

THE ROOTS OF THE BELIEF IN THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD IN THE HEBREW BIBLE: A SURVEY AND EVALUATION OF RECENT RESEARCH

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In chapter 12 of the book of Daniel the readers who are suffering in the present are comforted with the prospect of the resurrection of the dead at the end of times, followed by a final judgment that will reward the good and punish the bad. This will not come as a surprise for those who are familiar with and are happy to relate it to the concept as it is found in the New Testament, especially in 1 Corinthians 15, and as part of the later Christian *regula fidei*. For those, however, who are looking for a coherent conception of life after death in the Bible as a whole it will be more problematic. The idea of a resurrection of the dead appears to be a relatively late concept. In my dissertation of 1986¹ I discussed this topic relating it to the Canaanite cult of the dead which most likely was also practised in ancient Israel. Since then many new studies have been published on this subject. In my contribution to this Festschrift for my esteemed colleague Riemer Roukema I want to evaluate the reception of my dissertation. From this perspective I will give an overview and evaluation of recent research as it reflects on the roots of the belief in resurrection as it is attested in the Hebrew Bible and consider some possible directions for future research.

1. Hope in YHWH and the Cult of the Dead

In my dissertation I defended the view that the different conceptions of the afterlife as they are presented in the Hebrew Bible, can best be understood against the background of the practices of a cult of the dead in the southern Levant. In my opinion these practices were more prominent than is usually assumed in modern research. The primary source for this regional

¹ Klaas Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, AOAT 219 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1986).

cult of the dead are the texts of Ugarit. The reluctance in the Hebrew Bible to relate the trust in YHWH to hopes for the afterlife, I explained as having been caused by the wish to distinguish it from ancestor worship as it was also practised in ancient Israel. There was a close relationship between ancestor worship, the Canaanite cult of the dead, and the belief in Baal as the dying and rising god of fertility. The biblical idea in this regard would have been that one's wellbeing in the afterlife was not something that could be arranged or manipulated but should be left to YHWH. This makes it principally different from a cult of the dead that was based on the high status of the deceased and on the continued ritual practices after burial. The only legitimate way of describing a blissful afterlife was as a lasting relation with YHWH which transcended the boundaries of death. The chief witness for this view I found in Pss 49 and 73. With regard to the far more explicit description of the afterlife in Dan 12:1–3, I assumed that on the one hand it could have been based on a positive expectation related to the belief in YHWH, which may have been much older than is usually assumed in modern research. On the other hand, I assumed that because within the later Hellenistic context the threat of an unwanted association with the cult of the dead had faded, there was room for taking up elements which had formerly been suspect but were still preserved in popular religion. The idea of the resurrection of the dead could be seen as a revival of the old idea of prominent dead being able to leave the nether-world like Baal, the dying and rising god of fertility. The new element in the Hebrew Bible of a resurrection as part of events that would take place at the end of times, may have been influenced by contacts with the Persian religion.

2. The Discussion about a Ugaritic Ancestor Cult

The reception of my theories was mixed. For one thing, I cannot complain about the attention my dissertation received. For this I have to thank in the first place my recently deceased *Doktervater* Johannes de Moor who suggested the topic for my dissertation. I had worked out his ideas about the new year festival² and about the Ugaritic *rp'um*³ and I was drawn into an ongoing discussion comparing Israelite and Ugaritic texts and customs

² Johannes C. de Moor, *New Year with Canaanites and Israelites*, Kamper Cahier 22 (Kampen: Kok, 1972).

³ Johannes C. de Moor, "Rāpi'ūma – Rephaim," ZAW 88 (1976): 323–45. Cf. also his later publication "Concepts of Afterlife in Canaan," UF 45 (2014): 374–88. He kindly gives me all the credit (377, n. 27), but is far too modest regarding his own role.

concerning matters of life and death between scholars like Mitchell Dahood⁴ and Marvin Pope.⁵ This discussion continued in the following years with among others, monographs by Theodore Lewis,⁶ Josef Tropper,⁷ Brian Schmidt,⁸ Gisela Kittel,⁹ Philip Johnston,¹⁰ Alan Segal,¹¹ Jon Levenson,¹² Christopher Hays,¹³ Alexander Fischer,¹⁴ Matthew Suriano¹⁵ and Casey Elledge,¹⁶ and the volumes edited by Herbert Niehr,¹⁷ Alan Avery-Peck

⁴ Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I*. AB 17 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1965), XXXVI; *Psalms II* (1968), XXVI-XXVII; *Psalms III* (1970), XLI-LII.

⁵ Marvin H. Pope, "The Cult of the Dead at Ugarit," in *Ugarit in Retrospect*, ed. Gordon D. Young (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 159–79; reprinted in *Probative Pontificating in Ugaritic and Biblical Literature: Collected Essays*, ed. Mark S. Smith (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1994), 225–50.

⁶ Theodore J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit*, HSM 39 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989); cf. my review in *BiOr* 48 (1991): 234–40.

⁷ Josef Tropper, *Nekromantie: Totenbefragung im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament*, AOAT 223 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1989).

⁸ Brian Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition*, FAT 11 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1994); cf. my review in *BiOr* 53 (1996): 508–10.

⁹ Gisela Kittel, *Befreit aus dem Rachen des Todes: Tod und Todesüberwindung im Alten und Neuen Testament*, Biblisch-theologische Schwerpunkte 17 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999).

¹⁰ Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002).

¹¹ Alan F. Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion*, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

¹² Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

¹³ Christopher B. Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II and in First Isaiah*, FAT 79 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011). See also Alexander Massmann and Christopher B. Hays, ed., *Deathless Hopes: Reinventions of Afterlife and Eschatological Beliefs*. Altes Testament und Moderne 31 (Wien: Lit, 2018) and Christopher B. Hays, "Death and Afterlife," in *The Ancient Israelite World*, ed. Kyle H. Keimer and George A. Pierce (London: Routledge, 2023), 505–19.

¹⁴ Alexander F. Fischer, *Tod und Jenseits im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament: Eine Reise durch antike Vorstellungs- und Textwelten* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2014).

