or poor individuals. To illustrate the similarities between these burials and those of the dogs in question, I briefly survey the human mortuary evidence from (a) **Table 1** sites preserving roughly contemporaneous human burials; and (b) broader summaries or syntheses of Levantine mortuary practice in the Achaemenid period.

Sites with Roughly Contemporaneous Dog and Human Burials

The most extensive cemetery known from Iron Age Levantine Phoenician territory is that found during the 1960s expansion of the Beirut International Airport at the site of Khaldeh (approximately 12 km south of Beirut). Nearly 560 m² of the cemetery was explored during salvage excavation, though bordering highways prevented determination of its extent. The excavated portion of the cemetery contained more than 422 human burials dated by the excavators to the 10th through 8th centuries B.C.E., as well as the nearby find of the remains

of the eight “leviers du desert” (Saidah 1967: 166) mentioned in **Table 1**, though unfortunately the proximity of dog and human burials was not clarified in print. Even more regrettably, careful quantification and systematic study of the full corpus of human burials is not possible, since publication of the excavations was interrupted by the Lebanese Civil War, and the site’s excavator, Roger Saidah, passed away before the war ended. A few preliminary articles authored by Saidah, along with some personal photographs found by his widow and published more recently (Doumet-Serhal 2008), allow some characterization of the general features of the cemetery and its inhabitants.

The excavated Khaldeh/Khaldé burials were divided into two phases on the basis of accompanying ceramic remains: Khaldé IV (10th–late 9th centuries B.C.E.), where inhumation in pit or cist graves was the norm; and Khaldé III (late 9th–late 8th centuries), where a few cremations placed in amphorae appear along with the inhumations.³¹ This latter phase was also associated with areas of ash and carbonized wood, including human and animal bones; the cremations were thus probably conducted on-site (Saidah 1967: 166). Inhumations, which made up the clear majority of the burials in both phases, were for the most part simple and unaccompanied by grave goods. While a few contained remnants of food offerings (Saidah 1966: 85), the graves Saidah chose to highlight in those short preliminary publications showed both men and women buried with very little—perhaps a few pieces of pottery, some covered by a few round, flat rocks (variously placed at the head, torso, pelvis, or knees). It is clear that in several cases, pottery was deliberately broken on the grave as part of the burial ritual.

For those burials whose orientation was described (178 of the 422 graves), there was a slight preference for laying out the dead with the head pointed toward the north and the feet toward the south, although all four cardinal directions are represented.³² An even more uniform distribution was noted with respect to the body’s arrangement in the grave.³³ In a few cases, new graves were made on top of or cutting into older ones, perhaps suggesting that some graves may have been unmarked or

²⁸ The evidence from iconographic and textual sources for these specialized functions has been analyzed in discussions of the development of Near Eastern breeds (see, e.g., Clark 2001).

²⁹ Sometimes referred to in modern studies as “village dogs” (see, e.g., Brown et al. 2011).

³⁰ For example, dogs at Hesban were both “used mainly for protection” and expected to “eke out their own existence in the village feeding on garbage and whatever else comes their way” (LaBianca 1976: 198).

³¹ This side-by-side use of cremation and inhumation is what María Eugenia Aubet has referred to as “the duality of funerary rites that exists in the Phoenician world during the Iron Age” (2001: 65). As yet, no patterns regarding the choice of inhumation or cremation of adult remains in Levantine Phoenician territory have been established; the practice of cremation seems to fall out of favor ca. 600 B.C.E., when inhumation becomes the norm (as discussed below).

³² There were 104 lying with the head to the north and feet to the south (north–south), 12 in the opposite direction (south–north), 27 oriented east–west, and 35 oriented west–east (Saidah 1966: 84).

³³ Of these 178 burials, 72 were placed on their backs, 28 on the stomach, 58 on the right side, and 20 on the left (Saidah 1966: 84).

marked only in a transient way (only one inscribed grave stele was recovered from the site [see Bordreuil 1982: 190–91; and Sader 2005: 25]) and their locations obscured over the course of the longer life of this cemetery.

