AABNER

ADVANCES in ANCIENT BIBLICAL and NEAR EASTERN RESEARCH

Inaugural Issue: Conceptualizing the Divine in the Levant and Mesopotamia

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ADVANCES in ANCIENT BIBLICAL
and NEAR EASTERN RESEARCH

INAUGURAL *AABNER* EDITORIAL

The editors-in-chief:

Izaak J. de Hulster, Valérie Nicolet,

Ronit Nikolsky, Jason M. Silverman

Abstract

We, the founding editors-in-chief, describe our motivations, goals, and editorial principles for launching the new open access, forum peer-review journal, *AABNER*.

Nous, l'équipe de rédaction en chef initiale, présentons nos motivations, buts et principes éditoriaux pour le lancement de la nouvelle revue *AABNER*, une revue "open access," basée sur un système de "forum peer-review."

Wir als Gründungsmitglieder und Chefredaktion erläutern unsere Beweggründe und Ziele sowie die redaktionellen Prinzipien der neu gegründeten, auf ‚Forum-Peer-Review' basierenden Open-Access Zeitschrift *AABNER*.

INAUGURAL *AABNER* EDITORIAL

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Introduction

This is the first issue of the new journal, *Advances in Ancient, Biblical, and Near Eastern Research* (*AABNER*). Along with an increasing number of collaborators, we have founded this new journal to address some pressing problems in the fields of study related to the ancient Mediterranean, Near East, Bible, and their reception. Two key features of this journal make it different from the crowd of journals already in the field: 1) being diamond open access and 2) replacing the traditional double-blind peer review with forum peer-review, a newer and more transparent method of reviewing submissions. It is our opinion that these two features address concerns within the field, on which we elaborate below.

Origins of the Journal

Work on this journal began within the European Association of Biblical Studies, c. 2014, as part of a discussion concerning ways to actualize the society's ethos of equality, non-discrimination, and rigorous academic interdisciplinarity. As many academic societies have journals, one affiliated with the EABS was a logical idea to consider. Meanwhile, Martin Faßnacht suggested the possibility to collaborate in publishing an open access journal, for which the Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen provides the technical environment of hosting and connecting it with its "Index Theologicus." We quickly came to the realization, however, that the structure of the academic field itself requires reform, and that academic publishing is integral to the structure of the field. And so we got to work, to build a journal that is open access, interdisciplinary, and aware of power imbalances in the field of Biblical Studies broadly understood. Part of these imbalances concern who gets to be a voice in the discussion, but also what constitutes "the field." *AABNER* is committed to diversity of voices *in* the field, but also to working with a broader definition of the field, one which allows for methodological diversity and insures that various literary corpuses, geographical, and cultural contexts are taken into account, alongside a broad time span – not only Biblical Studies, but also the ancient Near East, Classics, and their receptions.

Currently, the journal is owned by a non-profit association in France, *Ami•e•s de la Revue Advances in Ancient, Biblical and Near Eastern Research* (*A.AABNER*),[1] and it has benefited from start-up funding from the Centre of Excellence in Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions (CSTT) and the Centre of Excellence in Ancient Near Eastern Empires (ANEE).[2] The necessary infrastructural support for a diamond Open access journal comes from the Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen. We are indebted to various people that have participated and still participate in supporting the journal in various ways. It is the pleasure of a first issue to have the opportunity to thank them by name here:

[1] The editors-in-chief have formed this association for the purposes of launching the journal.
[2] Both funded by the Academy of Finland. PI of CSTT is Martti Nissinen (also one of the Advisory Board members), and the PI of ANEE is Saana Svärd.
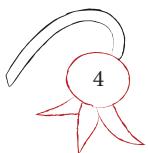
- Our inaugural advisory board members – Professors Martti Nissinen, Catherine Hezser, Jorunn Økland, Hugh Pyper, Kristin De Troyer, and Risto Uro – for their advice and support in launching this journal. We look forward to continuing to work together.
- Martin Faßnacht, Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen, director of the IxTheo-Open-Journal project there, and Axel Braun, Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen, OJS technical support, for their vital infrastructural support.
- Shani Tzoref, an editor-in-chief 2018–2019, for her enthusiasm and work in building the editorial community.
- Martti Nissinen, once more for his ongoing encouragement and for his role in providing start-up funding.
- George Brooke and Outi Lehtipuu, for their encouragement and efforts towards establishing collaboration with the EABS.
- Mélissa Tanguy, designer, for designing the *AABNER* logo and journal template.
- Duncan Burns, our professional copy-editor and type-setter, for his excellent work and understanding concerning delays.

It is also with joy that we thank the EABS membership for their support, as well as those colleagues who joined the editorial team as field editors (listed on the website) and have otherwise shown interest in the project and demonstrated their support by acting as forum reviewers. It is exciting to see that many in the field are ready to see a new journal and welcome our editorial guidelines as necessary in the current setting. We are still recruiting people for our forum, and will seek to reach out to people inside the EABS and more widely, partly through EABS contacts but also worldwide.

Diamond Open Access

AABNER is a diamond open access journal, meaning that it is free for the author and free to the reader; copyright for published articles remains with the author (though the author must grant *AABNER* and its host, Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen, the right to publish and

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distribute it). We have chosen to use a Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license, which allows authors to republish their own material, provided they cite its original publication in this journal.

Open Access is increasingly becoming a requirement for researchers, especially in Europe; many funders, including the ERC (https://erc.europa.eu/managing-project/open-access), make it incumbent upon grantees, and many universities are doing the same. This means that for an increasing number of scholars, open access publishing is mandatory rather than a choice; yet, the suitable venues for publication within ancient Near East fields remain limited and unable to handle such large demand. This alone requires some sort of rectification.[3] Certain forms of open access, the formerly so-called Gold, Green, and Hybrid Open Access systems[4] each have problems.
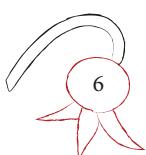
So-called Gold Open Access, or those publishers that require a fee for authors to publish (so-called Article Processing Charges or APCs) are currently the majority. However, the trend towards APCs for publishing open access distorts the field even more than traditional publishing, by favoring well-endowed research centers over scholars at smaller institutions, independent scholars, and scholars in poorer countries. These charges are often exorbitant, taxing the resources of libraries and scholars, at times lining the pockets of for-profit publishers. Hybrid models, where a subscription journal charges APCs, is even worse – essentially making institutions pay twice for the same content. The so-called Green option, whereby scholars post a prior version of their publication is unsatisfactory, as it complicates citation, increases versions, eliminates the value of proper review and copy-editing, and is often hidden on poorly ranked institutional repositories, making it hard to find.

Despite these problems, the advantages of open access are plain to see. Open Access articles often reach wider audiences and receive more citations. By eliminating a paywall, research becomes available to independent scholars, scholars outside wealthier countries, and

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[3] The EABS organized a panel discussion concerning these issues in the Warsaw meeting, 2019. For various options, cf. Cohen et al. 2013..

[4] SHERPA/RoMEO, however, have now retired these classifications (https://v2.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/about.html).

to the general public. Open Access obviously also reduces the strain on library budgets. Further, since journals such as this one are born digitally, they are much easier to archive permanently. Thus a move towards Diamond Open Access publishing is also a move towards a more egalitarian scholarly discourse, one that need not unduly privilege wealthier researchers and institutions.

AABNER is Diamond Open Access and non-profit. It does not charge readers, authors, or libraries for submission or access to articles or issues. This does *not* mean it has no production costs. The infrastructure provided by existing projects (Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen, Fachinformationsdienst (FID) Theologie; https://ixtheo.de and the Center for Open Science; https://www.cos.io) covers the majority of publishing, distribution, and archiving costs. *AABNER* still incurs the regular production costs of professional copy-editing and typesetting. We are still working on developing a sustainable, long-term funding solution that will nevertheless not burden authors or readers.

AABNER articles are hosted and archived in the OJS of the Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen and additionally on SocArXiv.org. Authors and readers therefore need not worry that a glitch in a computer server or a problem with the website will make the journal issues disappear. The authors are also encouraged to upload their articles on their personal websites and their university repositories. Soon the journal issues will also be available via print-on-demand, so libraries may place issues on their shelves and scholars who need print editions for tenure applications may present bound versions of their *AABNER* articles.

Forum Peer-review

AABNER is a peer-reviewed journal, but unlike any other journal in related fields, it uses a system of forum peer-review – for details, please see the subsequent editorial explicitly on this. We hope it will prove to be fairer, faster, and more rigorous than double-blind peer review can be.

Editorial Concerns

AABNER seeks to address some of the systemic problems present in academic research. It elaborates a model that is cooperative and community-oriented, with a concern for inclusivity and interdisciplinary. While we acknowledge that these keywords are often paid lip-service by the guild, we are convinced that the forum review model allows us to integrate a diversity of voices and methodologies in *AABNER*'s issues. We are committed to publishing both thematic issues which allow specialized perspectives on a problem, but also to having strong varia issues, to display the diversity of the field. The forum review model also aims to create an environment that is supportive of daring, unaffiliated scholars with innovative ideas which are out of the box and academically rigorous. We hope to embody ways of working together as a community, where authors benefit from the critical yet constructive engagement of their peers who take into account various perspectives and fields. This can also include practices of multi-authorship and encourages scholars at all stages of their career to submit articles. This implies that we are providing a non-discriminatory environment that actively seeks to include authors, editors, and reviewers representing human diversity in terms of gender, age, identity, race, health status, national origin, relationship status, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and religion. Thus we want to foster being an inclusive community for the community.

Interdisciplinarity

We welcome and encourage new and innovative research approaches to the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean material and its reception, as well as interdisciplinary approaches. While focusing on rigorous academic approaches, we want to encourage the bridging of different disciplinary fields. The journal also embodies this interdisciplinarity in including a variety of combinations of approaches and topics, for example in thematic issues. We resist the temptation of the humanities to splinter into many small specialized fields. This still allows space for specialized contributions by including them within this broader context.
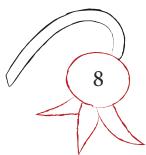
Communal Integrity

AABNER endeavors to build a community with integrity. We expect participants in the journal, both journal staff as well as authors, to conduct themselves as responsible members of society. This means that aspects outside academic content, such as citation practices and interpersonal behavior, require careful consideration. We particularly have in mind serious issues that impact the integrity of the community, such as harassment, racism, and felony convictions. As an academic community, we must learn to deal with such issues seriously, without devolving into mere rumor mills or populistic shaming. These are complex issues and they cannot be resolved quickly and in a general manner. They demand case-by-case consideration. However, we also are convinced that we need to take up this discussion in the journal and we are planning to publish a thematic issue discussing these ethical problems, such as the citation of convicted scholars, rumors, etc. In doing so, we hope to contribute to healthier academic communities.

Editorial Principles of the Journal

AABNER intends to be both high quality and innovative, thus the editorial policy strives to balance academic merit and methodological rigor with methodological innovation and novelty. We feel that two problems need to be addressed. On the one hand, some longer-established venues can be susceptible to "conservatism" in regards to topics and methodologies, due to the nature of the old model of peer review: typically, reviews are done by older, well-established scholars, who are more familiar with older paradigms and sometimes defensive of their own scholarship. On the other hand, academic work recently has been developed in important and meaningful ways in group projects. While the value of this production is clear, research that does not fit in the hierarchical academic networks might be ignored. This can lead to a narrowing of the variety of topics: similar subjects and methods are repeated endlessly, erasing other questions and other approaches. The journal hopes to rectify these problems and increase opportunities for a wider set of scholars, including junior scholars and independent researchers, using innovative, relatively untested methodologies, without surrendering over-all quality. A transparent review process

facilitates this: all reviewers can see all the reviews, and discuss and negotiate arguments for accepting or rejecting an article. Below we list the principles by which we strive to assess all submissions to the journal.

Academic merit. Academic merit largely consists of four things: knowledge of the relevant material, critical acumen in its analysis, awareness of relevant literature, and the positing of new questions and/ or answers. The editors will ensure that all published articles fulfill these criteria.

Methodological innovation. Vibrant scholarship progresses not only through the application of tried methodologies, but in the development, refinement, and application of new ones. The editors will seek to publish articles which attempt to create or refine methodologies more than ones that rehearse older methodologies.

Methodological rigor. A methodology is useless if it is not utilized in an appropriate manner, extent, or context. The editors will ensure that methodologies used in articles are appropriately justified, adapted for the article's stated aims, and thoroughly applied as appropriate.

Topical importance. Not all important topics are "trendy." The editors will seek to evaluate the relevance of an article on the inherent value of the topic chosen rather than on the popularity of the topic at the time of publication. Moreover, by retaining a broader disciplinary scope than many journals, the journal will be able to promote discussion across artificial disciplinary boundaries more easily. For example, topics related to imperialism are just as relevant to the Hebrew Bible as the New Testament, the Talmud, Gilgamesh, and the later receptions of these texts. Keeping the scope broad will therefore enable themed issues across traditional subfield boundaries.

Topical novelty. The above criterion means that the editors will also attempt to prioritize new topics of interest where possible.

Transparent peer review. There are numerous critiques of the double-blind peer review system, not least of which is the fact that in small fields anonymity is often not possible. The journal therefore follows the lead of some of the natural sciences in making the process of review more transparent and open (see the discussion of forum review in the subsequent editorial).
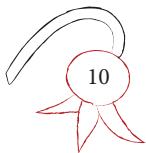
Editorial discretion. Since studies have shown that truly novel and innovative research has difficulty in getting funded or published, the editors will have the discretion to choose risky publications that are nevertheless ground-breaking and innovative, in the understanding that they will generate discussion and debate.

Ethics. The journal is committed to the highest ethical standards for its publications. For this reason, the journal will not accept for publication any works which have been published previously, plagiarize material, or falsify evidence. Any article which is found to have done so after publication will be withdrawn. The journal also will not publish post-1972 unprovenanced materials for the first time.[5] Previously published unprovenanced materials, if cited, should be flagged as such.

Onwards and Upwards!

Thankful for all the various kinds of support, tried and tested by set-backs, we are glad to present to you the first issue of *AABNER*. In light of the challenges that there are in founding a new journal, we have shared our reasons for our endeavor and express our hope and confidence that this new journal will grow further into a community effort, as a Diamond Open Access journal can only function as a community service for and by the academic (and wider) community. For years the seed has been growing and, with this issue, the seedling sees the light and awaits different kinds of communal care (input) in order to flourish and serve the community.

Above we have sketched how *AABNER* grew as a European initiative – although the editors-in-chief by academic affiliation reflect these roots, their backgrounds, networks, and activities go much beyond this; moreover, *AABNER*'s group of field editors and forum members shows an even larger diversity.