¹⁵ Matthew J. Suriano, *A History of Death in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); cf. the review article by Christopher B. Hays, "How Many Histories of Death Does the Hebrew Bible Contain?," *CBQ* 81 (2019): 679–92. See also Matthew J. Suriano, *The Politics of Dead Kings: Dynastic Ancestors in the Book of Kings and Ancient Israel*, FAT 48 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); cf. my review in *JAOS* 134 (2012): 132–33.

¹⁶ Casey D. Elledge, *Resurrection of the Dead in Early Judaism: 200 BCE–CE 200* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). See also his article "Resurrection of the Dead: Exploring Our Earliest Evidence Today," in *Resurrection: The Origin and Future of a Biblical Doctrine*, ed. James H. Charlesworth et al. (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 22–52.

¹⁷ Herbert Niehr, ed., "Der Umgang mit dem Tod in Israel und Juda," *TQ* 177/2 (1997): 81–133.

and Jacob Neusner,¹⁸ James Charlesworth,¹⁹ and by Angelika Berlejung and Bernd Janowski.²⁰

I was honoured with three extensive review articles of my dissertation by Marvin Pope,²¹ Mark Smith and Elizabeth Bloch-Smith²² and Karel van der Toorn.²³ In these and in a number of shorter reviews it was remarked that my interpretations were “often new and challenging”²⁴ but also “open to question”.²⁵ This concerns in the first place the translation and interpretation of the relevant Ugaritic texts, which were mostly the result of my cooperation with De Moor.²⁶ The reviewers rightly point to the fact that in many cases the translation is uncertain or debatable. Given the state of the tablets, which are often damaged, and the ambiguities of the written Ugaritic language, this comes as no surprise. My approach can be seen as “maximalist,” making as much as possible of the indications found in texts and archaeological data about the cult of the dead and the related views about the afterlife.²⁷ This inevitably invoked a “minimalist” counterreaction.²⁸ Dennis Pardee, a specialist in the field of Semitic studies, states that “contrary to the opinion of some of my dearest friends and colleagues in the field, I find virtually only hints and allusions to that cult, with practically no textual material attesting directly to it”.²⁹ Also many

¹⁸ Alan J. Avery-Peck and Jacob Neusner, ed., *Judaism in Late Antiquity, Part 4, Death, Life-after-Death, Resurrection and the World to Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

¹⁹ James L. Charlesworth et al., ed., *Resurrection: the Origin and Future of a Biblical Doctrine* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

²⁰ Angelika Berlejung and Bernd Janowski, ed., *Tod und Jenseits im alten Israel und in seiner Umwelt*, FAT 64 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

²¹ Marvin H. Pope, “Rezensionen. Klaas Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife* etc.,” *UF* 19 (1987): 452–63.

²² Mark S. Smith and Elizabeth M. Bloch-Smith, “Death and Afterlife in Ugarit and Israel,” *JAOS* 108 (1988): 277–84.

²³ Karel van der Toorn, “Funerary Rituals and Beatific Afterlife in Ugaritic Texts and in the Bible,” *BiOr* 48 (1991): 40–66.

²⁴ Bernhard Lang, *IZBG* 34 (1986–87): 390.

²⁵ Wilfred G.E. Watson, *SOTS Booklist* 1987, 99. Cf. Otto Kaiser, *ZAW* 100 (1988): 154: “Die ungewöhnlich stoff- und gedankenreiche Arbeit ist anregend, auch dort, wo sie zum Widerspruch reizt.” John F. Healey, “The Ugaritic Dead: Some Live Issues,” *UF* 18 (1986): 27–32: “not every detail ... will find acceptance” (28).

²⁶ In the years I was working on my dissertation I also collaborated with De Moor on the publication of the religious texts from Ugarit, both as autograph and in translation: Johannes C. de Moor and Klaas Spronk, *A Cuneiform Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit*. Semitic Study Series VI (Leiden: Brill, 1987); Johannes C. de Moor, *An Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit*, NISABA 16 (Leiden: Brill, 1987).

²⁷ Cf. Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II*, 118.

²⁸ Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II*, 117–21.

²⁹ Dennis Pardee, “Marzihu, Kispu, and the Ugaritic Funerary Cult: A Minimalist View,” in *Ugarit, Religion and Culture: Essays Presented in Honour of Professor John*

biblical scholars were not convinced. Schmidt calls the assumed ancient Israelite ancestor worship “a cherished relic of nineteenth century anthropology”.³⁰ According to Johnston the suggestion of a widespread cult of the dead in pre-exilic Israel is based on a “hypothetical reconstruction without any textual basis”.³¹ In their monographs on the views on death and the dead in ancient Israel, Schmidt and Johnston stick to the traditional interpretation of the relevant texts, concluding that there are no clear indications for an ancestor cult in Ugarit and early Israel. In their turn, however, they are blamed of overreacting, as can be concluded from reviewers like Smith who finds their conclusion that the dead in Syria-Palestine were believed to have no powers at all “unpersuasive”.³² Schmidt and Johnston can be seen as representatives of the scholarly *communis opinio* of the sixties and seventies of the previous century, which in the eyes of others is now no longer tenable.³³

The discussion about the ancestor cult is well described by Hays, who places it within the broader framework of Ugaritic studies of the last decades.³⁴ He speaks of the “Spronk synthesis” as “the most ambitious attempt to argue for widespread cults of the dead throughout the ancient Near East”³⁵ building on the previous work of scholars like De Moor and Pope. In his final evaluation he takes a position himself somewhere in the middle, stating that “it does not seem likely that the Ugaritic cult of the dead will be reduced to the small scale that they (i.e. scholars like Pardee; KS) would prefer”.³⁶

As could be expected on the basis of his previous work, Pope is in agreement with many of my suggestions. Nevertheless, he also criticizes some of the interpretations of Ugaritic texts and would have liked more

C. L. Gibson, ed. Nick Wyatt et al., UBL 12 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996), 273–87, quote on 287. Pardee does not mention my study, but he clearly opposes my conclusions.

³⁰ Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead*, 292.

³¹ Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 168.