Human and dog burials found in contemporary strata are known from two other sites detailed in **Table 1**: Tel Megadim and Beirut. As at Khaldeh, Tel Megadim preserves a mixture of cremations and inhumations mostly unaccompanied by grave goods, in some cases with an uninscribed, relatively flat stone at one or both ends of the tomb (Broshi 1969: 414). The Iron Age II–III-period graves known from salvage excavations in Beirut vary in complexity, energy expenditure, and arrangement both across and within excavated areas (including elite burials in rock-cut or shaft tombs, often placed in stone or wooden coffins, and accompanied by a wide range of burial goods [Stuart 2001–2002: 89–98; Elayi 2010: 167; Stuart and Curvers in press: 8–12]).³⁴ However, several groups of burials seem to follow the pattern of simple pit inhumations with limited grave goods:

- a. One small cemetery in BEY 032 (at the western end of Rue Azmi Bey), sealed by a Late Iron Age glacis, contained 10 adult pit burials, in which each body was laid on its back in an extended position, with minimal grave goods (Graves 2 and 4 are notable exceptions, as they contained a line of highly polished bone rings laid from head to feet—a feature also found in several of the shaft burials and thought to represent a decorative element attached to a burial shroud [Stuart and Curvers in press]). The orientation of these graves was relatively uniform, with nine of the burials featuring a southeast–northwest orientation. The presence of iron nails in some of the pits may indicate the use of wooden planks or coffins, though no remains survived (Stuart 2001–2002: 88–89; Stuart and Curvers in press).³⁵
- b. Another five adult pit graves with no associated finds were excavated in BEY 066 (Martyrs Square) and were dated to the late Iron Age based on similarities with other contemporaneous finds. These burials were dug into the bedrock, and four of the burials had the heads pointing west, though all were oriented approximately west–east (Stuart 2001–2002: 89; Stuart and Curvers in press).
- c. A group of 23 adult burials from BEY 158 (at the northern end of the Garden of Forgiveness) featured one rectangular pit containing two to three individu-

als, and three rock-cut rectangular tombs, while the remaining burials were pit graves oriented mostly east–west (two were north–south). Though these tombs were disturbed by later building, excavators dated this group to the late Iron Age (Persian period) on the basis of a ceramic vessel in one of the rock-cut tombs, as well as the adjacent late Iron Age settlement (Stuart and Curvers in press).

- d. Ten pit burials dating to the 4th–3rd centuries B.C.E. (late Iron Age–Hellenistic period) were found in BEY 045 (southwest of the Beirut souks), four of which were excavated. These four adult graves contained no grave goods, with bodies laid in an extended supine position in a west–east orientation (head to the east) and arms folded over the abdomen (Thorpe 1998–1999: 63–65; Stuart 2001–2002: 89; Stuart and Curvers in press).

While there are only a few sites in which both dog and human burials dating to the 1st millennium B.C.E. have been recovered, the simple inhumation grave appears much more common when surveying human mortuary practices across the Levant, especially during the Iron Age III/Achaemenid Persian period.

Mortuary Practices in the Persian-Period Levant

Scholarly consensus indicates that a substantial shift in mortuary practices occurred across the Levant with the transition from the Iron Age II to the Persian period. This manifests as a trend away from cremation in the Phoenician sphere, making inhumations the dominant Persian-period burial type across the Phoenician coast (Wolff 2002; Dixon 2013). Samuel Wolff specifically notes the “overall simplicity and poverty” of many pit burials, the growing “standardization of burial practices,” and what seems to be an emphasis on the individual (as opposed to the family group) in mortuary ritual (2002: 137). While in several Phoenician Levantine regions the evolution of a shared elite burial *koiné*—involving anthropoid sarcophagi, certain luxurious burial goods, and a possible interest in the longer-term preservation of the body—seems also to be developing under Achaemenid rule (Dixon 2013: 568–69), the overall picture of most Levantine human burials in this period is one of simple inhumation with (often broken) ceramic vessels as the most common type of grave good. While variation certainly persisted in terms of orientation of the body within the cemetery, arrangement of bodies in relation to one another, and inclusion of grave goods, increasing standardization among Levantine Persian and Hellenistic burials (at least in terms of lower-energy-expenditure burials) is consistent with current evidence.

³⁴ These burials come from several areas, to the west, northwest, and south of the Iron Age Beirut tell, with the largest Iron Age cemetery from BEY 018 (Stuart and Curvers 1997).

³⁵ For analysis of the pottery from these strata, see Jamieson 2011.

The dogs described in **Table 1** thus show evidence of having been interred in a manner consistent with the most common mortuary treatment afforded adult humans³⁶ across the Persian-period Levant (though perhaps with even less variation than is evident in the human corpus). Aside from dogs being the only animal afforded repeated or consistent intentional burial by humans in this period,³⁷ several more specific similarities between the low-energy-expenditure human burials described above and the dog burials in **Table 1** may be observed:

1. the use of a simple ovular pit, dug into the ground, as the burial setting;
2. the body placed directly in the pit grave:
 - a. the body intentionally arranged in one of a limited repertoire of poses (poses often seeming to mimic sleeping poses of the living);
 - b. irregular placement of bodies relative to nearby burials (e.g., later burials cut into earlier burials); and
 - c. little consistency in terms of directional orientation among burials in the same area or cemetery; and
3. the very few objects accompanying the deceased in the burial:
 - a. grave goods limited in type and dominated by ceramic vessels (whole or broken); and
 - b. the body sometimes covered by weighty, low-value objects (e.g., flat stones at Khaldeh; possible use of larger amphora sherds in this capacity).