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[5] See the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention, https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/. Both ASOR and SBL have the same policy, albeit they have a so-called Cuneiform exception that we do not have. ASOR: http://www.asor.org/about-asor/policies/policy-on-professional-conduct/; SBL: https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/SBL-Artifacts-Policy_20160903.pdf

There are different ways for you to join *AABNER* (aabner.org) in its service for the academic community:

- Submit an article or idea for a thematic issue;
- Offer your expertise for the review forum;
- Donate;
- Discuss with your institution's library possibilities for supporting the infrastructure via cataloguing or donation;
- Read, share, and cite the articles published herein.

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AABNER FORUM PEER REVIEW SYSTEM

The editors-in-chief:

Izaak J. de Hulster, Valérie Nicolet,

Ronit Nikolsky, Jason M. Silverman

Abstract

The *AABNER* founding editors-in-chief describe some of the problems with traditional double-blind peer review and describe our solution for them, forum peer review, which we have developed for use within *AABNER*.

L'équipe de rédaction en chef initiale d'*AABNER* décrit quelques problèmes liés au système traditionnel de la "double-blind peer review" et propose une solution, le système "forum peer review", développé et mis en place pour la création d'*AABNER*.
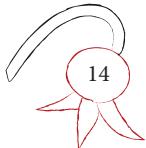
Die Chefredaktion von *AABNER* beschreibt die Schwächen und Probleme des traditionellen ‚Double-Blind-Peer-Review' und bietet eine innovative Lösung: den von uns weiterentwickelten ‚Forum-Peer-Review'.

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AABNER FORUM PEER REVIEW SYSTEM

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In the pursuit of a peer review system that would avoid some of the pitfalls of the traditional double-bind peer review system,[1] *AABNER* proposes (and uses) a forum peer review system. The faults of the double-blind peer review system are documented[2] and include a tendency towards conservatism in methodology and a bias against

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[1] Although, it should be borne in mind that peer review as a widely accepted necessity is relatively recent, see e.g., Baldwin 2017; 2018.

[2] Though Zuckermann and Merton 1971 were relatively rosy, they already pointed to some of the flaws that would later become more apparent. E.g., Weiskittel 2015; a special issue of the journal Scientometrics (113.1 [2017]) was recently devoted to the problem (Squazzoni et al. 2017); Tennant et al. 2017; Curtin et al. 2018; Tennant and Ross-Hellauer 2020; for a list along with difficulties in assessing various kinds of bias quantifiably, see Lee et al. 2012; for the need for such studies to integrate a solid sociology of knowledge, see Bornmann 2008; Sabaj et al. 2016.

truly novel research,[3] "the reviewer 2" problem of unfair, unprofessional, or mistaken reviews,[4] sometimes significant publication delays,[5] and the fact that in small disciplines true anonymity is often not possible in reality. Therefore, scientific considerations merit a change. Ethical concerns also call for redress; the above-noted facets of the double-blind system can be disproportionately detrimental to the scholarship of junior scholars, minorities, and women.[6] We are particularly concerned to address systemic inequalities within academia, and peer review is one of the elements that requires reform and lies within a journal's scope. These are problems discussed across the range of scholarly disciplines, and a wide array of solutions have been posited for them.[7]

Thus, *AABNER* is developing a review process first pioneered in the hard sciences: *forum peer review*.[8] This method offers a compromise between fully blind review systems and fully open review systems.[9] In this partially open system, instead of the editors-in-chief sending articles to a handful of scholars for their individual replies and making a decision based thereon (i.e., the traditional double-blind peer review),

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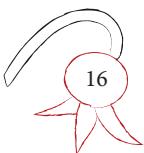
Fitzpatrick 2011, 15–49, takes a wider view that sees the entire system out of sync with modern technology.

[3] Siler et al. 2015. Cf. the somewhat aggrieved polemic in Godfrey 2013 in the context of Early Christianity studies.

[4] E.g., Smith 2006; Gerwing et al. 2020.

[5] For a site attempting to collate average response times, see https://scirev.org/statistics/first-round/. According to their current data set, only 71% of articles in the humanities process in less than 6 months (https://scirev.org/statistics/total-duration/).

[6] Helmer et al. 2017. This has been contested (Lee et al. 2012; Mutz et al. 2012).

[7] E.g., Rice 2011; Weiskittel 2015; Esary 2017; Chua et al. 2018.

[8] Cf. the debates overviewed by Rice 2011; Ross-Hellauer and Görögh 2019: especially option J1.

[9] Cf. the discussion of various types of open review systems in Hames 2007, 42–43, 277–81; Tenant et al. 2017; Ross-Hellauer and Görögh 2019; Besançon et al. 2020; Carraro and Jongen 2018. Discussions of "openness" within other aspects of Biblical Studies have been ongoing for quite some time, e.g., Bulkeley 2005. For an example of an open system of review in archaeology, see https://archaeo.peercommunityin.org.

field editors shepherd articles through a forum review process. To our knowledge, this solution has not been previously applied to the fields covered by *AABNER*.

What is the forum review process *AABNER* is using? Once the editors-in-chief receive an article, they first assess its basic suitability for the journal, and then assign it to a field editor with appropriate expertise – for interdisciplinary manuscripts the field editor may collaborate with another colleague. The field editor then shepherds it through the *AABNER* forum, which comprises multiple experts. Anonymized articles are presented within this forum for the reviewers' comments and critiques. Every forum reviewer is able to see the identity of the other reviewers, can read their comments, and offer their own comments on other reviewers' comments. The field editor is responsible for assessing when sufficient feedback has been received. Usually, the discussion between forum reviewers will last for about a month and involve a few threads of discussion. The field editor then collates and anonymizes the results. On this basis, acceptance, revision, or rejection is passed along to the author(s), along with the anonymized commentary. This means that while the identity of the author remains unknown to the reviewers, the identities of all of the reviewers are known to each other and to the author—although the author only receives a review that reflects the forum's *opinio communis* not attributable to single reviewers. In general, it is expected that most manuscripts will receive a number of revisions for improvement rather than outright acceptance or rejection. The entire process involves a consensus opinion among a variety of reviewers; it does not depend on the opinion of any single reviewer nor require an editor to arbitrate between opposing opinions by themselves (for a visual diagram of the workflow, see Fig. 1).

This method has several benefits. First, reviews will not be held up by a single scholar too busy to respond or to return their review. Second, it means that since reviewer comments are visible to their peers, reviewers have an incentive to ensure their comments are valid and constructive: the communal approach encourages constructive criticism over criticism for its own sake. Thus, the system functions as a peer review of peer reviewing itself. Third, it makes it easier to evaluate multi-disciplinary papers, as experts in one area are able to

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see the comments of experts outside their own expertise. This collective process encourages colleagues to comment on parts of the manuscript (sometimes just details) within their expertise and ought to produce more relevant and constructive comments for the authors than double-blind systems sometimes do. Our experience of the process so far for the papers published in this first issue has been promising. For the authors themselves, the larger feedback received through the forum review process also means that their work on an article is less solitary and benefits from its insertion in a scholarly community. Instead of individuals critiquing or incensing each other, there is an academic community contributing to the betterment of scholarship.[10]

The system as we have devised it involves both field editors and forum editors, all of whom are known to each other, while the authors' identities remain anonymous. The names of the editors can be seen on the website, and the list will be kept updated. In the near future, the members of the forum who are not also field editors will also be visible on the website. When any editor (whether advisory board member, editor-in-chief, field editor, or forum editor) submits a manuscript to the journal, they recuse themselves from the process for their submission, and they must engage with the resulting commentary like any other author. In the terms of Ross-Hellauer and Görögh (2019), *AABNER*'s forum review has partial open identities and open interaction between reviewers.

For the first several journal issues, we are using a temporary freeware software solution for the editorial forum. We are hopeful that new software specifically designed for forum review (that makes editorial self-recusal easier, for instance) will be developed and available to us in the near future. Thus, while the first issue has taken some time to organize, we hope that once the new software system is up and running, it will prove to be faster as well as a more efficient and effective method of ensuring rigor than traditional systems.

It is our earnest hope that using forum peer review will prove to be one step towards fostering the publication of truly innovative research,

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[10] In the context of interdisciplinary panels, see Huutoniemi 2012; for a perspective relating this to both epistemology and ethics, see Bezuidenhout et al. 2019.
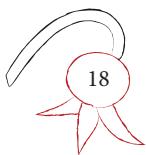
widen the scope of scholarly dialogue from traditional methodologies and topics towards a much richer dialogue of perspectives, and help to address systemic inequalities in the fields *AABNER* covers.
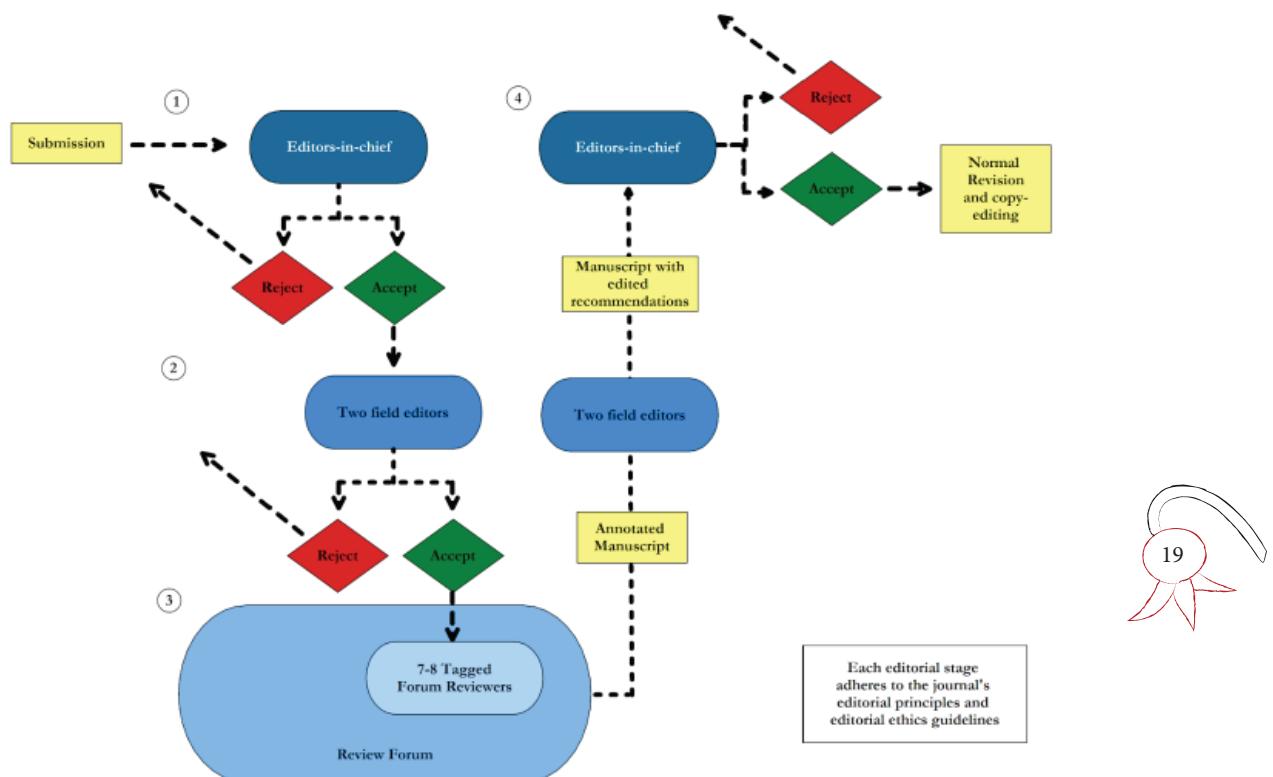
Fig. 1: Forum Review Process

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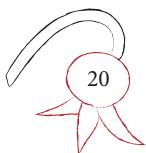
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Izaak J. de Hulster

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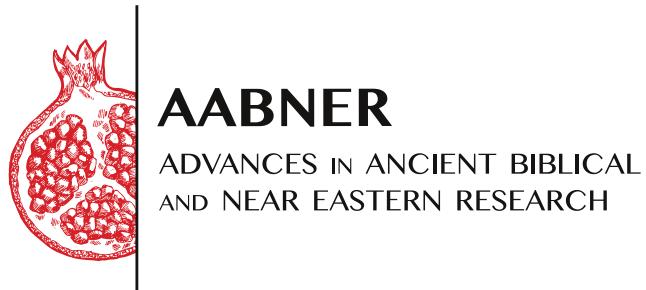
CONCEPTUALIZING THE DIVINE IN THE LEVANT AND MESOPOTAMIA: EDITORIAL FOR THE THEMATIC ISSUE OF *AABNER* 1.1

Izaak J. de Hulster

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This is the third contribution from the editorial team in this first issue of *AABNER*. Like the journal itself, this first theme also has a longer history. Alongside preparing for the journal, I had organized a conference "Deities in Aram, Israel, and Phoenicia: An Iron Age Perspective on Conceptualizing the Divine in the Levant" (March 2018) in Helsinki (within the context of the Centre of Excellence in Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions). This is where Joanna Töyräänvuori and Gina Kontantopoulos presented papers that resulted in their present contributions. Other conference papers have found other venues of publication. Mark Smith and Sebastian Fink met at the conference, conversed about the divine voice and the Day of the Lord, and, discussing the journal, decided to collaborate in writing the article that you can read as the first one in this first *AABNER* issue. Different conversations led to more submissions, and thus we could include

another co-written paper by Martti Nissinen and Raija Mattila and a paper by Karen Langton.

Here I want to highlight that to some extent our aim of diversity could be achieved in terms of gender and residence all over (at least) the northern hemisphere: Europe, Near East, Japan, and the USA. Second, we are thankful for colleagues collaborating to contribute co-authored articles. Third, I want to extend my gratefulness to our forum reviewers. As a thematic issue, this issue has a limited scope, and thus I want to thank by name our field editors in ancient Near East and Biblical Studies: Sonja Ammann, Sebastian Fink (who was not involved in reviewing his own co-authored article), Mark Leuchter, and Lionel Marti. The upcoming open issues will broaden the scope of *AABNER* further.