³² Mark S. Smith, *CBQ* 58 (1996): 724–25. Cf. also André Lemaire, *JNES* 58 (1999): 217–19, who calls them “quelque peu forcée.” In his review of the book of Schmidt in *JSS* 42 (1997): 362–68, Pardee agrees with his conclusion that care for the dead should not be mistaken for veneration of the ancestors. Nevertheless, Pardee notices the dangers of biblical scholars entering the fields of Semitic studies without the necessary expertise.

³³ De Moor, “Concepts of Afterlife in Canaan,” 377, n. 27, speaks of “the crude, now totally superseded criticism of Brian Schmidt.” Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II*, 143, qualifies the book of Johnston as “something of a throwback.”

³⁴ Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II*, 105–22.

³⁵ Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II*, 106.

³⁶ Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II*, 120.

attention to what he calls “the Eros-Thanatos, or Sex-Death connection”: “No treatment of ideas of death and hopes for beatific afterlife can properly ignore the inevitable question whether the exquisite pleasures of sexuality (relieved of some of its unpleasant and painful aspects) should be a feature of blissful afterlife”.³⁷ According to Smith and Bloch-Smith my diachronic reconstruction of the Israelite ideas about afterlife is too speculative and based on a too strict division between Canaanite and Yahwistic religion and between official Yahwistic and folk religion.³⁸ In their view my study is “a significant probing of the possibilities pertaining to resurrection and afterlife in ancient Israel”,³⁹ which in the end does no justice to the complex situation of ancient Israelite religion and its development over time. Karel van der Toorn primarily expresses his doubts about “any formative influence” of the Ugaritic conceptions on “the birth of the belief in eternal salvation” in ancient Israel.⁴⁰ He finds no conclusive evidence for a belief in the revivification of the dead in the Ugaritic texts and sticks to the common view that in Israel a more positive conception of the afterlife arose only in the period of the second temple.

3. The Discussion about the Roots of the Belief in Resurrection

In their overview of discussions about the roots of the belief in resurrection Friedman and Overton rank my study among “scholarly models of linear progressions, seeing Israel as moving from periods of belief to complete rejection (Job 14:12–14; Ec. 9:5–10) to a final full-blown belief (Dan. 12:2)”.⁴¹ Better than assuming a linear historical progression is in their opinion to leave room for different, sometimes conflicting views. One can question, however, whether it is not also possible and even desirable to do both: describe different views next to each other, and at the same time look for indications of the development of these views over time.

³⁷ Pope, *UF* 19, 460.

³⁸ Cf. also Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 162, pointing to my theory as an example of attempting “to minimize the Canaanite/Israelite nature of Israelite customs pertaining to the dead by distinguishing between Yahwistic religion and popular religion.”

³⁹ Smith and Bloch-Smith, “Death and Afterlife,” 284.

⁴⁰ Van der Toorn, “Funerary Rituals,” 66.

⁴¹ Richard E. Friedman and Shawna D. Overton, “Death and Afterlife: The Biblical Silence,” in *Judaism in Late Antiquity, Part 4, Death, Life-after-Death, Resurrection and the World to Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity*, ed. Alan J. Avery-Peck and Jacob Neusner, *Handbook of Oriental Studies* 49 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 35–59, quote on 55.

John Day calls my “novel explanation about Canaanite influence on the development of resurrection in ancient Israel ... highly speculative”.⁴² He bases this judgment on the reviews by Van der Toorn and Smith and Bloch-Smith and does not discuss my arguments. Apparently, he missed what I wrote about Hos 6, because his theory about the origin of resurrection imagery has much in common with my views. Day assumes a connection between Dan 12 and the resurrection imagery in Hos 6 and 13–14 through Isa 26:19. This imagery would have originated in the Baal mythology, as we know it from Ugaritic texts. He “postulate[s] a process in which mythological imagery was first demythologised and subsequently remythologised.”⁴³ In my opinion the resurrection imagery was not demythologised in Hos 6, but was used by the opponents of Hosea to picture YHWH as a god like Baal, who will reverse his judgment just like spring comes after winter and rains comes after drought. This is a blasphemy in the eyes of the prophet, as can be clearly seen in Hos 6:4–6.⁴⁴ Only centuries later, when the Baal religion was no longer seen as a threat, could this imagery be used again, in a different context, as seen in texts like Dan 12.

⁴² John Day, “The Development of Belief in Life after Death in Ancient Israel,” in *After the Exile: Essays in Honor of Rex Mason*, ed. John Barton and David J. Reimer (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 231–57, esp. 235. See also his article “Resurrection Imagery from Baal to the book of Daniel,” in *Congress Volume Cambridge 1995*, ed. John A. Emerton (Leiden: Brill 1997), 125–33, which repeats parts of the article published one year before.

⁴³ Day, “The Development of Belief in Life after Death”, 247. This interpretation is taken over by Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, 206–7.

⁴⁴ Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, 272–77, 344–46; See also Klaas Spronk, “‘Ten derden dage opgestaan volgens de Schriften’: opmerkingen bij het gebruik van Hosea 6:2 als verwijzing naar het geloof in de opstanding uit de dood,” in *Joden, christenen en hun Schrift: Een bundel opstellen aangeboden bij het afscheid van C.J. den Heyer*, ed. Cees Houtman and Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte (Baarn: Ten Have 2001), 31–42. A similar interpretation was already given by Jörg Jeremias, *Der Prophet Hosea*, ATD 24/1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 86. See also Marius G. Swanepoel, “Solutions to the *crux interpretum* of Hosea 6:2,” *OTE* 7 (1994): 39–59; Elisabeth Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I*, New International Bible Commentary (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 50–51; Marjo C.A. Korpel, “The Demarcation of Hymns and Prayers in the Prophets (I),” in *The Impact of Unit Delimitation on Exegesis*, ed. Raymond de Hoop, Marjo C.A. Korpel, and Stanley E. Porter, *Pericope 7* (Leiden: Brill 2009), 115–45, 122–29. See for a different opinion Göran Eidevall, *Graves in the Desert. Metaphors, Models and Themes in Hosea 4–14* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1996), 91–99; Andrew A. MacIntosh, *Hosea*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 218–19; Joshua N. Moon, *Hosea*, ApOTC 21 (London: IVP Academic, 2018), 117–18.