While this type of human burial reached its zenith in the Persian period (in terms of proportions of excavated burials), it was also practiced in other periods, includ-

ing the Iron Age II and Hellenistic periods (as some of the dog burials appear to be dated). The arrangement of the human body in the pit grave constituted the primary mortuary ritual in these simple inhumations, with the inclusion of pottery (either whole vessels or vessels broken presumably at some stage of the burial ritual) as the most common—but not ubiquitous—grave good type. The few dog burials covered by broken vessel sherds may reflect this kind of practice (though none of the sherds accompanying canine interments represents fully restorable vessels), or more likely the sherds may serve to cover the body or delineate the grave in a manner more consistent with the use of stones placed on human burials (at sites like Khaldeh and Tel Megadim).³⁸ Even the possible inclusion of flint flakes with one or two of the Beirut dog burials (if these are indeed grave goods and not part of the surrounding sediment, as mentioned above) could be characterized as consistent with human mortuary practice, as a single piece of jewelry (an anklet, a scarab, or some other small find) can also be found among dozens of these simple Levantine Persian-period human interments. While these similarities may seem general (and are limited by the poor state of analysis/publication of the majority of both dog and human burial data points), the simple fact that dogs were the only animal being afforded careful interment in death remains significant. The intentional nature of the mortuary behaviors represented by the dog burials is unambiguous, repeated, and stark in the overarching lack of individualized grave goods included with burials (especially in the case of Ashkelon, where no grave goods were reported in well over 1,000 burials).

The extension of human mortuary rituals to canines over the course of the second half of the 1st millennium B.C.E. seems a plausible explanation for the dog burial phenomenon as represented in **Table 1**. In the anthropological study of mortuary behavior, it is a truism to say that the social identities of the deceased are expressed in mortuary ritual, where the variability of mortuary practice in a particular community can indicate societal complexity (through the symbolic expression of rank, status, profession, kin networks, and other affiliations).³⁹ In the **Table 1** data, we see a simple burial ritual applied to dogs with almost no variability, as if a single, generic aspect of

³⁶ The relative paucity of child burials known from the Phoenician Levant is an interesting comparative point, as made by one of BASOR's anonymous reviewers (see the discussion below). This reviewer goes on to write that "the common burial of puppies (as is seen at Ashkelon and other sites) does not fit the normal burial practices of sub-adults throughout the southern Levant." Indeed, it is notable that the human burial record in the 1st-millennium B.C.E. Levant does not represent the normal mortality curve, but identical application of the notion of personhood between human and non-human groups is not to be expected. For example, the newborn puppy reaches independence from the mother much faster than the human neonate and might have been seen as reaching mature "personhood" in a canine context sooner than a child was viewed as reaching "personhood" in a human one.

³⁷ The fact that other animals living in close proximity to humans were disposed of in refuse pits would seem to argue against an explanation that this type of simple burial was conducted only as an expediency to protect against disease or scavenging carnivores. On the other hand, if a taboo against these corpses being eaten (presumably by feral dogs, pigs, or cats) were at play, the idea that humans and dogs were the only species in need of this type of protection would also be interesting from a social standpoint.

³⁸ Both the stones and sherds may have simply served the practical purpose of preventing scavenging animals from digging up shallow graves, though ritualistic intentions may also have been in play (thanks to one of BASOR's anonymous reviewers for pointing this out).

³⁹ For the early development of this idea and its testing in archaeological contexts, see Saxe 1970; Binford 1971; Tainter 1978; O'Shea 1984; and Parker Pearson 1999. Of course, features of burial may also represent ideological positions rather than social realities (cf., e.g., Trinkaus 1984; and McGuire 1988).

social identity were being expressed through ritualized mortuary treatment. In other words, one could perhaps say it was a special kind of personhood (a social identity shared by or attributed to all the **Table 1** buried dogs) being commemorated rather than unique qualities specific to individual animals, which in many cases were quite young at the time of death.⁴⁰ One might compare the mortuary treatment of the poor in state-provided “paupers’ graves,” which arguably commemorate a kind of basic human dignity rather than any specific emotional attachment to an individual.⁴¹