Conceptualization of the divine invites thinking in many different directions – of course, too many for simply one issue. Nevertheless, I am glad to present this issue with its methodological diversity, foci on a variety of topics and stimulating (invitations for) dialogues. Pondering the topic, I recall Spieckermann and Feldmeier's *Gott der Lebendigen / God of the Living* (2017) and Eisen and Müllner's *Gott als Figur* (2016). These two books in Biblical Studies address two different approaches and meanings of – to use one denominator – the character of God. The thematic issue at hand comprises papers addressing the Hebrew Bible but also many related and relevant topics beyond. Sebastian Fink and Mark Smith deal with the Day of the Lord (including a perspective from Sumerian and Akkadian literature); Karen Langton explores speaking about YHWH as midwife. Further contributions share the Levantine context and have a broader view on the divine world: Joanna Töyräänvuori deals with the iconography of the Sea as divinity, and Gina Konstantopoulos writes about "demons" from "Mesopotamia". Before I move to the last article, I mention another book: MacGregor's *Living with the Gods*. It made me think about how diverse and intriguingly complex the topic of conceptualizing the divine (and in the end belief or "religion") is – it is more than speech, more than metaphor, more than iconographic expressions. It includes community and the community's activity, a relation to the environment, producing materiality (most obviously in building but also in dress and food), practices,

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such as singing, charity, etc. Again, whereas one could compose texts and fill libraries, here we exemplify this broader scope with an article by Martti Nissinen and Raija Mattila on the temple of Ishtar of Arbela and its economic and religious significance.

Enjoy reading! Get inspired! Share and feel welcome to contribute to future issues!

Izaak J. de Hulster
January 2021

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THE DAY STORM IN MESOPOTAMIAN LITERATURE:
A BACKGROUND TO THE BIBLICAL DAY OF YAHWEH?

Sebastian Fink and Mark S. Smith

Abstract

This article explores the conception of divine (decision) days, especially the "day-storm" in second- and first-millennium Sumerian and Akkadian literature and finally compares it to the "the day of Yahweh" in the Hebrew Bible.

Der hier vorliegende Artikel untersucht das Konzept eines göttlichen (Entscheidungs-)Tages, speziell des „Sturm-Tages", in der sumerischen und akkadischen Literatur des ersten und zweiten Jahrtausends und vergleicht dieses mit dem „Tag Jahwehs" im Alten Testament.
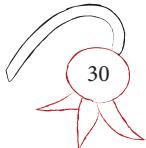
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THE DAY STORM IN MESOPOTAMIAN LITERATURE:
A BACKGROUND TO THE BIBLICAL DAY OF YAHWEH?*

Sebastian Fink and Mark S. Smith

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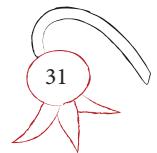
As Mischa Meier has recently argued in an article on the problem of time (Meier 2015) in European historiography, that historiographers tend to "compress" time in critical situations and attribute the decisive actions to a single point in time – a decision day, so to speak. The historical events that finally lead to a decision are concentrated on that very day. That day is the heyday of a crisis, and – as in the medical use of this word – it decides between life and death. The basic concept is well known from military history, and it even was described as an essential component of "the western way of war" (Hanson 1989), namely the idea of one decisive battle that ends a war, issuing in a clear result as to the victor and the vanquished and thereby re-establishing order.

This article explores two usages of the technique of temporal compression. More specifically, we compare the "day-storm" (or "storm-day") in ancient Mesopotamian literature from the early second and first millennia with "the day of Yahweh" in the Hebrew Bible. This essay consists of five parts: (1) an examination of the "day-storm" in traditional Sumerian lament literature; (2) Sumero-Akkadian examples of "the day-storm" within the same genre dating to the first millennium; (3) Akkadian "day-storm" in the first millennium; (4) divine wrath and the causes of destruction in these Mesopotamian texts; and (5) possibly relevant cases of "the day of Yahweh" in the Hebrew Bible. The Mesopotamian materials are offered to broaden the perspective on the biblical "day of Yahweh," long a topic of scholarly discussion.[1] The approach taken in this study hardly resolves the many questions concerning the "day of Yahweh" or even the directions potentially worth pursuing with respect to this phenomenon. Instead, the central goal of this study is to suggest the broad base of potential comparative evidence.

I. Sumerian Lament Literature

The first clear Mesopotamian instances of temporal compression of historical events to a single day is found in year names of the Ur III dynasty, where it is said that the king achieved great deeds in a single day (Fink 2016, 116). However, this article will not concentrate on royal inscriptions where this concept is found from time to time, especially in connection with great battles, because in the royal inscriptions the concept is used as a quite simple motif without further elaboration, for example: "the king defeated x enemies in a single day." We focus instead on lamentation literature, which stresses the non-heroic aspects

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[1] For example, Mowinckel 1958; von Rad 1959; and Weiss 1966, all discussed below. For more recent work, see Beck 2005; Schwesig 2006; Oswald 2009; Norin 2009; and Fleming 2010. Note also the two dissertations: Leung 1997, and LaRocca-Pitts 2000.

of war and develops the idea of a decision-day in detail.[2] While royal inscriptions highlight the heroic deeds of the king, lamentation literature depicts events from a considerably different viewpoint. It takes the perspective of the suffering, vanquished population. At the same time, the fact that someone remains to lament demonstrates that the destruction was not a final, complete one; the survivors expressed the hope for a better future in their laments. While the city was destroyed by human enemies based on the actions of hundreds or even thousands of people, this destruction is attributed to and conceptualized as a single entity, which is described, if we follow Nili Samet's translation, as "a storm-day" (see below).

In the following discussion, we offer an overview of relevant Sumerian and Akkadian texts. This material is closely connected, as Sumerian lamentations were written in post-Sumerian times. It is usually taken for granted that the use of Sumerian was restricted to a school and temple environment after the fall of Ur III, in a linguistic landscape dominated by Akkadian. Scribes composed Sumerian as well as Akkadian literary texts,[3] and for some reason Sumerian (or to be more correct Emesal [see below], the only literary variant of Sumerian) was seen as the most appropriate language for lamentations until the end of the cuneiform record. The city laments, all composed in the first half of the second millennium BC, are usually thought to have been performed during a festival celebrating the restoration of a city.

The Lament over Sumer and Ur, commonly regarded as the oldest city lament, introduces the motif of the "storm-day." Nili Samet suggested this translation of the Sumerian word "u_4/ud," which actually means both, "storm" and "day." She convincingly argues that "the 'day' on which Ur's fate changed and the 'storm' that destroyed it are mythologically identical."[4] Obviously, the scribes were aware that these were

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[2] George 2013 distinguishes between heroic and non-heroic descriptions of war in Mesopotamian literature.

[3] So, e.g., the famous Ipiq-Aja, who is known as the scribe of tablets containing the Akkadian Atram-hasīs as well as the Sumerian Destruction of Ur. See Löhnert 2011.

[4] Samet 2014, 20. See also 87–88.

different words, maybe even with different etymologies and different pronunciation[5] – but the temptation to identify them in this context and play with the ambiguity of the sign UD seemingly was too high. Being able to use the inherent possibilities of script to create different levels of meaning was proof of the highest mastery of scribal education.[6] As this ambiguity is not reproducible with a single English word, the best rendering for the ambiguous passages is surely Samet's "storm-day" in order to let the modern reader know that the ancient readers had both options. It is hard to assess if the identification was also an ontological one for the ancient scribes of the text. However, it is quite a universal belief that things that are connected in language and – as Marc van de Mieroop (2017) has convincingly argued for the case of Mesopotamia – also in script, are also connected in reality.[7] From this background, Samet's identification of the concept of the destructive storm and the fate-changing day makes even more sense. The initiated scribes, who know how to read, can clearly understand that these two entities are only readings of one sign or two sides of the same coin as we moderns might say.

In the lament for Sumer and Ur, the storm-day is called forth by the most powerful gods: An, Enlil, Enki and Ninḫursag (or Ninmaḫ). One god alone does not make the decision regarding the destruction of the land. It is rather a matter for the divine assembly, and this assembly made the decision to "change its [Sumer's] preordained plans."[8] The gods decide that the land has to be destroyed and this time the plan cannot be changed (lines 56–57). Enlil calls down a wild tribe, the Gutium, from their mountains, yet the text attributes the destruction to the storm-day. After a passage describing the destruction in several places of Sumer, two lines equate the storm with Enlil's word:

163.) u_4.ba inim u_4.dam al.du_7.du_7 $ša_3$.bi a.ba.a. mu.un.zu
164.) inim ^{d}en.lil_2.la_2 zid.da.aš gel.le.$eĝ_3$ gab_2.bu zu.zu.de_3

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[5] This is suggested by Parpola 2016, see entries 2636 (u_4) and 2662 (ud, ug_4, u_4).
[6] See Maul 1997 and 2003; Vanstiphout 2004; Frahm 2011.
[7] See Bronkhorst 2001 for a comparative analysis of this belief.
[8] The text in line 27 reads: ĝiš.ḫur.bi kur_2.ru.de_3. Transliteration and translation from ETCSL (2.2.3).
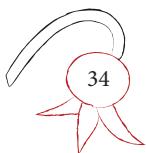
On that day the word (of Enlil) was an attacking storm. Who could fathom it?
The word of Enlil was destruction to the right, … to the left. (ETCSL 2.2.3)

These lines suggest that the word of Enlil and the storm are identical or at least very closely related in this context. Here the description of the storm-day applies to the divine word, which plays a major role in the conceptualization of divine power in the lamentations.

In the Ur Lament, the destruction is caused by Enlil calling forth (gu$_3$ –de$_2$, LU 173) the "storm-day."[9] This personified storm acts as Enlil's tool:

196.) kalam.e saĝ eĝar du$_3$ i$_3$.ak.e UR.bi i$_3$.gu$_7$.e
197.) u$_4$ gig er$_2$.re nam nu.tar.re uĝ$_3$.e še am$_3$.ša$_4$
198.) u$_4$ šu ur$_3$.ur$_3$.re kalam i$_3$.ur$_4$.ur$_4$.re
199.) u$_4$ a.ma.ru.gin$_7$ uru$_2$ i$_3$.gul.gul.e
200.) u$_4$ kalam til.til.e uru$_2$.a me bi$_2$.ib$_2$.ĝar
201.) u$_4$ ni$_3$ u$_2$.gu de$_2$.de$_2$ ḫul.ĝal$_2$.e ba.e.DU
202.) u$_4$ izi.gin$_7$ bar$_7$.a uĝ$_3$.e su bi$_2$.ib$_2$.ĝar$_2$
203.) u$_4$ ḫul.gig du$_{11}$.ga ^{d}en.lil$_2$.la$_2$ u$_4$.kalam.ta be$_4$.be$_4$
204.) uri$_2$^{ki}.ma tug$_2$.gin$_7$ ba.e.dul gada.gin$_7$ ba.e.bur$_2$

In the land, it (= the storm) *dashes heads against the walls*, consuming indiscriminately.
The bitter storm by tears cannot be influenced – the people moan.
The sweeping storm makes the land quake,
The land-annihilating storm silenced the city.
The all-exterminating storm came wickedly toward it.
The storm, blazing like fire, ripped the flesh of the people.
The storm ordered by Enlil in hate, the storm gnawing away the land
Covered Ur like a garment, was spread over it like a linen cloth.
(Samet 2014, 64–65)

The extant parts of the Uruk lament do not contain long references to the word or the storm as an agent of destruction. The agent of the destruction is described as a monster called forth by Enlil (see

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[9] ^{d}en.lil$_2$.le u$_4$.de$_3$ gu$_3$ ba.an.de$_2$ uĝ$_3$.e še am$_3$.ša$_4$ "Enlil called the 'storm-day' – the people moan." Samet 2014, 62–63.

Cavigneaux 2013). The Nippur lament contains a rather long passage that elaborates on the good day set up by Enlil, but does not elaborate on the storm-day or the force of the divine word.

It seems that the Eridu lament began with a description of the mighty word of Enlil but the extant lines add little new to the picture, except for one line. It elaborates on the topic of the inhuman nature of the storm, which fulfills its destructive mission without any hesitation once it is set in motion:

I 20.) u_4 sig_5 ḫul nu.ĝal$_2$.la sa_6.ga nu.zu ḫul nu.zu.e

A storm, which possesses neither kindness nor malice, does not distinguish between good and evil. (Green 1978, 132–33)
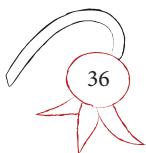
Summarizing the evidence from the city laments, we can say that the storm-day is an agent of destruction and it is equated with the divine word.

At the same time, this is only one side of the "day" in the lamentations. While the storm-day occurs as an expression of divine wrath, there is also evidence for the "good day" as an expression of the restoration of divine favor. On the other hand, the opening of the Curse of Agade describes a prospering city, before divine favor is withdrawn and Agade is destroyed.[10] The descriptions of good days were used as a literary device in order to sharpen the contrast to what will happen later, or to what has happened before. This feature will be important for the discussion of the biblical material below, as it might serve to explain why different, even contradictory, interpretations are given concerning the "Day of Yahweh." The best example for the good day (u_4 zi – we could translate more literally the "righteous day" and connect it to renewed divine judgement) comes from the Nippur Lament:

247. i_3.ne.eš$_3$ a_2. še$_3$ ^{d}en.lil$_2$.le u_4 zi kalam.ma bi$_2$.in.gub.ba.am$_3$
248. u_4 nibru^{ki} gu$_2$ an.še$_3$ zi.zi i$_3$.ne.eš$_3$ im.mi.in.dug$_4$.ga
249. u_4 zi e$_2$.kur.ra sag mu$_2$.mu$_2$ e.ne im.mi.in.tuk.a
250. u_4 ki.ur$_3$.ra dalla maḫ e$_3$.a e.ne im.mi.in.zi.ga

[10] For an edition, see Cooper 1983.

....

261. u$_4$ nig$_2$.si.sa$_2$ kalam.ma ga$_2$.ga$_2$ a$_2$.taḫ.a mi.ni.in.ku$_4$.ra

Now, see! Enlil hast set up a good day in the land!
The day for Nippur to raise (its) neck to heaven he has even now ordered!
He, a good day to shine in the Ekur, he has provided!
He, the day for the Ki'ur's magnificent manifestations, he has raised up!
…
The day for establishing justice in the land, he brought in (Išme-Dagan)
in (its) aid! (Tinney 1996, 116–17)

The lines omitted above all describe how fertility and power are restored to the land. Lines 284–95 describe the ritually pure day, in which all members of society peacefully co-exist and which finally removes the "darkness" from the land.[11]
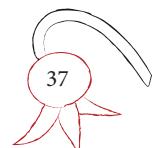
II. Sumero-Akkadian Evidence of the First Millennium

The Mesopotamian tradition of lamentation is well attested into the first millennium.[12] The city laments of earlier tradition were replaced by the so-called canonical lamentations. Canonical Sumerian lamentations were an important part of the state cult, and their role is well documented for the Neo-Assyrian period. The evidence for this period shows that they were performed on a fixed schedule, several times a week, if not every day, and that even the Neo-Assyrian king had to perform Emesal lamentations.[13] The latest dateable copies of canonical lamentations come from the first century BC.[14] Scribal families that kept this tradition alive until the very end of cuneiform writing copied

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[11] Tinney 1996, 120–21. Several parallels to this "harmony" passage were collected by Steve Tinney in his commentary to the text. See Tinney 1996, 177–81. The most prominent one is Gudea Cylinder A xii 21–xiii 15.