Nicolas Wyatt puts me on a par with Dahood.⁴⁵ In his commentary on Psalms in the Anchor Bible series Dahood claimed to have found many references to an early Israelite belief in resurrection and immortality.⁴⁶ This was primarily based on his controversial interpretation of the Hebrew based on the comparison with the Ugaritic language. Although Wyatt was familiar with my critical evaluation,⁴⁷ he still maintained that I endorsed Dahood's "valiant attempt to discern a beatific afterlife not only in the Hebrew Psalms, but in the older Ugaritic literature." He considers Dahood's attempt to be "a magnificent failure".⁴⁸ The reference in the accompanying footnote to "the later attempt by Spronk" indicates that my study did not convince him either. It can be noted, however, that in his own discussion of the Ugaritic texts Wyatt like me relates the royal ideology to the story about the death and resurrection of Baal. When he speaks of the Ugaritic king "sharing in the ontology of Baal",⁴⁹ this is very much in line with my theory about the relationship between the royal cult of the dead and the myth of Baal in ancient Ugarit. Wyatt may have been misled by the title of my book, which seems to suggest the presence of clear-cut conceptions of a blissful post-mortem life in Ugarit and ancient Israel. The most important result of my study, however, is that it is an attempt to demonstrate the prominent place of the cult of the dead in the world of ancient Israel and the related reluctance concerning the status of the dead in the religion of ancient Israel.

Next to these negative and in my opinion not always justified judgments I found my book more properly presented and evaluated by Carlos Blanco.⁵⁰ In his search for "the origin of the idea of resurrection in Judaism",⁵¹ he distinguishes "three fundamental orientations": (1) resurrection as a sudden and radical rupture with the earlier beliefs in the afterlife; (2) the

⁴⁵ Nicolas Wyatt, "The Concept and Purpose of Hell: Its Nature and Development in West Semitic Thought," *Numen* 56 (2009): 161–84, esp. 164; and "Immortality and the Rise of Resurrection," in *Life and Death: Social Perspectives on Biblical Bodies*, ed. Francesca Stavrakopoulou (London: T&T Clark, 2021), 141–69, esp. 155–56.

⁴⁶ See especially Dahood, *Psalms III*, XLI–LII.

⁴⁷ Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, 77–81; cf. Nicolas Wyatt, "After Death has us Parted: Encounters between the Living and the Dead in the Ancient Semitic World," in *The Perfumes of Seven Tamarisks: Studies in Honour of Wilfred G. E. Watson*, ed. Gregorio del Olmo Lete, Jordi Vidal, and Wilfred G.E. Watson, AOAT 394 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012), 259–92, esp. 259 n. 3.

⁴⁸ Wyatt, "The Concept and Purpose of Hell," 164.

⁴⁹ Wyatt, "Immortality and the Rise of Resurrection," 156; cf. his article "Ilimilku's Ideological Programme: Ugaritic Royal Propaganda, and a Biblical Postscript," *UF* 29 (1997): 775–96.

⁵⁰ Carlos Blanco, *Why Resurrection? An Introduction to the Belief in the Afterlife in Judaism and Christianity* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2011), 155–59.

⁵¹ Blanco, *Why Resurrection*, 143–81.

perspective of continuity between traditional Yahwism and the resurrection of the dead; (3) a synthesis assuming agreement between the belief in resurrection and the traditional views, and at the same time accepting the originality of this new faith which may have been influenced by foreign cultures. Blanco places my dissertation in the second category, together with the studies by Émile Puech,⁵² Simcha P. Raphael,⁵³ and Levenson.⁵⁴ One could be in worse company, albeit that these authors do not share my ideas about the relationship between belief in the resurrection of the dead and the cult of the dead. Nevertheless, I am happy with the way Blanco summarizes it: “An interesting contribution of this author is his linking the Jahwistic silence on the afterlife to the opposition to Baalistic cults of Canaanite origin. This would explain why it was not until a relatively late age that the topic of the afterlife became central in Jewish theology”.⁵⁵ In his own discussion Blanco argues that the best thing to do is to use both a philological-literary and a social-historical perspective. In line with the third orientation and especially influenced by the work of Stefan Beyerle⁵⁶ he reaches the conclusion that “the belief in resurrection was born in a social and historical context shaped by the opposition between Hellenism and Judaism (...), assimilated fundamental elements of the Israelite faith within the frame propitiated by apocalypticism and featured, in its most general terms, a gradual emphasis on the idea of transcendence in the conception of the sovereignty of God over world, life, and the human being”.⁵⁷

4. A Mid-Term Review: How to Search for the Roots of the Belief in Resurrection

The overview by Blanco and especially the fact that for all three perspectives he can refer to recent studies shows that the discussion about the roots of the biblical faith in resurrection is far from settled. Very important in all this is to use clear definitions in order to distinguish

⁵² Émile Puech, *La croyance des Esséniens en la vie future : immortalité, résurrection, vie éternelle? Histoire d'une croyance dans le judaïsme ancien*, EBib 20–21 (Paris: Gabalda, 1993).

⁵³ Simcha P. Raphael, *Jewish Views of the Afterlife* (North Vale, NJ: Aronson, 1994).

⁵⁴ Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*.

⁵⁵ Blanco, *Why Resurrection*, 159.

⁵⁶ Stefan Beyerle, *Die Gottesvorstellungen in der antik-jüdischen Apokalyptik*, JSJSup 103 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 189–268. In his view we only find in Dan 12 “die Durchbrechung der Todesgrenze” (265), but this was prepared by older texts, beginning with Hos 6 and followed by Pss 73 and 49 and by the vision of Ezek 37, showing an ongoing “Transzendierung” of God’s saving acts.

⁵⁷ Blanco, *Why Resurrection*, 180.

between the different conceptions related to death and the afterlife. A returning question, for instance, is when does care for the dead turn into veneration of the dead. I also agree with my critics that the cult of the dead in the southern Levant cannot be simply related to the hope for revivification like the dying and rising god Baal. Nor can this alleged repeated revivification be equated with a belief in the once-only resurrection of the dead at the end of times.