It is also worth noting that this does not mean that young dogs were treated as young humans in full reflection of the life cycle of personhood afforded human members of the community. While there is still much work to be done on the mortuary treatment of infants, children, and adolescents in the Levant, it has long been observed that there is a special paucity of child burials known from Phoenician Levantine sites. Children were not buried with any regularity in the extant cemeteries, although such burials are not unheard of—for example, 22 burials from the Khaldeh cemetery were described by the excavator as “enfants en bas âge” (Saidah 1966: 84), while in Beirut, one child is known from a late Iron

Age site (BEY 168 [Stuart and Curvers in press]), and another was found in a Hellenistic extramural cemetery (Wadi Abu Jmil/BEY 165 [Stuart and Curvers in press]). Whether the “missing” children received no regular burial, as opposed to different, undetectable burial (e.g., cremated and scattered or buried without containers; buried on seashores, subject to challenging conditions of preservation, as perhaps evinced by Punic infant cremation cemeteries, or tophets), is difficult to assert—it remains an *argumentum ex silentio*. While infants and children probably were conceived of as less socially valuable (perhaps as having less “personhood”⁴²) than adult humans, current data do not allow positive assertion about whether their mortuary treatment was significantly different (affecting preservation in the archaeological record) or completely lacking (I know of no evidence for the disposal of infants in refuse dumps or cisterns at Phoenician Levantine sites). In any case, it is adult personhood—what could be described as the “default” social setting for personhood—that is reflected in the dog burials across several Levantine cultures.

Of course, this phenomenon was not universally afforded to all dogs or by all humans; the burial sites in **Table 2**, where dogs seem to have been killed for human purposes (or were otherwise differently conceived), must still be addressed. As discussed above, evolutionary evidence indicates that dogs living in or near human settlements—but not living with or “owned” by particular families—was probably the norm throughout most of the history of domesticated canines. Furthermore, previously mentioned ethnographic studies illustrate how multiple populations of dogs (some specialized for human needs, some feral) often coexist, fulfilling different social roles and therefore being valued differently by their human neighbors. Along these lines, a brief exploration of literary and inscriptional evidence for attitudes toward dogs in the 1st-millennium B.C.E. Levant reveals that (a) multiple attitudes toward dogs coexisted and may have been contextually specific; and (b) within this semantic range, there is solid evidence for a conceptualization of dogs as loyal, faithful, and obedient. These conceptions of the dog, as evinced in Northwest Semitic texts of the period, are briefly discussed here.

Conceptualizing Dogs in the Persian-Period Levant

Several authors have surveyed attitudes toward dogs in the texts of the Hebrew Bible (Thomas 1960; Menache 1997; 2013; Miller 2008), where perhaps the majority of contexts mark dogs with negative associations. Certainly,

⁴⁰ In discussions about this topic (both at conferences and in more casual settings), I have often encountered the view that puppies are particularly easy for humans to bond with, and their burial in such high numbers (some only a few weeks or even days old) must indicate that they were favorites of individuals or families. While this may be true for modern Western populations, I have yet to find this assertion made in print for the ancient world. Instead, those scholars working on the 1st-millennium B.C.E. Levantine dog burials have emphasized the high number of ritualized, minimalist burials as evidence that their treatment *cannot* indicate their status as treasured pets or loyal working dogs, and that they would not have been old enough to establish a social bond with their owners (e.g., Stager 1991a: 39–42; Wapnish and Hesse 1993: 74; though referencing quite a different phenomenon, Billie Jean Collins [1990] suggests that Hittite ritual texts favor puppies because of their expendability). See also the analysis of the Ashkelon dog burials as representing the expected mortuary profile of a feral dog population (with proportionately more puppies than subadults or adults), summarized above. Wapnish and Hesse (1993: 59–60) further point out post-depositional problems with determining “expected” age distribution: Puppy skeletons are less likely to be preserved or identified by excavators at any archaeological site, and variability in percentages of puppies found in the different grids at Ashkelon can be statistically attributed to chance.

⁴¹ See, e.g., Hurren and King 2005 on the implementation of and response to the New Poor Law (1934) in the United Kingdom. Hart Island, a potter’s field for New York City, is still in operation and sees the burial of ca. 1,500 humans annually. Unknown individuals are buried individually (so they may be located for removal if family is identified), while known individuals are interred in mass graves. Those buried at Hart Island include the homeless, indigent, general poor, unclaimed bodies, and children under five years of age who die in hospitals (including stillbirths and miscarriages [see, e.g., <https://www.hartisland.net/>]).