[12] For a recent overview on Emesal prayers in the first millennium, see Gabbay 2014.

[13] See the cultic calendars published in SAA 20 and Maul 2000.

[14] These texts were published by Reisner already in 1896.

these texts and passed their knowledge of Sumerian from father to son.[15] These texts also influenced prayers in Akkadian language; some Akkadian prayers or hymns might be adapted translations of Sumerian texts (Wassermann and Gabbay 2005). Besides direct translations, the Sumerian tradition also influenced the language and motifs of Akkadian prayers, based on the fact that scribal education always was bilingual. At the same time, Sumerian remained the most appropriate language for lamenting until the very end of cuneiform culture and perhaps impeded the development of an Akkadian genre of lamentations. When it came to lamentation, Sumerian, or more exactly Emesal,[16] the only known variant of Sumerian, was regarded as the fitting language.

The canonical lamentations, especially the balaĝs, include several attestations of the "storm-day," usually described in long litanies. In the balaĝs, the "storm-day" is often equated with the divine word. A discussion of every reference to the destructive storm in the balaĝs does not seem fruitful, but the following selection indicates how the "storm-day" was conceptualized. We present the evidence in four groups: (1) equations of the storm with the word of the gods and the flood; (2) the destructive character of the storm; (3) the motif of the storm without mercy; and (4) cases representing temporal compression.

II.1 Equations

The balaĝ u_4.dam ki am_2.us_2 "It touches the earth like a storm" elaborates on the destructive qualities of the divine word and compares it to a storm.[17] The storm and the word alternate as agents of destruction.

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[15] As far as we can see, there are no references to female scribes in the colophons of the canonical lamentations from the first millennium.

[16] On Emesal, see Schretter 1990 and Schretter 2018 with references to earlier literature. Most Emesal variants of the Sumerian main dialect can be explained by straightforward sound changes (Schretter 1990, 31–70). However our correct understanding of the nature of Emesal (dialect, sociolect, etc.) is hampered by the fact that all the clear evidence for Emesal comes from a time where Sumerian (and therefore also Emesal) was no longer an everyday language.

[17] For an edition and translation, see Cohen 1988, 120–51.
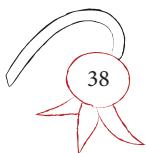
As stated above, they are identified with each other, as shown in the following line:

47.) e.ne.eĝ$_3$.ĝa$_2$.ni u$_4$.de$_3$ e$_2$.5.ta 5.am$_3$ ba.ra.ab.e$_3$

His word is a storm which chases (all) five out from a household of five (Cohen 1988, 125/137).

The following text likewise offers an equation of the two destructive entities storm and word, this time specified as the word of the sky god An:

151.) u$_4$.de$_3$ e.ne.eĝ$_3$ an.na e.ne.eĝ$_3$ ^{d}mu.ul.lil$_2$.la$_2$.re
152.) u$_4$.de$_3$ ša$_3$ ib$_2$.ba an gu.la.re
153.) u$_4$.de$_3$ ša$_3$.ab ḫul.ma.al.la ^{d}mu.ul.lil$_2$.la$_2$.ke$_4$
154.) aĝ$_2$ e$_2$.zi.ĝu$_{10}$ ba.ab.gul.la.re
155.) aĝ$_2$ uru$_2$.zi. ĝu$_{10}$ ba.ab.ḫul.la.re

The storm, the word of An, the word of Enlil,
The storm, the angry heart of great An!
The storm, the vicious heart of Enlil!
That which has destroyed my faithful house!
That which has destroyed my faithful city![18]

The text first elaborates on the storm-day, equating it first with the word of An and Enlil and then with their angry hearts. In the last two lines, the text refrains from naming the destructive entity and simply calls it aĝ$_2$ "thing," thereby referring to all these aspects.

   The following passage apparently elaborates on the second part of Enlil's name – lil$_2$ – that can be understood as "wind," "breeze." It equates the god himself with the storm and once more the text plays with the homophony of "day" and "storm" (b+92.):

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[18] Cohen 1988, 147, 149–50. We thank the anonymous reviewer for the hint to line 9' of BRM 4,6 which is an Akkadian translation of lines 151–52, see Linssen 2004, 306.

b+92.) u$_4$.ri u$_4$.ri.gin$_7$ te.ga.ba zal
b+93.) gi$_6$.ri gi$_6$.ri.gin$_7$ te.ga.bi zal
b+94.) u$_4$ e.lum.e mu.un.zal.a.re
b+95.) u$_4$ ^{d}mu.ul.lil$_2$.le mu.un.zal.a.re

As in every day of yore, it continues unabated when approaching.
As in every night of yore, it continues unabated when approaching.
The storm, the important one, continues unabated.
The storm, Enlil, continues unabated.[19]

In sum, the texts discussed above equate the storm-day with the divine word, with the god's angry heart, and with the god Enlil himself. In one instance, the storm is even called the "messenger of the honored one" (Cohen 1988, 625, line a+22), which shows the storm-day as a divine tool and as a personification of the destruction.
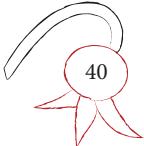
II.2 The destructive character of the storm-day

The destructive capacities of the storm precisely described in litanies appear with slight variations. These offer very similar descriptions for the divine word and the storm, which comes as no surprise since they were considered to be identical or at least different aspects of one entity.[20] The following text focuses on the results of the storm's activities:

b+109.) u$_4$ mu til.e u$_4$ gi til.e
b+110.) u$_4$ tur$_3$ gul.e u$_4$ amaš bu.re
b+111.) tuk.ku$_3$.de u$_4$ ša$_3$.ba nu.pa$_3$.de$_2$.da.ra
b+112.) tur$_3$ al.gul.gul.e amaš bu.bu.re
b+113.) am$_2$.tur$_3$ am$_2$.maḫ.ba mu.da.ab.gi.gi
b+114.) [mu].an.na.me.gub mu.bi še am$_3$.ša$_4$
b+115.) [gi].an.na.me.gub gi.bi še am$_3$.ša$_4$
b+116.) [^{giš}]mes.gal.gal.la gu$_2$.re a[m$_3$.me]
b+117.) [u$_4$].de$_3$ du$_6$.du$_6$.dam šu.še$_3$ a[l.ma.ma]
b+118.) [e].ne.eĝ$_3$ ^{d}mu.ul.lil$_2$.la bu$_5$.bu$_5$.am$_3$ i[bi$_2$ nu.bar.bar.re]

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[19] Cohen 1988, 258/263. This is the more complete Old Babylonian version of the text, however a rather broken first-millennium text also exists.

[20] It is quite typical for the genre that such litanies appear in expanded and abridged versions.

> The storm brings to an end (the life of) the young man; it brings to an end (the life of) the young girl.
> The storm destroying the cattle pen, the storm uprooting the sheepfold,
> …the midst of the storm cannot be seen.
> It destroys the cattle pen; it uproots the sheepfold.
> It kills both small and great.
> When it encounters a young man, that young man moans.
> When it encounters a young woman, that young woman moans.
> It fells the great *mes*-trees.
> The storm turns all into ruin mounds.
> The word of Enlil rushes about (so quickly), it cannot be seen.[21]

The storm brings the life of young man and young woman to an end (b+109); it destroys the cattle pen and uproots the sheepfold (b+110, b+112); it kills small and great (b+113); it fells huge trees (b+116); and it turns everything into ruins (b+117).[22] Towards the end of the preserved text we find several lines pleading the gods to "turn back the storm" and thereby end the destruction.[23]
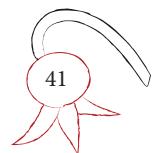
In the balaĝ am.e bara$_2$ an.na.ra the storm is equated with the word of An and several lines elaborate on the destructive character of this word, angry heart, storm or flood that "causes the heavens to rumble above [and] the earth to shake below."[24]

II.3 The storm has no mercy

The texts describe the storm as an entity without any social relations and the inability to feel mercy for its victims. As seen above, it kills young man and woman alike. In im.ma.al gu$_3$.de$_2$.de$_2$ it is said that the storm has no regard for mother and father, for spouse and child, for sister and brother or for friend and companion.[25] The storm does not even spare persons who deserve special protection according to all human standards, such as young girls without brothers or children

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[21] Cohen 1988, 259–60/263, lines b+109–b+118.
[22] Cohen 1988, 263, lines b+109–118.
[23] Cohen 1988, 438, lines f+109–f+115.
[24] Cohen 1988, 332, lines a+29–a+45.
[25] Cohen 1988, 625, lines a+14–a+19.

41

without father.[26] However, in e_2 tur_3.gin_7 niĝin.na.am$_3$ it is said that the word, which is equated with the storm in line c+88, is just to those who are just and unjust to those who are unjust:

> c+97.) i_3.ge.en i_3.ge.en nu.ge.en nu.ge.en
> *ana ki-i-nu ki-na-ku ana la ki-i-nu ul ki-na-ku:*
> *ana sar-ra sar-ra-KI:*
> *ana ki-i-nu ki-na-at ana sar-ra sar-ra-at*
>
> (To him who) is just, it is just. (To him who) is unjust, it is unjust. (Cohen 1988, 79/86)

The fact that the line has three variant Akkadian translations gives evidence of the theological implications this line might have had for its readers, as it contradicts the usual idea of the merciless storm that kills indiscriminately.
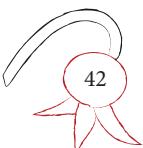
II.4 Temporal compression

Temporal compression is clearly represented in the following lines from B25 (u_4.dam gu_3 de_2.de_2.aš):

> a+9.) na.aĝ$_2$.bi.še$_3$ an ba.dub$_2$ ki ba.sig$_3$
> a+10.) an ba.dub$_2$.dub$_2$ ki ba.sig$_3$.sig$_3$
> a+11.) ᵈutu an.ur$_2$.ra ba.da.nu$_2$
> a+12.) ᵈnanna an.pa.še$_3$ muš$_2$ ba.an.da.ni.ib$_2$.ga
> a+13.) u$_4$.gal an.ta u.gu$_3$ ba.an.de$_2$.e
> a+14.) u$_4$.ḫul.ma.al.la.e ka.naĝ.ĝa$_2$ su ba.ab.da[r$^?$]
>
> On account of this [the word of the angry gods] the heavens trembled, the earth shook.
> The heavens continually rumbled, the earth continually shook.
> The sun lay at the horizon.
> The moon stopped still in the midst of the sky.
> In the sky the great lights disappeared.
> An evil storm (has split$^?$)[27] the nations.

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[26] Cohen 1988, 625, lines a+49–a+50.

[27] Cohen 1988, 439 tentatively suggests this translation.

Here the word is identical with the storm as demonstrated in the last line, examples could be multiplied.[28] It causes time to stand still, as all the indicators for the passing of time – the sun, the moon and the stars in the sky – either stand still or even disappear. The destruction thus takes place in this timeless world (Cohen 1988, 436, lines a+14–a+26).

III. The Storm-day in Akkadian

The Akkadian word *ūmu* has the same ambiguity as Sumerian u$_4$: it designates the day as a unit of time, as well as the storm as a mythical being or demon (*CAD U/W* 138, s.v. ūmu). When *ūmu* cannot be translated as day, *CAD* uses "weather-beast," even in cases where "storm" would be more fitting. The use of this word for storm/weather beast might be due to the Sumerian influence. This intimate relation of the sign UD with destructive forces is also demonstrated by the Sumerian Ug-demons, which were written ^dUD.PRIRIG or ^dUD.UG in oldest times, and which are equated with *ūmu* in Ḫḫ. XIV 121 (MSL 8/2; see Krebernik 2014). It was suggested by J. J. M. Roberts (1972, 55) that the god *ūmu* "was nothing than the deified day." Frans Wiggermann (1992, 171) added: "and its nature [is] the manifestation of divine will." He also notes, as perhaps expected, that these beings are "associated with Iškur/Adad, the storm god" (Wiggermann 1992, 171). In the god lists this demon or god – it is hard to draw a clear line between these categories – is closely related to storm and war (Krebernik 2014, 279).

In any case, the literature in both Sumerian and Akkadian shares the idea of the destructive storm-day, which is somewhat more personalized in Akkadian literature. However, as outlined above, the genre of lamentation was intimately connected with the Sumerian language. The

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[28] Ana Elume, lines 10–17 (Cohen 1988, 209 and 216); the parallelism of "storm" and "word of Enlil" in Uruhulake of Gula, lines 117–18 (Cohen 1998, 260 and 263); the opening of Elum Gusun, lines 1–13, which begins with "your name is against the lands," then identifies the addressee as Enlil and then ends with its effects, "heaven itself rumbles, the very earth shakes" (Cohen 1998, 274–75 and 291), and later in the same, in line 94, "The word of the lord is indeed a flood" (Cohen 1998, 277 and 293).

lamentations that were used on many occasions throughout the second and first millennium were written in Sumerian and therefore not many Akkadian lamentations were composed. The idea of the destructive "storm-day" was reflected in the ongoing practice of Sumerian texts accompanied by their Akkadian translations.[29]

Despite the virtual lack of Akkadian city lamentations, which are – as a matter of genre – closely connected to destruction, instances of these *ūmu*-demons/beasts are attested in other Akkadian genres. In *Enūma Eli*š they appear in a list of eleven monsters:

> I 141 *uš-zi-iz ba-aš-mu muš-ḫuš u ᵈla-ḫa-mu*
> I 142 *u₄-gal-la ur-idimin-me ù gír-tab-lú-u₁₈-lu*
> I 143 *u₄-me da-ab-ru-te ku₆-lú-u₁₈-lu ù ku-sa-rik-ku*
> I 144 *na-ši kak-ku la pa-du-ú la a-di-ru ta-ḫ*[*a-z*]i

> She created the Hydra, the Dragon, the Hairy Hero,
> The Great Demon, the Savage Dog, and the Scorpion-man,
> Fierce demons, the Fish-man, and the Mighty Bull,
> Carriers of merciless weapons, fearless in the face of battle.
> (Lambert 2013, 58–59)

This line refers to the army created by Tiamat, or more exactly it is a listing of the eleven dangerous monsters and is repeated in II 29, III 33 and 91. We know that they are eleven because it is explicitly stated in I 146. However, if we count the creatures, there are only have eight of them.