It has also become clear that in ancient Israel different views of the afterlife existed next to each other and that we have to reckon with the possibility that, as Hays formulates it, “many histories of death (...) remain mostly untold”.⁵⁸ Even when we focus on the resurrection of the dead, leaving aside other ways of conquering death, we have to realize that in the ancient Jewish texts there is a great deal of diversity. This not only concerns the way the resurrection of the dead is described in Dan 12, 1 En 1–36 (The Book of Watchers) and in the later writings in early Judaism, suggesting that Jews were “relatively open to differing explorations of what resurrection would be like”,⁵⁹ it also has repercussions for the quest for the origin of this belief. According to Elledge “(t)he variety expressed in the literary evidence makes it challenging, if not impossible, to trace the emergence of resurrection to a simple, direct line of development from a single point of origin”.⁶⁰ His own reconstruction of the way in which the idea of resurrection emerged within the scribal circles of early Judaism, is a combination of internal development and external influence, especially of Zoroastrianism and Canaanite myth.⁶¹

Klaus Bieberstein has reservations concerning the likelihood of external influence. Like Elledge, he points to different aspects of the hopes (plural!) for an afterlife.⁶² He distinguishes between four models, partly overlapping in content and time:⁶³ (1) the just taken up in death (“Die Aufnahme der Gerechten im Tod”, especially in Isa 53; Pss 49 and 73; 1 En 37–71); (2) the resurrection of those who were left to go unpunished,

⁵⁸ Hays, “How Many Histories of Death Does the Hebrew Bible Contain?,” 692.

⁵⁹ See the survey by Elledge, *Resurrection of the Dead in Early Judaism*, 19–43; quote on 43.

⁶⁰ Elledge, *Resurrection of the Dead in Early Judaism*, 44.

⁶¹ Elledge, *Resurrection of the Dead in Early Judaism*, 44–65.

⁶² Klaus Bieberstein, “Jenseits der Todesschwelle: Die Entstehung der Auferweckungshoffnungen in der alttestamentlich-frühjüdischen Literatur,” in *Tod und Jenseits im alten Israel und in seiner Umwelt*, ed. Angelika Berlejung and Bernd Janowski, FAT 64 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 423–46.

⁶³ Bieberstein, “Jenseits der Todesschwelle,” 424: “vier sich zeitlich überlagernde und einander schließlich ablösende Modelle.”

or were not reconciled (“Die Auferweckung der Ungestrachten und Unge-sühnten”, especially in 1 En 22 and Dan 12); (3) the resurrection of the just (“Die Auferweckung [nur] der Gerechten”, especially in Isa 24–27 and 2 Macc 7); (4) the resurrection of all the dead (“Die Auferweckung aller Toten”, especially in 1 En 51 and T.Benj. 10:6–8). In his opinion this sketches the development of the belief in resurrection. According to Bieberstein it was an internal process. External (Zoroastrian or Hellenistic) conceptions may have been stimulating but are not the basis of these beliefs.⁶⁴ This raises the question however, of how this stimulus worked and what precisely was taken over from these external sources.

In his recent discussion of “the rise of resurrection” Wyatt advocates a more open approach, stating that it is “wrong to identify any single cause for the rise in resurrection belief.”⁶⁵ He lists more or less objectively all the possibilities. He begins with the common view that the hope for the resurrection of the dead expressed in Dan 12 was an answer at the time of the persecution under Antiochus IV Euphron in the second century BCE to the question of how the martyrs and their executioners could be duly rewarded for their faithful perseverance and respectively, their evil deeds. After this theodicy in the Maccabean period (2nd century BCE) he continues going backwards in time, mentioning: (2) Persian influence, (3) Exilic influence, (4) Egyptian practice, (5) Ugaritic royal beliefs, (6) Judahite royal beliefs, and (7) Levitical beliefs.⁶⁶ In what follows I will make some remarks on three of them. First about the renewed interest in a possible Persian influence (2), then about the impact of the cult of the dead (5+6), and finally about the new theory concerning Levitical beliefs (7).

5. Persian Influence

At the beginning of the twentieth century many scholars were convinced that the sudden appearance of the belief in the resurrection of the dead at the end of times, should be ascribed to Persian influence.⁶⁷ A basic problem however, was the relatively late date of the written

⁶⁴ Bieberstein, “Jenseits der Todesschwelle,” 444: “Zwar können solche Vorgaben durchaus stimulierend gewesen sein, doch wird aus fremden Symbolsystemen nur aufgenommen, was im eigenen Symbolsystem sinnvoll integriert werden kann.”

⁶⁵ Wyatt, “Immortality and the Rise of Resurrection,” 163.

⁶⁶ Wyatt, “Immortality and the Rise of Resurrection,” 150–63.

⁶⁷ See the surveys of previous research by Franz König, *Zarathustras Jenseitsvorstellungen und das Alte Testament* (Wien: Herder 1964), 8–39; Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, 57–59; and Elledge, *Resurrection of the Dead in Early Judaism*, 45–53.

sources, well after the Persian period. This casts doubt on the assumption that the Zoroastrian belief in the resurrection of the dead preceded the second century BCE. In addition to the many differences between the biblical and the Zoroastrian conceptions, this question of dating was an important reason for Franz König to deny *any* Persian influence.⁶⁸ In his opinion it was also not necessary to assume foreign influence because of clear indications of an internal development. This view is still held by many modern scholars.⁶⁹ Jan Bremmer even turned things around by stating that the belief in resurrection as attested in the Zoroastrian texts does not testify to ancient traditions, but that the thematizing of the resurrection in these texts was influenced by Christian belief, showing the resilience of the belief in resurrection in the context of the Roman persecutions.⁷⁰ Nowadays most scholars adopt the more moderate view, well represented by James Barr, “that Iranian religious influence, if it did come in, came in through the admixture of Oriental ideas in the Hellenistic world and was adopted because it was part of the anti-Hellenistic reaction”.⁷¹ This should not be seen as a way of accepting or even of submitting to the other religion, but more as a way of recognizing certain common concepts and elements appropriate to internal developments. Similar views can be found amongst others with Segal, who gives a useful overview of the Iranian views of the afterlife.⁷² He finds much “Zoroastrian-Jewish interaction” in Isa 44–47, where the prophet polemicizes against Zoroastrianism. In the text of Isa 66, however, he notes that some elements are taken up positively, especially the hope that YHWH will “make their bones flourish like the grass” (verse 14) and that YHWH “will come in fire and his

⁶⁸ König, *Zarathustras Jenseitsvorstellungen*, 285.