⁴² See also n. 36 above.

the image of the “dead dog” (כלב מת) is evoked in the Masoretic Text (MT) of the books of Samuel as the basest of organisms (compared to a flea in 1 Sam 24:15 and then mentioned alone in 2 Sam 9:8 and 2 Sam 16:9).⁴³ The LXX of 2 Kgs 8:13 also paints this picture (ὁ κύων ὁ τεθνηκώς), where the MT reads instead “your servant the dog,” an interesting apposition potentially mirrored in some formulations of personal names investigated below. The most common context in which dogs are mentioned in the 1st-millennium B.C.E. Northwest and East Semitic corpora is in calling oneself a dog as an expression of humility, used when addressing superiors (Thomas 1960). These relatively negative semantic uses of dogs nevertheless belie the wide range of meanings or characteristics that seem to have been attributed to them in the 1st-millennium B.C.E. Levant. One realm in which this is particularly evident is in the corpus of Northwest Semitic personal names.

While not a phenomenon unique to the Persian-period Levant, inscriptional and literary evidence indicates the apparent acceptability of names containing the element *klb* or “dog.” Two individuals⁴⁴ named Kaleb/Caleb⁴⁵ appear in the historical texts of the Hebrew Bible: (1) Kaleb, son of Jephunneh the Kenezite, one of the 12 spies sent by Moses into Canaan, who inherits Hebron in the south of Judah (Deut 1:36; Num 13:6, 30; 14:6, 24, 30, 38; 26:65; 32:12; 34:19; Josh 14:6, 13–14; 15:13–18; 21:12; Judg 1:12, 14–15, 20; 1 Sam 25:3; 30:14; 1 Chron 4:15; 6:56); and his grandfather, mentioned in the Chronicler’s list of the descendants of Judah—namely (2), Kaleb/Kelubai,⁴⁶ son of Hezron and brother of Jerahme’el (1 Chron 2:9, 18–19, 42–49),⁴⁷ whose descendants include (the cities of) Ziph, Mareshah, and Hebron. These individuals are painted in a positive light, despite the general characterization of

biblical references to dogs as being negative,⁴⁸ as mentioned above.

In the Phoenician sphere, inscriptional evidence preserves six different names containing the element *klb*, attested in Phoenician, Punic, and Neo-Punic inscriptions, and apparently used for both men and women. These names and their attestations are summarized in **Table 4**. While the common noun “dog” may be read as the underlying meaning of the Hebrew “Kaleb,” as well as of some of the Phoenician names, most scholars have argued that all the attested variants should be understood as either full or hypocoristic versions of a theophoric name-type: “dog of [DN].” Parallel to other name-types like ‘*bd*-[DN] (“servant of [DN]”), the origins of the *klb*-type names are probably to be found in expressions of dependence on and loyalty and servitude to a deity,⁴⁹ and are similarly attested in Nabataean, Palmyrene,⁵⁰ and East Semitic⁵¹ repertoires as well. It may be that these instances of referring to oneself (in the case of formal euphemisms or expressions of lower status) or one’s child (in the case of these personal names) as a “dog” should be interpreted as evidence for a semantic range that includes positive connotations—emphasizing devotion and reliability in addition to humility and lowliness.

A second corpus of inscriptions relating to the place of dogs in the Phoenician semantic conception involves names formed from the element *gr*,⁵² a root that may mean “young dog” or “puppy.”⁵³ Unfortunately, *gr* ap-

⁴³ Although in the latter, the LXX¹ gives the variant “this cursed dog” instead (Thomas 1960: 416).

⁴⁴ Some interpreters still posit a third, one “Kaleb, son of Hur” in 1 Chron 2:50 (the MT gives: אלה היו בני כלב בן-חור), though the disjunctive reading (“these are the sons of Caleb [son of Hezron, mentioned in verses 18–19 as fathering a son called Hur]. The sons of Hur . . .”) reflects consensus opinion.

⁴⁵ It is possible that the name “Caleb” could be a nickname, indicating perhaps that its recipient was a scrappy fighter or particularly loyal (thanks to one of BASOR’s anonymous reviewers for pointing this out). Unfortunately, Hebrew and other Northwest Semitic literary and inscriptional evidence is such that there is no way to know in any individual case whether the name was given by family or peers. In either case, we may assume it was—whatever its cultural nuance—considered a respectable enough moniker to use in official records like historical chronicles or records, or mortuary inscriptions.

⁴⁶ This variant has been interpreted as a gentilic, probably attributable to scribal error.