The widespread incantation-series Maqlû (I 117) likewise mentions this demon – once more as a destructive agent that is supposed to kill the evil witch or sorcerer (Abusch 2015, 116/118). While it seems obvious that in these examples the entity described is conceptualized as a kind of demon, the Akkadian evidence of the bilingual texts, most of them being interlinear translations of the lamentations we discussed above, indicates that we cannot always clearly distinguish between the

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[29] As a discussion of the instances of *ūmu* in Akkadian translation of Sumerian texts would more or less double the discussion above, we just refer to the bilingual evidence in *CAD U/W* 138, s.v. ūmu.

storm-day and the more clearly defined "weather-beast."[30] However, it is not entirely clear why *CAD* tried to avoid the translation "storm" for *ūmu*, which would fit much better than "weather-beast" in several instances. In some cases, the "weather-beasts" are the draught-animals of divine chariots,[31] for example in *Enūma Eliš* IV 50. There we can find the well-attested motif of the rider of the "storm." Here the storm, also designated by other terms than *ūmu*, is a divine weapon used to punish the god's enemies. W. G. Lambert translates the line the following way:

IV 50 ^{giš}*narkabat u$_4$-mu la maḫ-ri ga-lit-ta ir-kab*

He rode the fearful chariot of the irresistible storm.
(Lambert 2013, 89)

Finally, several texts compare or even equate deities with *ūmu*. For example in a Gula Hymn, Lugalbanda is described as "the irresistible storm."[32]

Thus far, we have noted considerable evidence for the concept of a destructive storm or storm-demon in Akkadian literature. However, we did not encounter the intimate relation of the day and the storm or the temporal compression of all kinds of bad experiences to a single day. For these features, we may turn to the concept of a "bad day" and the "good day" in prayers. Akkadian prayers, especially those lamenting the bad fate of the praying person, often conceptualize the prayer as a kind of appeal process, in which their whole case is reopened before the divine jury or the divine judge. On that very "judgment-day," the divine council or a divine judge should end the crisis and re-establish a good fate for the suffering person.[33] The "bad day" in turn is the day when the punishment starts, when a goddess becomes angry. The concept is evident in the following lines from *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*:

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[30] For the evidence, see *CAD U/W* 153–54, s.v. ūmu.

[31] For the evidence, see *CAD U/W* 154 b.

[32] *u$_4$-mu la ma-ḫi-ri* in Lambert 1967, 126 (line 150).

[33] See Maul 1992 and Steinkeller 2005, where Steinkeller discusses the Mesopotamian idea that judgement is also given during extispicy.

I 41. *iš-tu u₄-mi be-lí i-ni-na-an-ni*
I 42. *ù qar-ra-du* ᵈ*marduk* (AMAR.UTU) *is-bu-su itti* (KI)-*ia*
I 43. *id-da-an-ni ilī* (DINGIR-MU) *šá-da-a-šú i-li*
I 44. *ip-par-ku* ᵈ*iš-ta-ri i-bé-eš a-ḫi-tum*

On (lit. from) the day when the lord punished me,
and the hero Marduk became angry with me;
my god rejected me and went up to his mountain (i.e. disappeared)
my goddess deserted (me) and moved away. (Ludlul I)
(Oshima 2014, 80–81)

In line 5 of the first tablet of the composition, even a day of the storm (*u₄-mu me-ḫe-e*) is mentioned, to which we will return below in some detail.[34] In a diĝir.ša₃.dib.ba incantation, the bad day is associated with a storm:
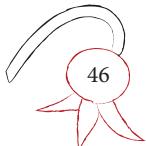
96 *a-na u₄-mi lem-ni la ta-man-na-an-ni*
97 *a-na u₄-mi me-ḫe-e la tu-tar-ra-an-ni*

Do not hand me over to an evil day.
Do not turn me over to a day of storm.[35]

In the same prayer, also the good day is described – this salvation of the individual on a single day stands in stark contrast to the earlier continuous and constant commitment of sins by the praying individual. As in the Sumerian texts discussed above, the good day is the day of renewed divine judgment and the absolution of sins:

7. *a-nu-ú-a ḫi-ṭa-tu-u-a gíl-lat-ú-a* [*šá ki-ma ḫa-mi*] *tab-ku*-ú-ma *eli-ši-na ú-kab-bi-is*
8. *ina u₄-mu an-ni-i lu-u paṭ-ra-ni lu-ú pa*-áš-*ra-ni*

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[34] See the commentary on this *meḫu*-wind in Oshima 2014, 172–73.

[35] Lambert 1974, 278–79. A parallel is found in another incantation of this type, the text reads: "Do not turn me over to the day of the storm. 25. My god, do not hand me over to an evil night" (291).

> I have trodden on my iniquities, sins and transgressions, [which] were heaped up l[like leaves]:
> On this day let them be released and absolved.
> (Lambert 1974, 284–85)

In *Ludlul* the good day, the day when the punishment ends and the sufferer is restored, is described in great detail on tablets III–V. Unfortunately, we have no mention of a specific day in the text, which is quite broken in the end. Nevertheless, it is clearly indicated that the change happened suddenly: "my illness was suddenly over" (III, 50).[36]

In sum, it is evident that the storm-day as well as the good day are demonstrations of the power of the respective god. The god described in the texts above has the power to destroy and the power to give life. These changes happen suddenly – in a single day.

IV. Divine Wrath and the Causes of Destruction

The main cause for destruction or punishment in the texts discussed above is divine "wrath." The explanation is mainly emotional and conceptualizes the divinity in quite anthropomorphic terms. Only in one text discussed here are the causes for this wrath explained in detail, namely in the *Curse of Agade* where Naram-sin's destruction of Ekur clearly indicates why Enlil is angry and finally decides to destroy Agade. Maybe for that reason the text does not elaborate on Enlil's anger at length, but rather speaks of revenge.[37] However, the god is clearly in a bad mood, as reflected by his situation: he is fasting (line 209) and that the other goods have to cool his angry heart with cold water (line 211).

In one famous instance, divine wrath is explained as a kind of natural law: all empires have to crumble, because no rule is eternal (*Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur*, lines 366–69) and

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[36] *mur-ṣi ár-ḫi-iš ig-ga-mir* in Oshima 2014, 96–97.

[37] Cooper 1983, 57, line 151: "Enlil, because his beloved Ekur was destroyed, what should he destroy (in revenge) for it?"

each has to fall at some point.[38] The destruction, as well as the reasons for the highest god to allow it, is seen as inexplicable for human beings in many texts. In the following speech to Enlil, even the god Su'en does not understand his father's plans:

> 456. ša₃ su₂.mu.ug.ga i.zi.gin₇ ḫu.luḫ.ḫa.za igi.zi bar.mu.un.ši.ib
> 457. a.a. ᵈen.lil₂ nam mu.e.tar.ra galga ba.ra.an.du₈.du₈
>
> Look into your darkened heart, terrifying like the waves!
> O father Enlil, the fate that you have decreed cannot be explained!
> (Michalowski 1989, 64–65)

In most texts, however, no reason for the wrath is given at all. The god has become angry and humans can try to calm him down by lamenting and praying to him. Therefore, the "soothing of the heart" (Eršaḫuĝas) has become the name of a whole genre of lamentations.[39] While these Eršaḫuĝas address personal suffering, the balaĝs, often described as public lamentations, are full of descriptions of divine wrath as the cause of the destruction described in these texts. When the heart and the liver of the god are angry, they have to be calmed. In all genres of Emesal-prayers[40] "heart pacification units" can be found. Usually these texts are placed at the end of the composition, as a final appeal to the deity to end his wrath and end the destruction. Often the god is only addressed indirectly, as other gods are used as intercessors (see Gabbay 2014, 33–35). An impressive example for this technique is found in u₄.dam ki àm.ús:

> f+225 an.e ki.e de₃.ma₃.e.huĝ.e
> f+226 an.ki.a.bi.ta de₃.ma₃.e.huĝ.e
> f+227 ᵈUraš ki.še.gu.nu

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[38] Michalowski 1989, 58–59. See the commentary in Michalowski 1989, 15 as well as Michalowski 1983. Steinkeller 2003 who provides an edition of an Ur III fragment of the Sumerian King List, still agrees with the idea that the "fatalistic idea of history as a chain of recurring cycles" (285) came into being not earlier than Isin times.

[39] For an edition of these texts, see Maul 1988.

[40] See Gabbay 2014, 5–14 for an overview.

f+228 ^{d}En.ki ^{d}Nin.ki ^{d}En.mul ^{d}Nin.[mul]

…

f+265 [dim$_3$.me.er an.na dim$_3$.me.er ki.a a.ra.zu de$_3$.ra.ab.be$_2$]

f+266 [uru$_2$.zu na.an.šub.be$_2$.en de$_3$.ra.ab.be$_2$ a.ra.zu de$_3$.ra.ab.be$_2$]

(Cohen 1988, 134–35)

May heaven and earth calm you!
May both heaven and earth calm you!
Urash, the place of late barley,
Enki, Ninki, Emul, Nimul
… [long list of names and epithets of gods]
May (these) gods of heaven and (these) gods of earth each utter a prayer to you!
"May you not abandon your city!" may each utter to you! May each utter a prayer to you!
(Cohen 1988, 141–42)

The wrath of the goddess can be conceptualized in the way we have encountered above, namely as the destructive word or storm. Besides this, the inactivity of the deity and its unwillingness to listen to the prayers of the suffering people is also seen as the cause of the destruction, or at least as the reason why the destruction continues, for example in the following passage from am.e amaš.a.na:[41]

25. a.a. ^{d}mu.ul.lil$_2$ mu.lu.u$_6$.di i.bi$_2$.zu en$_3$.še$_3$ nu.kuš$_2$.u$_3$
26. mu.lu sag.zu.a tug$_2$ bi.dul.la e en$_3$.še$_3$
27. gu$_2$.zu ur$_2$.ra ba.e.ni.mar.ra en$_3$.še$_3$
28. ša$_3$.zu ^{gi}pisan.gin$_7$ am$_2$.ma$_3$.ba.šu$_2$.a en$_3$.še$_3$
29. e.lum.e $^{mu.uš.túg}$GEŠTU$_2$.zu ur$_2$.ra mi.ni.ib$_2$.us$_2$.sa en$_3$.še$_3$
(Cohen 1988, 155)

Father Enlil, who gazes about, how long will your eyes not be tired?
How long will you keep your head covered with a cloth?
How long will you keep your neck in (your) lap?
How long will you keep your mind covered like a reed box?
Important one, how long will you lean your ear against (your) lap?
(Cohen 1988, 166)

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[41] For other instances of this motif see the index of Cohen 1988, 783 s.v. "úr"

In the balaĝ e.ne.eĝ$_3$.ĝa$_3$.ni i.lu i.lu the intention of the goddess Inanna is standing in front of Enlil's house and she asks the doorkeeper to let her in. Her intention is the following:

> b+60. ša$_3$.ga.ni ga.am$_3$ ḫuĝ ba[r.a.ni ga.an.šed$_7$]
> b+61. ša$_3$.ge bar.ra.ne$_2$ ga.am$_3$.ma.x.[x]
> b+62. ša$_3$.kuš$_2$.u$_3$.a.be$_2$ e.ne.eĝ$_3$ [ga.am$_3$…] ga.na i$_3$.du$_8$ e$_2$ [ĝal$_2$.tag$_4$]
> (Cohen 1988, 195)
>
> "May I calm his heart! May I pacify his liver!"
> "May I direct words to his heart and liver!"
> "May I direct words to that tired heart!"
> (Cohen 1988, 199)

The two stock-phrases describing the divine wrath are to cool down the angry heart and to calm the liver of the god. Both are seen as the seat of emotions. The phrases "ša$_3$ -huĝ," calm the heart, and "bar -šed$_7$," pacify the liver, occur frequently in the balaĝs[42] and express the wish that the wrath of the goddess will calm down.

A prime example of the wrath of a god[43] in Akkadian sources can be found in the initial lines of *Ludlul*. There Marduk is characterized as horrible in his wrath, but at the same time kind and compassionate when he calms down:

> 1. *lud-lul be-lu$_4$* né-me-*qí ilu* (DINGIR) *muš-*[*ta-lum*]
> 2. *e-ziz mu-ši mu-ˋup˺-pa-šìr ur-r*[*i*]
> 5. šá *ki-ma u$_4$-mu me-ḫe-e na-mu-ú ug-gat-su*
> 6. ù *ki-ma ma-nit še-re-e-ti za-aq-šú ṭa-a-bi*
> 7. *uz-zu-uš-šu la ma-ḫar a-bu-bu ru-ʾu-ub-*šu
> 8. *mu-us-saḫ-ḫir ka-ra-as-su ka-bat-ta-*šú *ta-a-a-rat*
>
> Let me praise the lord of wisdom, the jud[icious] god,
> the one who is furious by night (but) lenient by day. (…)
> The one whose wrath is like a devastating [day of] *gale*,
> but his blowing (wind) is gratifying like a morning breeze.

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[42] See Cohen's index s.v. "bar" and "ša$_3$ hun."

[43] This is paralleled by the reoccurring motif of the divinely inspired wrath of the Mesopotamian kings. For examples see *CAD* U/W, 38 s.v. *uggatu* 3'.

In his anger, he is irresistible, his fury is a deluge,
(but) his mind is *caring*, his *heart* is lenient.
(Oshima 2014, 78–79)

This lengthy description of Marduk continues until line 36, and then these statements are further explicated by the personal experience of the author. As already mentioned above, line 5 mentions a day of storm and the term *uggatu* used here either means "anger, wrath" or signifies the "day of wrath," which is the name of the 19th day of the month (see *CAD* U/W, 37, s.v. *uggatu*). In the evidence listed in *CAD* we find a reference to BRM 4 6:9, which mentions the "day of the wrath of High Anu (referring to an eclipse),"[44] and in the Erra epic we find a line that mentions the day of Erra's wrath:

V 19. *ina ūmi ug-ga-ti-ka ali māḫirka*[45]

V 19. "On the day of your wrath, where is who can withstand you?" (Cagni 1977, 58)

To sum up, the wrath of the deity widely served as a reason for destruction and punishment and in some texts it was conceptualized as a "day of wrath" of a certain deity.

V. The Biblical "Day of Yahweh"

The Mesopotamian "day-storm" may be compared with the biblical motif of "the day of Yahweh." Our purpose here is not a detailed analysis, tracing specific motifs associated with "the day of Yahweh" through different texts.[46] Instead, this discussion focuses on some salient, general points about the biblical evidence in relation to the possible, broader Mesopotamian background(s) explored above.

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[44] *CAD* U/W, 38, s.v. *uggatu*. The translation of Linssen, who re-edited this text, reminds us of the problems outlined above. He decided to translate "storm is the wrath (in) the heart of great Anu." Linssen 2004, 310.