⁶⁹ According to Levenson (*Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, 216) “it would be better to describe Zoroastrian theology as at most a collateral relation whose influence is indirect.” According to Hays (*Death in the Iron Age II*, 331 n. 584) “(t)he idea that physical resurrection was imported from Zoroastrianism is not only unnecessary but relies on a highly contestable reconstruction of Zoroastrian resurrection beliefs in the sixth century BCE.” Cf. also Stephen L. Cook, “Apocalyptic Prophecy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014), 19–35, esp. 26–27.

⁷⁰ Jan N. Bremmer, “The Resurrection between Zarathustra and Jonathan Z. Smith,” *NTT* 50 (1996): 98–107; and *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife* (London: Routledge, 2002), 47–55.

⁷¹ James Barr, “The Question of Religious Influence: The Case of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity,” *JAAR* 53 (1985): 229; cf. also Yaakov Elman and Shai Secunda, “Judaism,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, ed. Michael Stausberg and Yuhan S.-D. Vevaina (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 425; Elledge, *Resurrection of the dead in Early Judaism*, 53.

⁷² Segal, *Life after Death*, 173–203.

chariots like the stormwind” (verse 15). According to Segal “(w)ithin this passage is the scriptural root of Israelite notions of the resurrection of the dead, though the atmosphere in which it developed was Persian. It took centuries before the root produced a plant – the book of Daniel, in which the concept of bodily resurrection finally flowers”.⁷³

According to Bernhard Lang already the prophet Ezekiel and the author of the Isaiah apocalypse were influenced by the Zoroastrian belief that one distant day God would resurrect the dead. It would have inspired the vision in Ezek 37 of the valley of the dry bones.⁷⁴ Lang bases his theory on the work of Mary Boyce, an expert in the field of Zoroastrian studies, who extensively described the Zoroastrian views on the afterlife, stating that they go back to the early Persian period.⁷⁵ She maintains that Persian doctrines, like the coming of a cosmic saviour, heaven and hell, a resurrection of the dead and a last judgment “all came to be adopted by various Jewish schools in the post-Exilic period, for the Jews were one of the peoples, it seems, most open to Zoroastrian influences – a tiny minority, holding staunchly to their own beliefs, but evidently admiring their Persian benefactors, and finding congenial elements in their faith”.⁷⁶ More recently Almut Hintze, Professor of Zoroastrianism at the University of London, once again underlined the “undeniable connections” between Jewish eschatology in the second century BCE and the Zoroastrian beliefs. An important argument for the Zoroastrian belief as the dominant one is in her opinion

⁷³ Segal, *Life after Death*, 203. The image of the seed was already used by Wilhelm Bousset in his book *Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter*, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 21 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1926), 470: “Auch wer die Einwirkung fremder Religionen für wahrscheinlich hält, wird doch zunächst auf die innerjüdische Entwicklung achten müssen; denn das Judentum konnte das Fremde nur dann in sich aufnehmen, wenn es selbst reif dafür geworden war. Keine Saat wächst, es sei denn der Boden für sie bereitet.”

⁷⁴ Bernhard Lang, “Street Theater, Raising the Dead, and the Zoroastrian Connection in Ezekiel’s Prophecy,” in *Ezekiel and his Book: Textual and Literary Criticism and their Interrelation*, ed. Johan Lust, BETL 74 (Leuven: Peeters, 1986), 297–316; esp. 308–14; see also his “Life after Death in the Prophetic Promise,” in *Congress Volume Jerusalem 1986*, ed. John A. Emerton, VTSup 40 (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 144–56; “A Zoroastrian Prophecy of Resurrection: A New Reading of Ezekiel 37,” in *Hebrew Life and Literature: Selected Essays of Bernhard Lang* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), 83–91; and (with Colleen McDannell) *Heaven: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2001), 12–13.

⁷⁵ Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism* (Leiden: Brill 1975), 109–29; *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge, 1979); “Persian Religion in the Achaemenid Age,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism. Vol. 1: Introduction; The Persian Period*, ed. William D. Davies and Louis Finkelstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 279–307. My own summary of the Persian views in *Beatific Afterlife*, 125–29, is also based on her work.

⁷⁶ Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 77.

the inconsistencies in the Jewish sources about the time of the judgment: immediately after death? or after the resurrection of the body? In this regard the Zoroastrian belief is more coherent.⁷⁷ The probability of Persian influence is further endorsed by the recent studies of Shaul Shaked⁷⁸ and Jason Silverman about the Persian influence on other elements of Second Temple Judaism.⁷⁹

An interesting concept within Zoroastrianism is that of the *Fravashi*.⁸⁰ It was taken over from ancient Persian belief preceding Zarathustra. Originally the *fravashis* were the objects of a hero-cult and they were venerated as heroic protectors of the living. Within Zoroastrianism their role changed into that of the pre-existent spirit which is born into this world in a physical body. After death they live on to be re-united again with the body after the resurrection of the dead. It would be interesting to compare this to the alleged similar development of playing down the role of venerated ancestors in ancient Israel.

6. The Cult of the Dead

Elizabeth Bloch-Smith notices a cycle in scholarship regarding the debate over the preexilic Israelite cult of the dead.⁸¹ In the beginning of the twentieth century many biblical scholars interpreted, influenced by anthropologists like Fustel de Coulange and James Frazer, funerary and mourning rites as features of an Israelite cult of the dead. A shift occurred after World War II, amongst others in the Biblical Theology movement, emphasizing Israel's uniqueness in the ancient Near Eastern world. Steps in the

⁷⁷ Almut Hintze, "Defeating Death: Eschatology in Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity," in *Irano-Judaica VII. Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture throughout the Ages*, ed. Julia Rubanovich and Geoffrey Herman (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2019), 23–72.