⁴⁷ Note that the Babylonian Talmud (Soṭah 11b) interprets this Kaleb as the same as (1), interpreting “son of Jephunneh” as “a son who turned [*pnh*] from the counsel of the spies.”

⁴⁸ However, Miller (2008) has convincingly argued that biblical references to dogs are more mixed, pointing in particular to the books of Job and Tobit as evincing positive attitudes toward canines. One of BASOR’s anonymous reviewers is right to point out that the books of Job and Tobit are both relatively late (Job no earlier than the Persian period, Tobit and possibly Job as well dating to the Hellenistic period). These texts may well indicate a diachronic change, in which the dog was increasingly seen in a positive light into and over the course of the Hellenistic period.

⁴⁹ Charles Krahmalkov (2000: 227) defines the idiom “hound of a god” as “obedient worshipper.”

⁵⁰ See, e.g., *RÉS* 2:729 (Palmyrene), 1173, and possibly 1194 (Nabataean).

⁵¹ Jean Bottéro (1956: 34) lists *klb*- names featuring Šamaš, Sin, Zababa, Ninurta, Ea, and Marduk.

⁵² These names are also attested for both men and women. Extant variants include *gr’šmn*, *grb’l*, *grmks*, *grmlk*, *grmlqrt*, *grmskr*, *grskn*, *gr’šrt*, *gršd*, *gršpn*, *gr’hl*, *grhkl*, *gr’l*, and *grtmlqt* [sic] (Benz 1972: 228; Heltzer 1987: 311), as well as several names mentioned in Greek or Akkadian texts (Heltzer 1987: 312).

⁵³ Other suggestions include “client,” “dependent,” or “protected person” (Harris 1936: 92; Heltzer 1987), “dweller” or “inhabitant” (related to the Hebrew hollow verbal root גר -I and analogous to Arabic *gār* [Harris 1936: 92]), or “one who fears”/“fearer” (read as an active participle of *gr* “to fear or worship a god” [Krahmalkov 2000: 142]). The interpretation “young dog,” “puppy,” or “cub” is made on the basis of the Hebrew nouns גור / גור, as well as Standard Babylonian *gerru* or *girru*, all of which can be used to refer to either young dogs or young lions (Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1906: 158; CAD 5: 94; Black, George,

TABLE 4. Phoenician and Punic Inscriptional Evidence for Names Containing the Root *klb*

Name	Inscription	Language/Date	Context, Provenance, and Inscription
<i>klb</i> ⁹ (affirmative <i>aleph</i> marking hypocoristic termination?)	Ferron 1964–1965	Punic; ca. 600–550 B.C.E.	Dedicatory stele from Carthage: dedicated by <i>gr</i> ‘ <i>štrt bn klb</i> ’ (plus 3 other generations)
	<i>Kition III</i> : D19	Phoenician; 6th century B.C.E.	Fragment of an incised plate from Kition: <i>[k]lb</i> ⁹
	<i>CIS</i> 1:52; <i>Kition III</i> : B43	Phoenician; 4th century B.C.E.	Grave stele from Kition: <i>lklb</i> ⁹ <i>bn</i> <i>šmnytn bn klb</i> ⁹ (plus 3 other generations)
	<i>CIS</i> 1:4657	Punic; 6th–2nd centuries B.C.E.	Dedicatory stele from Carthage: dedicated by <i>gdn</i> ⁹ <i>m bt klb</i> ⁹
	<i>CIS</i> 1:4711	Punic; 6th–2nd centuries B.C.E.	Dedicatory stele from Carthage: dedicated by <i>kbd</i> <i>bt hnšd bn klb</i> ⁹ <i>h</i> ⁹
	<i>CIS</i> 1:5040	Punic; 6th–2nd centuries B.C.E.	Dedicatory stele from Carthage: dedicated by <i>bd</i> ⁹ <i>štrt bn</i> <i>zrb</i> ⁹ <i>l bn bd</i> ⁹ <i>štrt bn klb</i> ⁹
	Constantine N54	Neo-Punic; post-146 B.C.E.	Dedicatory stele from Constantine, Algeria: dedicated by <i>l</i> ⁹ <i>[š] bn klb</i> ⁹
<i>klb</i> ⁹ <i>lm</i> “dog of the gods”	<i>CIS</i> 1:49; <i>Kition III</i> : B33	Phoenician; 4th–3rd centuries B.C.E.	Grave stele from near Kition: <i>[l</i> ⁹ <i>b]dssm bn klb</i> ⁹ <i>lm bn (tn/nt)</i> [. . .]
	<i>CIS</i> 1:702	Punic; 6th–2nd centuries B.C.E.	Dedicatory stele from Carthage: dedicated by <i>[bd]</i> ⁹ <i>šmn bn bd</i> ⁹ <i>štrt bn [k]lb</i> ⁹ <i>lm</i>
	<i>CIS</i> 1:5772	Punic; 6th–2nd centuries B.C.E.	Dedicatory stele from Carthage: dedicated by <i>šmnytn bn</i> <i>bd</i> ⁹ <i>šd bn klb</i> ⁹ <i>lm</i>
<i>klby</i> (<i>yod</i> may reflect a Canaanite form, hypocoristic abbreviation, adjectival or gentilic force, or 1cs suffix [see Benz 1972: 241])	<i>KAI</i> 1:8; Gibson 1982: no. 10	Phoenician; ca. 900 B.C.E.	Incised neck of a large vessel from Byblos: <i>‘bk</i> ⁹ <i>. bklby . hy[sr]</i>
	<i>RÉS</i> 3:1203	Phoenician; end of the 5th century B.C.E.	Incised base of an Attic skyphos from Sidon: <i>lklby bn prsy</i>
<i>klb</i> ⁹ “dog of the mighty one”?	Lidzbarski 1912: no. 42	Phoenician; 5th century B.C.E.	Inscribed jar from Elephantine: <i>l</i> ⁹ <i>ptl bn klb</i> ⁹
<i>klbn</i> [. . .]	Masson and Sznycer 1972: 112; Puech 1979: 29–30	Phoenician; 7th–early 6th centuries B.C.E.	Inscribed jar from Idalion: <i>klbn</i> [. . .] ⁹
<i>klbt</i> (feminine construct form, perhaps a hypocoristic theophoric name ¹)	Sader 2005: no. 41	Phoenician; 7th century B.C.E.	Grave stele, probably from Tyre al-Bass: <i>lklbt bt</i> <i>bskn</i>