[45] Text after *CAD* U/W, 38, s.v. *uggatu*.

[46] For a fairly detailed survey, see Weiss 1966.

Before beginning, we note that we are not positing or presupposing any specific Mesopotamian influence on biblical literature. Instead, in this study the possible relations are viewed in broad comparative terms and not in terms of direct literary or cultural influence ("genetic" relationships).

Like the Mesopotamian "day/storm," "the day of Yahweh" is a day of divine judgment manifest in the form of destruction (Isa 13:6, 9; Ezek 13:5; 48:35; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; 3:4; 4:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Obad 15; Zeph 1:7, 14; Mal 3:23). It often involves foreign armies (note *qārôb*, "near," predicated of "the day of Yahweh" in Isa 13:6; Joel 1:15; 4:14; Obad 15; Zeph 1:7, and 14; cf. *⋆bw'*, "is coming," in Isa 13:9; Joel 2:1; 3:4; Mal 3:23). In this respect, "the day of Yahweh" compares with "the day (belonging) to Yahweh" (Isa 2:12; similarly Isa 22:5; 34:8; Jer 46:12; Ps 74:16). Prophetic literature attests to the motif in variants specifying divine anger: "the day of the wrath of Yahweh" (Isa 13:13, see also Zeph 2:14); "the day of wrath" (Zeph 1:15; cf. Prov 11:4); and "the day of my indignation" (Isa 10:5).[47] This form of the day as a time of divine anger made manifest appears also in the city-lament literature of Lamentations: "the day of wrath of Yahweh" in Lam 1:12; "the day of his anger" in 2:1; and "the day of the anger of Yahweh" in 2:22. "The day of Yahweh" may represent an elaboration on divine anger as judgment made manifest for a particular "day." The usages noted thus far show some variety in the relevant expressions. To these we may add the divine judgment cast more generically in terms of "the day" in both the Bible (e.g., "see the day, see, it is coming…," in Ezek 7:10 parallel to "the disaster, see it is coming…," in v. 5), and Mesopotamian texts (e.g., "your day" referring to a day of divine judgment an oracle quoted in the letter of Shamash-nasir to King Zimri-lim of Mari).[48] Thus "the day" does not appear to

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[47] Cf. "Yahweh's day of vengeance" in Isa 34:8–17, said to be known in "the book of Yahweh," a possible allusion to the storm of "the day of Yahweh" in Isa 13. See Fitzgerald 2002, 77. For the case in example in Isa 13, see also Grant 2014, 105–106. For the range of phrases, see also Fitzgerald 2002, 199; and further below.

[48] See Bodi 2013, 52. The Akkadian text is ARMT 26, 196, conveniently transliterated and translated in Nissinen 2003, 26–27. The writing of "your day"

be an entirely fixed technical term, but appears in different manners: a variant form ("the day belonging to Yahweh"); elaborated forms (e.g., "the day of wrath of Yahweh"); and perhaps a reduced form ("the day" in reference to Yahweh's judgment of destruction).

Isaiah 13 offers a fairly paradigmatic case of "the day of Yahweh," expressing divine anger marked by disaster and destruction (so Weiss 1966). Verses 4–5 introduce "the day of Yahweh" as a battle of heavenly proportions, before v. 6 explicitly mentions "the day of Yahweh," with its terrible effects described in vv. 7–8. Verse 9 elaborates on the day of Yahweh in these terms:[49]

> "See, the day of Yahweh comes,
> cruel, with wrath and divine anger,
> to make the earth a desolation,
> and to destroy its sinners in it."

The divine anger on this day recalls "the storm ordered by Enlil in hate" in the Ur lament noted above.[50] According to the following v. 10, all light will be suspended, as in B25 (u_4.dam gu_3 de_2.de_2.aš), likewise discussed above. Thus the divine day in biblical literature, as in the Mesopotamian texts noted above, represents a time of divine anger or hate and of the suspension of light.

Unlike the Mesopotamian "day-storm," the biblical "day of Yahweh" is not labeled explicitly as the storm,[51] and unlike Akkadian *ūmu*, Biblical Hebrew *yôm* does not mean "storm." However, a wider perspective on "the day" appears warranted. Indeed, "the day of war" is parallel to "the day of storm" (*sûpâ*) in Amos 1:14 (Fitzgerald 2002, 133–34). Moreover, as Aloysius Fitzgerald rightly noted (Fitzgerald 2002), "the day of Yahweh" texts often use motifs signaling the effects of the

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ú-*ut-ka* is exceptional, see the comments in Durand 1988, 423 who tentatively translated "day." See also George 2003, 153, who argues against this translation.

[49] For this passage, see von Rad 1959, 99–100, and Fitzgerald 2002, 44–46.

[50] Cf. "the day of Yahweh" called a "day of wrath" in Zeph 1:14–15.

[51] For the relevant Biblical Hebrew terms for the destructive storm, see Fitzgerald 2002, 133–39. See also "the day of the storm" (*ywm rwḥ*) in Ahiqar, #75, in Lindenberger 1983, 171.

destructive storm marking divine judgment (see Zeph 1:7–13; Mal 2:2–5): destruction and fire, with deleterious results for nature (Joel 1:15–20); darkness and fire (Joel 2:1–3, 10; 3:4, 14–15; Amos 5:20; see also Zeph 2:14–15); and divine armies marshaled (Joel 2:11) or human enemies involved (see Isaiah 13, especially the foes described in vv. 1–5 and 17–18; note also Ezek 13:5; cf. Joel 4:9–14). In most cases, divine judgment appears directed against Israel, but in some instances, "the day of Yahweh" is directed against the nations (e.g., Obad 15). Several of these features have correspondences in Mesopotamian texts about the "day storm" discussed above, which would work well with Fitzgerald's view that "the day of Yahweh" evokes the imagery of the destructive storm to signal the time of divine judgment.

"The day of Yahweh" is limited in its scope in biblical literature. Apart from Lamentations, it is missing from the Writings. It is likewise not at home in the Pentateuch, nor in the Former Prophets. It is absent also from Jeremiah (cf. "the day" in 46:10), as well as the prophetical books of Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Haggai, and Zechariah. In terms of genre, the prophetic Mesopotamian text describing "the day" noted above aligns with many biblical prophetic texts attesting to "the day of Yahweh," and several of the Mesopotamian texts discussed above belong to city-laments compare with the biblical book of Lamentations with its variations on this day. At the same time, it is notable how many biblical prophetic texts attest to the motif in contrast to the picture in Mesopotamian prophetic literature, while the Mesopotamian city-lament literature is well versed in the motif relative to the single biblical case in the book of Lamentations.

Further perspective may be provided by the similar phrase, "the day (belonging) to Yahweh" (Isa 2:12; 22:5; 34:8; Jer 46:10; Ps 74:16). It, too, involves divine judgment with foreign nations playing their role (e.g., Ezek 30:2–4). Unlike "the day of Yahweh," "the day (belonging) to Yahweh" also enjoys a cultic usage for sacred days (e.g., the Sabbath in Exod 16:25; cf. Exod 32:29; Lev 23:34; Deut 26:23; Ezek 46:13).[52] This approach fits with the cultic theories that have been offered for

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[52] For Akkadian cases of "good day" and "bad day," see further *CAD U/W* 148–49, for example, "do not hand me over to an evil day, do not turn me over to a day
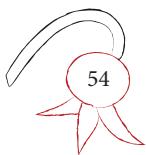
the background of "the day of Yahweh." Sigmund Mowinckel (1958) famously proposed the fall New Year festival as the background for "the day of Yahweh." Despite Gerhard von Rad's critique as well as his own proposal (discussed below; von Rad 1959, 107), Mowinckel's view received a sympathetic response in the works of Kevin J. Cathcart (1978) and Aloysius Fitzgerald (2002). The latter based his case on the time of year when the destructive sirocco-storm appears at its strongest, in what he calls "the fall interchange period." A variant on the cultic approach has been suggested by Alexander Heidel, who regarded "the day of Yahweh" in Amos 5:18 and 20 as a "fast-day" to ward off the divine judgment issuing in destruction (Heidel 1929, 356).

More recently, Daniel E. Fleming (2010) has suggested a cultic background for "the day of Yahweh" in Amos 5. As Fleming notes, this case stands outside of the more common repertoire of motifs associated with "the day of Yahweh,"[53] particularly the lack of the language of destruction and the emphasis on light and darkness. Fleming (2010, 24) sees "the day of Yahweh" as "part of a ritual event where the people celebrated the arrival of light after a time of darkness." Accordingly, he proposes a background in a New Moon rite annually celebrated in the fall, with comparison made with the New Moon rites attested at Emar. For Fleming, "the day of Yahweh" would have been a point of reference for Amos 5, the oldest of the uses. This was plausibly a specific moment for creating a new terminology for divinely driven disaster. From this point, the motif could then develop a life of its own; not all the biblical uses had this cultic reference – just this one. While Amos 5 seems to be something of "an outlier" relative to other biblical cases, it is to be noted that its usage seems to fall broadly in line with the concept of "good day" and "bad day," noted above in some of the Mesopotamian examples of "day-storm." Thus, "the day of Yahweh" would be parallel to the Mesopotamian use of the "day" as a moment of divine declaration of intent. Amos 5 is not the only cultic instance. As Heidel (1929, 357)

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of storm," in Lambert 1974, 278–79, lines 96–97, and also 290–91, lines 23–24, as 303 for discussion.

[53] See also von Rad 1959, 98, critiquing the idea of taking Amos 5:18 as the *locus classicus* for "the day of Yahweh."

emphasized, the book of Joel also shows the "fast" as the cultic context for "the day of Yahweh." In theory, a number of different cultic contexts could have served as settings for the use of these expressions, with various ones potentially foregrounding certain themes associated with "the day of Yahweh." Given the lack of evidence, it remains unclear whether a cultic origin is indicated; it is difficult to be more precise on this score.

By contrast to cultic settings proposed, von Rad famously suggested that "the day of Yahweh" emerged out of Israel's old Holy War traditions.[54] Ugaritic may offer a comparison in *bym b'l*, "on the day of Baal," but the context is very broken and the text poorly understood.[55] The so-called old poetry attests to divine anger (see Grant 2014, 89–100), but not to "the day of Yahweh." Perhaps the closest analogue in older biblical literature is Josh 10:12–14 (cf. the storm imagery of Ps 29, but without any reference to "the day" or to divine anger).[56] The prose introduction to the poetic piece in these verses understands the day as a special one in terms of the deity listening to a man: "nor was there a day like that day before it and after it, when Yahweh listened to the voice of a man, for Yahweh fought for Israel." This looks like a prose interpretation of the poetic piece in Josh 10:12b–13, perhaps inflected by "the day of Yahweh" as found in prophetic literature and Lamentations. The clause, "the moon stood (still)," in Josh 10:13 enjoys a parallel in the Sumerian lament literature, in B25 (u_4.dam gu_3 de_2.de_2.aš), a+12, as quoted above, "The moon stopped still in the midst of the sky." Thus the imagery of "the day of Yahweh" enjoys antecedents in traditional Israelite literature, as von Rad surmised.

As opposed to its imagery and themes, this day's specific expression as "the day of Yahweh" (with its elaborated forms) appears to represent an eighth-century development, and it is in this context that the expression is to be located. In his response to von Rad, Meir Weiss (1966, 46) understandably thought that Amos coined the expression.

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[54] See von Rad 1959, 104–105 and 108. For a detailed critique, see Weiss 1966.

[55] For a possible exception, see *bym b'l* in KTU 1.9, line 15. The end of the line is broken and the syntax is not quite clear. See Pardee 2012, 31–38. Some vocabulary items are possibly indicative of warfare, e.g., *qšt*, "bow," in line 14.

[56] For a recent study of this passage, see Leonard-Fleckman 2017.
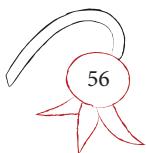
However, this explanation would assume that other biblical cases either borrowed the expression from Amos or ultimately go back to Amos; as Weiss himself indicated, this is hardly clear. Rather thinking in terms of a single point or one original context, "the day of Yahweh" seems to emerge in the eighth century as a specification of a more broadly known motif about the day of divine judgment instantiated in a number of contexts, including cultic ones. It is difficult to be more precise, given the lack of more concrete evidence. What is to be stressed about the expression "the day of Yahweh" (as well as its expanded forms) is that they make an important specification: this is specifically Yahweh's day, perhaps in contrast to the day of another deity. In other words, the day evokes not only a day of divine judgment and destruction. The development of this specific expression and its elaborations make a statement specifically about Yahweh in the context of the eighth century and later.

On this point, "the day of Yahweh" contrasts with the divine "day of war" associated with various deities in the eighth century onwards. The latter phrase appears in one plaster inscription from the area of the interior wall of the western entryway of the "Bench-room Complex" at Kuntillet ʿAjrud.[57] In this case, the "day of war" is apparently associated with the gods Baal and El (if these are not titles for Yahweh).[58] The association with Baal would be notable if the Ugaritic case noted above is correct. The expression "the day of war" appears also in Amos 1:14 and Hos 10:14 (note 1 Sam 13:33; Prov 21:31), with similar phrasing in Ezek 13:5. In other words, such a "day of war" may be associated with any number of deities. By contrast, "the day of Yahweh" and its elaborated forms are distinctive relative to other deities with their day of judgment, whether Enlil or other deities in some of the Mesopotamian cases of the "day-storm"; El and Baal "on the day of war" in the Kuntillet ʿAjrud inscription (again assuming these are not titles of Yahweh); and Yahweh "on the day of war" in Amos 1:14 and Hos 10:14. By contrast, "the day of Yahweh" not only marks a time of divine action issuing in

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[57] Aḥituv, Eshel, and Meshel 2012, 110. For the location, see Aḥituv, Eshel, and Meshel 2012, 74.

[58] For this view, see Dobbs-Allsopp, Roberts, Seow, and Whitaker 2005, 287–89.

judgment and destruction like "the day of war." "The day of Yahweh" (with its elaborated forms) comes into sharper relief as an expression specifically about Yahweh.