⁷⁸ Shaul Shaked, "Iranian Influence on Judaism: First Century B.C.E. to Second Century C.E.," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism. Vol. 1*, 308–25; "Eschatology. i. In Zoroastrianism and Zoroastrian Influence," *Elr* VIII/6: 565–69, accessible via <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/eschatology-i>.

⁷⁹ Jason M. Silverman, "Persian Influence on Jewish Apocalyptic," *PIBA* 32 (2009): 49–52; *Persepolis and Jerusalem: Iranian Influence on the Apocalyptic Hermeneutic*. LHB/OTS 558 (London: T&T Clark, 2012); *Persian Royal-Judaean Elite Engagements in the Early Teispid and Achaemenid Empire: The King's Acolytes* (London: T&T Clark, 2020).

⁸⁰ Cf. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, 117–29; and "Fravaši," *Elr* X/2: 195–99 accessible via <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/fravasi->.

⁸¹ Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, "Death in the Life of Israel," in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, ed. Barry M. Gittlen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 139–43.

other direction were taken between the late fifties and mid-nineties, when again the similarities between ancient Israel and her neighbours concerning the role of the dead were stressed by scholars like Dahood, Pope and myself. This was followed again by a reaction by scholars like Johnston and Schmidt seeking to minimize the role of the dead. In his introduction to the special issue of the *Theologische Quartalschrift* in 1999 on the attitude towards death in Israel and Judah, Herbert Niehr seems to ignore the final step noted by Bloch-Smith. In his opinion the present state of scholarship is still influenced by the change that took place in the second half of the eighties of the twentieth century.⁸² He notes that before that time the cult of the dead in ancient Israel was seen as an unimportant relic of the past. New information from the comparison with surrounding cultures of places like Ebla, Ugarit and Mari and from archaeology, indicated that it is worthwhile to look at the relevant texts again and also to look behind these texts to their social and historical background. In the issue introduced by Niehr this is well illustrated by the contribution by Van der Toorn, who speaks of a hidden legacy.⁸³ Niehr himself underscored it four years later with an article on “the changed status of the dead in Yehud”.⁸⁴

Hays notes a similar change with regard to the interpretation of the Ugaritic material,⁸⁵ referring to the work of Gregorio del Olmo Lete⁸⁶ and Wyatt.⁸⁷ Also Pardee seems to be edging away from his earlier minimalism, as he now also acknowledges the existence of a royal mortuary cult on the basis of the newly found Akkadian text RS 94.2158, which points to sacrificial rites for the deified deceased king.⁸⁸ More evidence of a royal cult of the dead in that region was found in Sam'al, modern day Zincirli, a city in south-eastern Turkey, situated about 200 km north of Ugarit. In 2008 they found there a well-preserved basalt stele with a very

⁸² Niehr, “Der Umgang mit dem Tod,” 81.

⁸³ Karel van der Toorn, “Ein verborgenes Erbe: Totenkult im frühen Israel,” *TQ* 177 (1997): 105–20. See also his article “The Nature of the Biblical Teraphim in the Light of the Cuneiform Evidence,” *CBQ* 52 (1990): 203–22, identifying the teraphim as ancestor statuettes.

⁸⁴ Herbert Niehr, “The Changed Status of the Dead in Yehud,” in *Yahwism after the Exile: Perspectives on Israelite Religion in the Persian Era*, ed. Rainer Albertz and Bob Becking (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003), 136–55. See also Herbert Niehr, “Aspekte des Totengedenkens im Juda der Königszeit,” *TQ* 178 (1998): 1–13; esp. 5–6.

⁸⁵ Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II*, 118–21; “How Many Histories of Death,” 683.

⁸⁶ Gregorio del Olmo Lete, *Canaanite Religion according to the Liturgical Texts of Ugarit* (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 1999), 213–53.

⁸⁷ Nicolas Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 430–31.

⁸⁸ Dennis Pardee, *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit*, SBL Writings from the Ancient World 10 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 199–201.

interesting inscription by king Katumuwa.⁸⁹ With this stele Katumuwa the “still living” (line 2) king makes arrangements for sacrifices to the gods and a feast at his burial chamber. He himself will be present after his death with “my soul (*nbš*) in this stele” (line 5). To this can now be added the funerary stele of the earlier king Hayyan from the same city of Sam’al. This was already found in 1888, but only recently it was possible to decipher it on the basis of new photographs.⁹⁰ This stele describes the same situation of the deceased king being present as a “soul” (*nbš*, line 1) ordering his sons to bring sacrifices to the gods and also to feed him, “so that I can eat and enjoy a good name, so that I, the soul of Hayyan, drink in my eternity” (line 10).⁹¹

Very interesting in this connection is also the recent discovery of a tomb below the palace of ancient Qatna, located about 150 km to the south-east of Ugarit. In 2002 archaeologists discovered a 40 m long corridor leading down to a rock-cut chamber with two ancestor figurines at the entrance and dishes for the offerings before them. The material remains point to ancestor worship practised in this place from about 1800 until 1340 BCE, when the city was destroyed.⁹² It confirms what had already been indicated by the findings in ancient Ugarit and other places in this area, that ancestor worship was important in the Levantine kingdoms in the Late Bronze Age.⁹³

Also in biblical studies, the idea of a cult of the dead in ancient Israel is becoming more and more acceptable.⁹⁴ The question remains if and then how this phenomenon was related to the belief in the resurrection of the dead.

⁸⁹ Cf. Virginia R. Herrmann and J. David Schloen, ed., *Remembrance of Me: Feasting with the Dead in the Ancient Middle East*, Oriental Institute Museum Publications 37 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2014). Cf. also Dennis Pardee, “A New Aramaic Inscription from Zincirli,” *BASOR* 356 (2009): 51–71; and De Moor, “Concepts of Afterlife,” 381–82.

⁹⁰ Cf. Émile Puech, “La stèle funéraire Araméenne de Hayyan, roi de Sam’al, à Ördek-burnu,” *RB* 128 (2021): 332–53.

⁹¹ Puech, “La stèle funéraire Araméenne de Hayyan,” 339: “afin que je mange et que soit favorable le bon renom, alors que moi, ‘la personne’ de Hayyan, je bois ‘(dans) mon éternité.’”