¹ Note that the phrase *klbt* *šlm* appears in *KTU* 1.3 III, 45 from Ugarit, in parallel to *bt* *šl*. David West (1992: 383) translates the couplet as follows: “I have smitten Il’s bitch Išatu (Fire), / have finished off Il’s daughter Dabibu (Flame).” The translation “bitch of the gods” seems to me more appropriate, though in either case it is interesting to note the name or epithet belongs to a divine being.

pears outside of name-based contexts in only one Phoenician text—a 5th- or 4th-century B.C.E. limestone plaque from Kition, Cyprus, which lists temple personnel (*CIS* 1:86; *KAI* 1:37). In that text, *klbm* and *grm* appear paired together in two separate entries, sparking a debate as to whether “dogs and puppies” were fed and maintained at this cultic structure, or whether the terms were used euphemistically or as official titles of specialized priests⁵⁴

and Postgate 2000: 92), and is supported by its proximity to *klbm* in the context of *CIS* 1:86.

⁵⁴ Note that Peckham translates *klbm* and *grm* as “dogs and lions,” arguing these were “temple servants in animal disguise, impersonating legendary figures or gods in the rituals” (1968: 317). The bibliography on this inscription is extensive; for a useful summary of the debate as it pertains to the present discussion, see Stager 2008: 565–67.

(even cultic prostitutes⁵⁵). This indication of the presence of “dogs” (actual or as the name of certain officials) at a temple in Persian-period Cyprus has been used to support the suggestion that our dog burials were part of a healing cult (as mentioned above), but there is as yet no clear substantiating evidence of such a dog-oriented cult from the Levant. However, *CIS* 1:86 does serve to underscore the sense in which dogs must have been associated with positive qualities in the eastern Mediterranean and perhaps were in some cases considered part of human society, a position commemorated in intentional burial during the second half of the 1st millennium B.C.E.

⁵⁵ This position is maintained on the basis of an interpretation of Deut 23:18 as referring to two types of prostitutes (the זונה or “female prostitute” and the כלב or “dog”) whose wages may not be given in the temple to fulfill a vow.