The use of "the day of Yahweh" in times of war became the dominant one, perhaps unsurprising given the engagement of prophetic texts and Lamentations with the empires and armies of Assyria and Babylon. Indeed, the preponderance of biblical cases of "the day of Yahweh" date from the eighth century onwards, a time when Israel encountered Mesopotamian armies. Accordingly, the correspondences between the biblical "day" and the Mesopotamian "day/storm" may make its attestations in the Hebrew Bible all the more poignant. The biblical specification of this day as "the day of Yahweh" arguably represents a claim about Yahweh's judgment and divine control over world events as opposed to other deities'. The expression "the day of Yahweh" first appears in an era when Israel shows an emergent sense of – and responses to – world empires. In this context, "the day of Yahweh" conveys this deity's ultimate control over the world (cf. Isa 10:5) – and perhaps implicitly in this period denies this power to Mesopotamian empire gods.
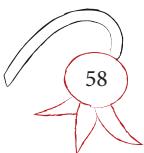
Abbreviations

ETCSL   Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature: http://etcsl. orinst.ox.ac.uk/

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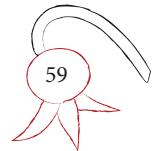
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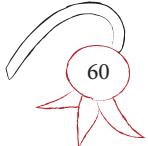
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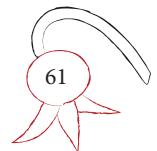
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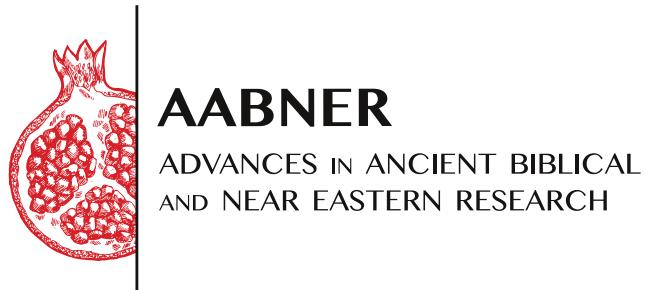
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BRINGING TO BIRTH:
RELATIONSHIP WITH YHWH

Karen Langton
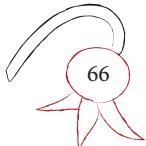
Abstract

In the Hebrew Bible, YHWH controls the womb. He opens and closes the womb, controls gestation, and birth, and in Pss 22:10–11 and 71:6 there are physical descriptions, however brief, of YHWH bringing forth from the womb. The image in the text is physical. In both psalms, YHWH lays hands on the infant and in Ps 22:10 sets the infant on its mother's breast. The image is also conceptual. Being brought forth from the womb is a movement from darkness to light, from being enclosed to being exposed and vulnerable, from submerged in protective waters where YHWH's presence is guaranteed to being thrust into a world in which the supplicant accuses YHWH of abandoning him (Ps 22:1–3) and pleads with YHWH not to cast him off in his old age (Ps 71:9). The womb is a space of surety, existing in the same space as absolute doubt. It is the possibility of life and death, hope and devastation, great fear and overwhelming joy. It is a simultaneous knowing and unknowing. With this diverse range of physical aspects and conceptual parameters, the opening of the womb is one of the most compelling images to communicate humanities' relationship with YHWH.

In der hebräischen Bibel liegt die Kontrolle des Mutterleibes bei JHWH. Er öffnet und schließt den Mutterleib, kontrolliert Schwangerschaft und Geburt, und in Ps 22,10–11 und 71,6 gibt es – wenn auch nur kurze – Beschreibungen von JHWH als Geburtshelfer. Das Bild in den Texten ist physisch. Beiden Psalmen zufolge legt JHWH dem Säugling die Hände auf, und in Ps 22,10 legt er den Säugling an die Brust seiner Mutter. Das Bild ist auch konzeptionell zu verstehen. Aus dem Mutterleib hervorgebracht zu werden, ist eine Bewegung von der Dunkelheit zum Licht, vom Eingeschlossensein zu Enthüllung und Verletzlichkeit, von einem Zustand umgeben von schützender Flüssigkeit, in der JHWHs Anwesenheit garantiert ist, hinein in eine Welt, in der der Bittsteller JHWH beschuldigt, ihn verlassen zu haben (Ps 22,1–3), und bittet, ihn in seinem Alter nicht zu verlassen (Ps 71,9). Der Mutterleib ist ein Raum der Sicherheit, der im selben Raum existiert wie der absolute Zweifel. Er ist die Möglichkeit von Leben und Tod, Hoffnung und Verwüstung, großer Angst und überwältigender Freude. Er ist Wissen und Nichtwissen zugleich. Die Öffnung des Mutterleibs ist angesichts eines derartig vielfältigen Spektrums von physischen Aspekten und konzeptionellen Parametern eines der eindrücklichsten Bilder für die Beziehung der Menschheit zu JHWH.

BRINGING TO BIRTH: RELATIONSHIP WITH YHWH

Karen Langton

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Introduction

In the Hebrew Bible, YHWH controls the womb. He opens and closes the womb (Gen 20:17–18; 21:1; 29:31; 30:2, 17, 22; 29:31; 30:22; 1 Sam 1:5–6; Judg 13:3), forms inside the womb (Ps 139:13–16; Job 10:8–12; 31:15; Isa 44:24; 49:5; Jer 1:5), consecrates (Jer 1:5), calls from the womb (Isa 49:1–2), and brings to birth (Isa 66:9). And in Pss 22:10–11 and 71:6 there are physical descriptions, however brief, of YHWH bringing forth from the womb. I specifically use the terminology "brings forth from the womb" because in both psalms there is no vocabulary of birth, that is, ילד. Rather, the vocabulary refers to a womb, namely, רחם and בטן, and the image is of *how* YHWH brings forth from the womb. The image is not formulaic and, even though the image of YHWH bringing forth from the womb in both psalms has similarities, it is not identical. Further, it is only when the distinct differences of the two images are put into conversation within the context of the entire psalm that we are able to appreciate how the womb imagery contributes to meaning formation across the psalm.

YHWH bringing forth from the womb contributes meaning that is otherwise inaccessible. The image in the text is physical. In both psalms, YHWH lays hands on the infant and in Ps 22:10 sets it on its mother's breast. The image is also conceptual. Being brought forth from the womb is a movement from darkness to light, from being enclosed to being exposed and vulnerable, from submerged in protective waters where YHWH's presence is guaranteed to being thrust into a world in which the supplicant accuses YHWH of abandoning him (Ps 22:1–3) and pleads with YHWH not to cast him off in his old age (Ps 71:9). The womb is a space of surety, existing in the same space as absolute doubt. It the possibility of life and death, hope and devastation, great fear and overwhelming joy. It is a simultaneous knowing and unknowinwg. In other words, the opening of the womb is one of the most compelling images to communicate humanities relationship with YHWH. More importantly, given the distinct differences in the context of the psalms and the vocabulary, the writer is not broadly addressing humanity's relationship with YHWH. Rather, the image of YHWH bringing forth from the womb is the manifestation of each supplicant's personal and unique relationship with YHWH.

I ground my interpretation in Benjamin Harshav's definition of meaning formation and his theory of Integrational Semantics. Harshav explains that meaning is not formed in isolated units such as words, phrases, or sentences but is the integration of "discontinues semantic materials." These materials include the text as it appears on the page, the context of the text both inside and outside of the text, and the innumerable amounts of information required for a reader to make sense of the text. In other words, meaning formation is not one dimensional; rather, it is three dimensional. Additionally, just as meaning is not one dimensional, neither is it linear. Meaning is not created as a reader works through a text, that is, from verse to verse in a linear format; rather, meaning is formed as semantic materials unfold and overlap. Thus, the image of YHWH bringing forth from the womb in Ps 22:10–11 is integral to the image of YHWH laying the supplicant down in the dust of death in Ps 22:16. These images, in light of Ps 22:1, in which the supplicant complains that YHWH is so far, develop the concepts of near and far, as well as life and death. Meaning is dependent
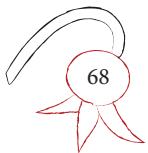
on the organization of the text, that is, the specific vocabulary used and the order in which each image is placed. This unfolding and overlapping are not tied to the text, but they do not exist without the text. I am not saying that meaning is located in the text nor is it tied to the text; rather, the text, is the "floor" upon which all meaning is built (Harshav 2007, 39). Focusing on the details in the text prevents interpretations that offer overt theological interpretations, or, even more importantly, interpretations that minimalize the contribution of the womb to meaning formation.

The feminist theorist Cheryl Exum cautions against focusing on the written text or arguing that, in the Hebrew Bible, the female voice has been written out of the text in an effort to control women.[1] Rather, she advocates for going "beyond the boundaries of the literary text itself" (Exum 1997, 9). If this is not done, Exum explains, all that is left is a study of men's views of women. Exum's purpose in her book is to identify the hidden narratives of women's silenced voices. Undeniably, in both psalms, the mother's voice is silent. She has a womb that YHWH opens (Pss 22:10; 71:6) and breasts where YHWH places the baby (Ps 22:10). Exum addresses the silence of characters; however, the mother in these two psalms is not so much a character as she is an object. Her body, that is, her womb, serves a purpose, but her voice is unnecessary, inconsequential. By returning to the text, I am able to further understand how ancient writers used the womb to create meaning.

YHWH's Relationship with the Womb

Simply put, YHWH controls the womb. While man can control a female body through pure strength, he cannot control her womb. One can imagine that labor and delivery filled a man with terror, knowing there was nothing he could do. By assigning control of the womb to

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[1] Exum (1997, xxiv) writes: "One of my discoveries in the course of writing this book was that, over and over, that agenda [i.e., of writing out the female voice] was motivated by male fear and desire in response to women's sexuality and the resultant need of patriarchy to control women."

YHWH, man is able control the uncontrollable. YHWH's control of the womb begins with control of fertility.[2] For example, in Gen 11:29 Abraham takes Sarah for his wife and the only thing revealed is that she is barren (Gen 11:30). Sarah does not speak until Gen 16:2, when she acknowledges that YHWH has prevented her from conceiving and offers Abraham her slave-girl, Hagar. Because of Hagar's obedience to YHWH, she conceives and gives birth to Ishmael (Gen 16:9–11). When Sarah is eavesdropping and hears that she will give birth to a son, she laughs (Gen 18:12), believing her womb is past the age of childbearing. In response, YHWH challenges her faithfulness. "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" (Gen 18:14). YHWH allows Sarah to conceive despite her age. In Gen 25:21, Isaac prays to YHWH to allow Rebekah to become pregnant. When Rachel says that she will die if she cannot have children (Gen 30:1), Jacob answers that it is God who closes Rachel's womb (Gen 30:2). YHWH does finally listen allowing Rachel to conceive (Gen 30:22). Hannah's desperation for YHWH to open her womb prompts her to promise the male child as a Nazarite (1 Sam 1:11). Samson's mother is barren and only conceives when YHWH appears to her telling her she will conceive a son (Judg 13:2–3). These stories, which all show that fertility is the reward for being faithful to YHWH, are representative of divine agency. Candida Moss and Joel Baden explain that the womb is a closed chamber and the only one who holds the key is YHWH (Moss and Baden 2015, 57). YHWH must intervene and this intervention is a direct line of communication with humanity, whether it be the angel of the Lord who speaks (Gen 16:11), YHWH himself (Gen 18:13–14; 25:23), or simply that YHWH listens (Gen 30:17).

In addition to commanding the opening and closing of the womb, YHWH controls the gestation process. YHWH declares that he is the one who forms in the womb (Isa 43:1; 44:2, 24; 49:5; Jer 1:5), and in

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[2] The desperation of Sarah and Hannah to become pregnant points to the importance of fertility and a woman's place in society. Moss and Baden explain: "The laser-like focus on each woman's infertility, to the exclusion of nearly every other aspect of her identity, means that infertility is effectively her identity" (Moss and Baden 2015, 24). For a discussion on YHWH's control of fertility, see pp. 21–102.
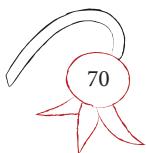
Job 10:8–12 and Ps 139:13–16 YHWH carefully forms the fetus. In Job 10:8–12, Job describes the gestation process from an unformed substance (curdled cheese, Job 10:10) to skin, flesh, bones and sinews (Job 10:11). Similarly, in Ps 139, the supplicant describes how his kidneys are formed as YHWH knits him together (Ps 139:13). In this deep and dark womb, his bones are not hidden from YHWH (Ps 139:15). Even before the baby is formed, YHWH witnessed fertilization and sees his unformed substance (Ps 139:16). And YHWH controls birth (Isa 66:7–9). In Isa 66:1–6, YHWH proclaims that heaven is his throne and earth his footstool (v. 1), reminding the people he is the creator, all things belong to him (v. 2), and he will bring retribution to his enemies (v. 6) because they have not listened to him (v. 4). Then, in Isa 66:7, Zion gives birth without going into labor and without labor pains. When the nation wonders if this is possible, YHWH declares, "Shall I open the womb and not deliver? says the Lord; shall I, the one who delivers, shut the womb? says your God" (Isa 66:9 NRSV).

Presumably, the ancient writers were male, which leads to the question: "Did ancient writers have an understanding of the female body?" Several biblical texts suggest male knowledge of birth and complications of childbirth, such as the image in Hos 13:13 in which the child is unwise because of delays at the opening of the womb, preventing birth. Consider also 2 Kgs 19:3 (cf., Isa 37:3), in which children come to the opening of the womb and there is no strength to deliver them.[3] Other biblical descriptions of labor that indicate specific knowledge of childbirth include Jer 4:31, where Zion who is the laboring woman cries out like a woman giving birth to her first child.

Breach births are depicted in Gen 25:26, where Jacob is delivered hanging on to Esau's heel, and in Gen 38:28–30, where Zerha extends his hand through the womb and has to be repositioned to allow for the birth of Perez. Due to these two images, Eran Viezel concludes that men would have known more about animal births because animals such as sheep and cattle are delivered feet first (Viezel 2011, 689). In

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[3] John Makujina describes Isa 37:3 as referring to a complication known in labor and delivery as dystocia in which the contraction of the uterus, i.e., labor pains, is not strong enough to dilate the cervix. Makujina 2016, 90.

breach births, the baby presents feet first rather than head first. Viezel explains that the image of Jacob holding on to Esau's heel when the babies were delivered is a description of a transverse lie position which will always lead to death or a macerated infant (Gen 25:26) meaning that Jacob could not have been born (Viezel 2011, 685–86). Therefore, there would not have been a story about Jacob. What Viezel fails to mention is that in the birth of twins, the type of presentation offered in Gen 25:26 is not atypical, and while the birth is difficult and can result in death for both the mother and baby, death is not a certainty.[4] Additionally, in twins, the presentation of a hand and the ability of the midwife or doctor to push the hand back into the birth canal to birth the first twin is not uncommon (Gen 38:28–30) and there is a good chance of survival.[5] More importantly, since the danger of breach births often ends in death, surely the man would have wanted to know why the infant and mother died and would most likely have been told that the baby presented feet first preventing the birth. This is certainly

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[4] "Chapter 4: Pathologies during Pregnancy and Pregnancy-Related Disorders - Essential Obstetric and Newborn Care," 2020, https://medicalguidelines.msf.org/viewport/ONC/english/chapter-4-pathologies-during-pregnancy-and-pregnancy-related-disorders-51416661.html.