⁹² Cf. Peter Pfälzner, ed., *Interdisziplinäre Studien zur Königsgruft von Qatna* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011).

⁹³ Cf. Herbert Niehr, “The Royal Funeral in Ancient Syria: A Comparative View on the Tombs in the Palaces of Qatna, Kumidi and Ugarit,” *JNSL* 32 (2006): 1–24; “Die Königsbestattung im Palast von Ugarit: Ein Rekonstruktionsversuch der Übergangsriten aufgrund schriftlicher und archäologischer Daten,” in *Tod und Jenseits im alten Israel und in seiner Umwelt*, ed. Angelika Berlejung and Bernd Janowski, *FAT* 64 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 323–46; Peter Pfälzner et al., ed., *(Re-)Constructing Funerary Rituals in the Ancient Near East*, Qatna-Studien Supplementa 1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012).

⁹⁴ Cf. Fischer, *Tod und Jenseits*, 138–54, who answers the question in the title of the paragraph on this subject (“Gab es im alten Israel einen Totenkult?”) positively.

7. Levitical Invention?

Wyatt ends his list of possible contexts for the rise of resurrection beliefs with a very positive evaluation of a new theory launched by Bernhard Lang in an article published in 2017,⁹⁵ in which he maintains that the hope for a heavenly afterlife started in ancient Israel as “the exclusive privilege of the landless Levites”.⁹⁶ In the Hebrew Bible it is told that the Levites did not get their share of the promised land. According to Lang this must have had repercussions for the way they looked at death. For the other tribes death was more or less acceptable because of the continuity of the family, in what the sociologist Fustel de Coulange a century ago described as the complex of kin, cult, land and afterlife. In Old Testament studies this concept was introduced by Herbert Brichto as present in ancient Israel as well.⁹⁷ The family lives on in the offspring, and the bond with the previous generations is kept alive in the ancestor cult at the graves in the land in which it had been living in the past and would continue to live in the future. The Levites were forced to develop another way of coping with death. Their inheritance was not in land, but with YHWH (Num 18:20). Especially in Pss 16, 49, 73, which according to Lang are Levitical, it is indicated that being with YHWH goes beyond the border of death. Especially interesting in this connection is Ps 16, in which the psalmist renounces ancestor worship when he states (in Lang’s translation): “I shall not [place] above You the saints who are in the netherworld. Cursed [be] all who take delight in them, in the large number of [ancestor] idols! I shall not pour out their drink offerings of blood, nor will I take their names upon my lips” (verses 2b-4).⁹⁸

Lang’s interpretation of Ps 16 comes close to the one I gave in my dissertation, assuming a connection between “the saints” with the venerated ancestors,⁹⁹ and also to my interpretation of Pss 49 and 73 as pointing to an ancient Israelite belief in a beatific afterlife as being forever “with

⁹⁵ Bernhard Lang, “New Light on the Levites: The Biblical Group that Invented Belief in Life after Death in Heaven,” in *What is Human? Theological Encounters with Anthropology*, ed. Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dietrich, and Bo Holm (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 65–85; Wyatt, “Immortality and the Rise of Resurrection,” 159–63.

⁹⁶ Lang, “New light on the Levites,” 77.

⁹⁷ Herbert C. Brichto, “Kin, Cult, Land, and Afterlife – a Biblical Complex,” *HUCA* 44 (1973): 1–54; see also my critical evaluation of Brichto’s study in *Beatific Afterlife*, 48–51. See on the close relation between land and views on the afterlife, now also Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers: The Roles of Ancestor Veneration in Biblical Land Claims*, LHB/OTS 473 (London: T&T Clark, 2010).

⁹⁸ Lang, “New light on the Levites,” 71.

⁹⁹ Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, 334–38.

YHWH".¹⁰⁰ This is also noted by Wyatt, when he remarks on the basis of Lang's work that "(a) close reading of Ps 16 requires a partial reappraisal of the line taken by Dahood and Spronk on the matter of 'eternal life'."¹⁰¹ With this he seems to retract his earlier negative judgment. Although he still thinks that Dahood and I are too optimistic concerning the Ugaritic material, he does see reason to look again at the biblical material.¹⁰²

An important question that remains is how this positive conception of the afterlife relates to the belief in the resurrection of the dead which Lang, as was mentioned above, attributes to Persian influence. Apparently, he assumes that both concepts existed next to each other. Another question is when and, if so, how this "Levitical afterlife" may have become a more general expectation. Moreover, one can question whether it was exclusively Levitical after all.

8. Conclusion

Wyatt adds to the remark quoted above that "a complete reappraisal is beyond the scope of this chapter." It would indeed need another monograph to do so. This may be a fitting conclusion of this overview. It shows that the discussion about the roots of the biblical faith in the resurrection of the dead is still far from settled. I also learned and have to admit that my attempt in 1986 to reconstruct the rise of this belief in ancient Israel may have been too bold and based on a maximalist interpretation of the relevant Ugaritic and Hebrew texts. Nevertheless, the recent developments do show me that it was not wrong to assume that the cult of the dead played an important role and that we cannot fully understand the ancient Israelite views concerning the afterlife without comparing them to those about the venerated dead in their cultural environment. Important questions that remain after this survey concern especially the impact of the new discoveries in the Levantine kingdoms; the influence of the contact with Persian beliefs, and the precise relationship between different concepts of the afterlife as they jostled each other within ancient Israel. Just as the retirement of my esteemed colleague Riemer Roukema will, as I have got to know him, certainly (*Deo volente*) not be the end of his studies, so my contribution to this volume honouring him may be for me the start of a new thorough study on the ever-intriguing subject of life after death.

¹⁰⁰ Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, 315–34. See also Mark S. Smith, "The Invocation of Deceased Ancestors in Psalm 49 12c," *JBL* 112 (1993): 105–7, showing that a similar repudiation of invoking the ancestors can be found in Ps 49.

¹⁰¹ Wyatt, "Immortality and the Rise of Resurrection," 163.

¹⁰² Wyatt, "Immortality and the Rise of Resurrection," 156 n. 42.