Conclusions

That the dog might be considered to have a special relationship with humans is not a radical suggestion; the growing evidence for the early (pre-Neolithic) and multi-regional domestication of the dog (e.g., Freedman et al. 2014; Frantz et al. 2016) indicates a symbiosis that had, in the period in question, already endured at least 10,000 years. Still, the change in treatment afforded the **Table 1** dogs in death is remarkable. Wapnish and Hesse were the first to note that at least at Ashkelon, “[i]t does not seem to be anything that the dogs *did* that earned them a careful burial. . . . The key feature seems to be simply that they died. . . . The behavioral core of the ideology surrounding dogs was the act of burial itself” (1993: 74). It seems clear that the dogs in **Table 1** were used to living in human communities, based on their burial in several urban centers, but they are described in analysis as feral, wild, or simply showing no signs of being cared for preferentially. Where context is available, it seems they were being buried in central areas—streets, for example—but were not being memorialized with lasting grave markers or systematically organized cemeteries. While evidence could still emerge to substantiate some cultic connection, a more parsimonious explanation may be found not in a sea change of religious beliefs but in an evolving social conception. For the second half of the 1st millennium B.C.E., it may be that the boundaries of the human community were somewhat in flux and were expanded in some locations to include a specific selection of animal co-inhabitants.

Those dogs that died in the towns and cities of the Persian–Hellenistic-period Levant (or at least those represented in **Table 1**) may have been recognized by their human neighbors as valuable community members. Perhaps they were thought to serve useful roles—disposing of rotting garbage or raising an alarm in the face of certain types of danger—and were being honored as a community in death for their general civic contributions. Or perhaps they were broadly conceptualized as having distinct personalities and preferences (unlike, say, individuals in a herd of sheep or goats), and therefore dogs were, for a time, thought to be worthy of a more dignified burial than disposal in refuse heaps, while still not individually owned, taken care of, or even “known” individually as such. In other words, the dogs could have been buried in recognition of having the *potential* for qualities like loyalty or protectiveness, or for having “personhood” without having specific relationships with individual humans. In these cases, the larger number of burials at Ashkelon might reflect simply a larger living population of dogs;⁵⁶ it is easy to imagine that canine food

sources (such as decaying fish, a by-product of seafood harvesting) were particularly prevalent due to increased trade and prosperity (which, with the commencement of Phoenician rule, has already been posited by the excavators [cf. Stager 1991a: 22–23]) or even a change in garbage disposal methods. Though we may not be able to trace with certainty the roles these dogs played in their communities, it seems likely that we are witnessing some element of their social identities reflected in their ritualized treatment in death.

These Levantine canine burials seem to illustrate the idea that “the dog was capable of assuming the roles of both an animal of *high status* and a person of *low status*” (Sergis 2010: 64; emphasis original).⁵⁷ The **Table 1** dogs were treated in death precisely as were humans whose burials evince low-energy expenditure (possibly as a reflection of their lower socioeconomic status). To go a step further, the very distinction between “animal” and “human”⁵⁸ (or perhaps even the limits of personhood) is now recognized as far from universal, and our expectations in that regard may say more about our modern ontological categories than about the Iron Age Levantine world.

of dogs interred per year calculated from extant graves would be at most 30 per year: the maximum estimate of 1,500 dogs over ca. 50 years (probably a significant underestimate), based on the chronological estimate in Stager 1991a: 22, 25. This is far from an unreasonable number, given the natural mortality profile of the studied remains.

⁵⁷ Manolis Sergis goes on to emphasize the ambiguity of the dog as represented in nearly all Western literature (focusing in particular on medieval texts). It is notable that a similar fluid or liminal role for dogs has been posited for dozens of worldwide cultures. See, e.g., the discussion of the wide range of primary and secondary dog burials found at several Middle Woodland-period (ca. 2200–1600 B.P.) Native American sites in Illinois: “[D]ogs are interstitial, that is intermediate between the forest, the world of animals, and the camp, the world of men. Like men they travel between two worlds, but the dogs belong to neither and are, in that sense, liminal to both. Small wonder then that dogs appear . . . buried as humans are where humans live” (Cantwell 1980: 491).

⁵⁸ Or the spheres of “nature” and “culture,” a binary construct that distinguishes, for example, kept animals from wild [cf. Descola 2013]. The anachronistic nature of this distinction has long been explored for indigenous animistic societies in which “personhood” may be extended to some—but not all—animals, plants, features of the landscape, weather phenomena, etc. In those contexts, a wide spectrum of individuality is recognized: “[M]any animals do not seem to have individual, unique souls but rather those that cycle back into a collective for that species. . . . An important aspect of animistic perspectives is that any animal *potentially* could be a person, but people’s knowledge of this in part depends on context” (Losey et al. 2011: 175, writing about Neolithic Siberia). Personhood itself might not be conceived of in all-or-nothing terms; Robert Losey and his colleagues go on to conclude that for northern Eurasia, “It seems probable that all dogs within a forager community could be unique persons, but some more than others because of their friendliness, dependability, and unique histories with specific humans” (2011: 175).

⁵⁶ While it seems clear that the excavated burials at Ashkelon do not represent the entire corpus of dogs buried at the site, the number

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