[5] This type of delivery is not uncommon in the birth of twins. A compound malposition presentation is when the baby is presented with the arm preceding the birth. This occurs when "the fetus is very small or dead or macerated." Samra et al. 1990, 234–36. In one labor study, the woman pregnant with twins was induced and labor started. The doctor's notes state, "One hour later vaginal examination revealed a compound presentation with the neonate's hand and forearm. This compound presentation persisted for more than 6 h, along with no change in cervical dilation… In our case, the infant's forearm and hand presented first into the birth canal, alongside the head, known as a compound presentation." Martinovski, Wilseck, and Mattson 2015, 79–81. The treatment is as follows. "Assist the woman to assume the knee–chest position. Push the arm above the pelvic brim and hold it there until a contraction pushes the head into the pelvis. Proceed with management for normal childbirth." World Health Organization 2017. One study out of Ghana described 152 transverse lie deliveries with two maternal deaths and 25 stillbirths and 37 requiring hospital care. The maneuver is dangerous but not impossible. "Management of the Fetus in Transverse Lie," https://somepomed.org/articulos/contents/mobipreview.htm?17/61/18398.

possible considering Hos 13:13, in which the baby עמד, "stands," at the mouth of the womb. The mouth of the womb certainly refers to the cervix, which is circular and when ripe for delivery looks like a mouth. In addition, a baby presents headfirst. If the feet present first, the midwife must reach into the womb and turn the baby around. And while translations do not reflect the baby physically presenting feet first, the vocabulary certainly points to a standing position.

Additional evidence of birthing knowledge occurs in Qumran texts, where there are references to the cervix being a "crucible." The opening of the womb is described in 1QH XI, 9:

> like a city fortified before [the enemy]. I was in distress like a woman giving birth to her firstborn, when pangs and painful labor have come upon her womb opening, causing spasms in the crucible of the pregnant woman. For children have come to the womb opening of death. (Schuller and Newsom 2012, 37)

Similarly, 1QH XI, 13, states "the crucible of the pregnant one. But she who is pregnant with venomous vanity (will be subject to) to painful labor, and the womb opening of the pit to all the works of terror" (Schuller and Newsom 2012, 37). Referring to the cervix as a "crucible" evokes images of fire, an apt description of what the cervix feels like when ripening. In fact, the cervix is sometimes called "the ring of fire" when the cervix is fully dilated and ready for the birthing process. If the child becomes stuck in the opening of the womb, labor during ancient times often ended in death for both mother and child.

The earliest gynecological text we have comes from the second-century physician Soranus of Ephesus, with the subsequent Latin translation of Soranus by Caelius Aurelianus, and includes a detailed account of labor and delivery, describing how the cervix dilates for labor and delivery as well as enumerating problems that might occur. Soranus notes that if the cervix has not dilated from 1 cm to 10 cm, the midwife must help the dilation. He explains how the cervix can widen so much that the fetus simply slips out. And, he describes how the cervix ages from fleshiness to a hardness depending on how many children a woman has delivered (Soranus and Temkin 1956, 74–75).

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Given the birthing details involved in birthing twins (Gen 25:26; 38:28–30), descriptions of babies stuck at the cervix (2 Kgs 19:3; Isa 37:3; Hos 13:13), the details of gestation (Job 10:8–12; Ps 139:13–16), and the observations on the sound of a woman's cries in labor (Jer 4:31), it would appear that the biblical writers did have knowledge of the workings of the womb.[6]

YHWH as Midwife: Psalms 22 and 71
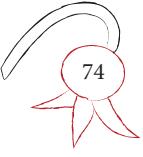
It is likely that ancient writers purposefully and skillfully used the image of YHWH bringing forth from the womb in both Psalms 22 and 71. Although there are similarities in the images, they are not identical. However, sometimes scholars homogenize the image of YHWH bringing forth from the womb and interpret YHWH's actions as those of a midwife. Phyllis Trible first suggested the interpretation of YHWH as midwife in 1973 as part of her attempt to "examine interactions between Hebrew Scriptures and the Women's Liberation Movement." Trible acknowledged that biblical literature is patriarchal but also emphasized that to reject the bible outright was to accept "male chauvinistic interpretations" (Trible 1973, 31). Trible's solution was to "reread" the Bible and to attempt a translation without sexism which included identifying feminine characteristics of YHWH. For example, in Hos 11:3, YHWH takes Ephraim into his arms and teaches Ephraim to walk. Trible's argument is that YHWH's care in teaching Ephraim is the activity of a mother and not that of a father in ancient Israel (Trible 1973, 32). Additional examples Trible identifies as "feminine imagery for God" include images of YHWH as a mother and nurse (Num 11:12; Isa 49:15; 66:13), a midwife (Pss 22:10–11; 71:6; Job 3:12), and one who gives birth (Deut 32:18; Isa 42:14) (Trible 1973, 32). Trible writes: "Midwife, seamstress, housekeeper, nurse, and mother: all these feminine images characterize Yahweh, the God of Israel" (Trible 1973, 34). Many scholars have followed Trible's lead,

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[6] For a discussion on Assyrian and Babylonian midwifery, see Von Soden 1957.

and the interpretation of YHWH as midwife in Pss 22:9–10 and 71:6 is commonly repeated.[7]

For example, Dörte Bester, Marianne Grohmann, and Hanne Løland identify YHWH as midwife due to the fact that the action of delivering a baby in ancient society was performed by women.[8] Juliana Claassens devotes a chapter to discussing God as midwife in both Psalms 22 and 71,[9] and Nancy Declaissé-Walford notes that Psalm 71 echoes the image of YHWH as midwife in Psalm 22 (Declaissé-Walford 2012, 227; 2020, xliv–xlv). Ulrike Bail identifies YHWH in Psalm 22 and says YHWH is "perhaps" a midwife in Psalm 71 (Bail 2012, 250). And, in her discussion on Psalm 139, Fiona Black references both Pss 22:9 and 71:6 as containing images of YHWH as midwife (Black 2012, 27). These interpretations homogenize the image of the womb in both texts. This suggests that the womb in each psalm offers no unique meaning; therefore, the womb can be replaced. However, the texts are distinctly different, and it is only through highlighting this difference that we can experience the full impact of the text.

Psalm 22

The supplicant in Psalm 22 begins with an accusation that God has abandoned him. He begs for answers: Why has God forsaken him? Why is God so far away (v. 1)? The supplicant cries day and night and

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[7] Schmitt 1985; Korpel 1990; Johnson 1992; Gruber 1992, 351–59; Foster 1994; Terrien 2003; Løland 2007, 157 n. 79; Bergmann 2008, 153–54; Claassens 2012.

[8] Dörte Bester (2007, 144) discusses the female image of God as midwife in both Psalms. She writes: „Da die Tätigkeit von Hebammen nach den Zeugnissen des Alten Testaments wie des Alten Orients von Frauen ausgeübt wurde, wird damit in Ps 71,6 wie in Ps 22,10a die Tätigkeit von Frauen für das Handeln Gottes transparent." "Since the activities of midwives according to the evidence of the Old Testament and of the Old Orient were exercised by women, in Ps 71: 6, as in Ps. 22:10, the activity of women becomes transparent for the action of God." See also Grohmann 2007, 65; Løland 2007, 157 n. 179.

[9] Claassens 2012, 64–79. Also see Løland 2007, 157 n. 79; Declaissé-Walford 2012, 225, 227.

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still, God does not answer (v. 2). He remembers how his ancestors trusted in God and God saved them (vv. 4–5), so why does God not answer him? He is just a worm whom others scoff at. They mock him, turn their heads, and walk away (vv. 6–7). The people who pass by tell him that if he would commit his cause to YHWH, he will survive (v. 8). The supplicant appeals to YHWH and his appeal is couched in language of the womb (vv. 10–11) (cf. Job 10:8–12):

כי־אתה גחי מבטן מבטיחי על־שדי אמי
עליך השלכתי מרחם מבטן אמי אלי אתה

Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast.
On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God. (Ps 22:10–11 NRSV)
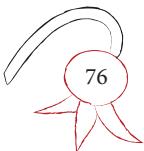
Scholars often interpret the image as that of a parent figure. For example, Mitchell Dahood explains that the supplicant is placed into YHWH's custody (Dahood 1965, 1:136, 139). Bernhard Duhm says the image is of YHWH laying the child in front of the father, who will either reject or accept the child,[10] while Gerstenberger explains the image is an "affirmation of confidence" by the supplicant towards YHWH who is insisting that YHWH acknowledge his responsibility as a parent (Gerstenberger 1988, 111). Some scholars focus on the mother's breast as a central image. James Mays emphasizes that the image is of a human

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[10] Duhm (1922, 93) writes: „Angespielt wird v. 10 f. auf die Sitte, dass das neugeborene Kind vor dem Vater niedergelegt wird, damit der entscheide, ob es aufgezogen oder ausgesetzt werden soll; im ersteren Fall nimmt er es auf die Knie und übergibt es der Mutter oder Amme zum Säugen." "In v. 10 the custom is shown that the new-born child shall be laid down before the father, so that he may determine whether it is to be reared or expelled; In the former case, he takes it on his knees and hands it over to the mother or nurse for suckling." See, e.g., Gen 30:3; 48:12; 50:23. The same argument appears in Baethgen 1904, 93. For a discussion of the ancient practice of infant exposure, see Stol and Wiggermann 2000; Galpaz-Feller 2000. The exact practice of infant exposure is debated. Judith Grubbs emphasizes that one must differentiate between infant exposure and infant abandonment (2013, 83). Grubbs provides a detailed discussion of the history of infant exposure. For a discussion on infant exposure in the Graeco-Roman World, see Harris 1982.

father who lays the child to rest on his mother's breast.[11] Rashi explains that the supplicant gains trust through the mother's breast that is supplied by YHWH (Gruber 2007, 126). Similarly, Bester explains that the image depicts trust, but not necessary trust in YHWH. It is the trust that the supplicant experiences at the mother's breast.[12]

As noted above, an often-repeated interpretation of vv. 10–11 is that God is performing the actions of a midwife. In reference to Psalm 22, Trible argues that not only is God a midwife, but also the divine and maternal intertwine, with images melding and crossing so that God is both midwife and mother (Trible 1978, 61). She writes:

> In the first line, the divine you receives the infant from the womb and places it safely upon the breasts of the mother. Deity and mother appear at the beginning and end of this sentence, respectively. Their syntactic distance signals a content difference between divine midwife and human mother. But at the center of the poetry this distance lessens… Subject has become object; divine midwife has become divine mother. To be kept safe upon the breasts of the mother is to be cast upon God from the womb.[13]

Similarly, Juliana Claassens argues that the image of God as midwife is used to show that God is present in times of suffering just like parents are there for their children (Claassens 2006, 173). Two scholars offer an emotional element not present in the text. William Brown suggests that the womb serves to identify God as motherly, a term in itself that is problematic (Brown 2014, 412). And Tarja Philip writes: "The intimacy

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[11] James Mays (2011, 10) writes, "This individual relationship is described by the use of a metaphor that portrays God in the role of a human father who takes the child as it comes from the womb, lays it on its mother's breast to be nursed, and thereafter furnishes the environment of provision and security in which life is lived."

[12] Bester (2007, 146) writes: „Es geht nicht um eine Vertrauensleistung des betenden Ichs, sondern um das Vertrauen, das ihm an der Mutterbrust zuteil wird, das es mit Nahrung und mütterlicher Zuwendung, eingeflößt bekommt." "It is not a question of the supplicant trust, but of the trust that is given to him in the mother's breast, which is fed with food and motherly affection."

[13] Trible 1978, 60. Bester 2007, 133 makes a similar argument to Trible.

between baby and the midwife, the first person who touches him, forms the basis of the close and warm relationship between them."[14] Goldingay identifies YHWH as midwife; however, he also adds that the infant's trust is on his mother's breast and the "expectancy of finding milk there" (Goldingay 2007, 330). And, in her discussion of "nonmale imagery for God," Gale Yee identifies God as the "holy midwife" (Yee 2018, 152).

Whether it be as a midwife or parent figure, the supplicant needs YHWH to step in and save his life. The image of YHWH bringing forth from the womb seems to break up the supplicant's lamentation with ideas of YHWH as a father or mother, suggesting a relationship of care and perhaps compassion. Ideally, the delivery of a baby is close, warm, and consoling. However, the description of YHWH bringing forth from the womb in Psalm 22 is not a comforting, tender scene. Instead, the image is of YHWH forcefully, perhaps even violently, removing a baby from the womb and throwing the baby down almost as if it is a dead body onto its mother's breast.

The key to interpreting Psalm 22 lies in the two verbs, גֹחִי in v. 10a and הִשְׁלַכְתִּי in v. 11a. In v. 10a, גֹחִי (from the root גחה), is not so easily translated. It is a *hapax legomenon* and typically translated as "took me" from the womb (e.g., NRSV, KJV, JPS) with a transitive meaning (Dahood 1965, 1:139). However, if גֹחִי is emended to גָּחִי (from the root גיח), the result is a more forceful action, a bursting from the womb.[15] This interpretation can be sustained in that is used twice more in relation to giving birth. גיח is the same verb in Job 38:8, where YHWH prevents the sea from bursting forth from the womb. Also in Job 40:23, the River Jordan breaks or surges. And, in Mic 4:9–10, Zion is in labor

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[14] Philip 2006, 103. Bester also identifies YHWH as midwife. Her book is specifically about body imagery. She emphasizes that Ps 22:10a is not about creation, but about the specific body image of God as midwife. She writes, "Denn in Ps 22,10 handelt es sich nicht um Schöpfungsbilder, sondern um Geburtsbilder." "For in Ps 22:10, there are not images of creation, but images of birth" (2007, 136).

[15] The entry in *DCH* 2:342–43 reads: "or em[ended]. גֹחִי *one who extracts me* to גָחִי in the same sense, from גיח *burst out*) 71$_6$ (if em. גזה *sever*)." See also *HALOT*, 187–89; Baethgen 1904, 63–64. According to the dictionaries just quoted, there is no further evidence of the use of this word in neighboring Semitic languages.
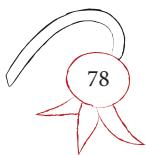
(Mic 4:9), escaping her enemies, and she is told to writhe in labor and burst forth (Mic 4:10).

In Ps 22:11a, the verb שלך (hoph. pf. first fem. sg.) is typically translated as the baby being "cast onto" YHWH. This interpretation does not capture the nuance of the word. Again, the intensity of the verb is lost in translation. In Jer 36:30, a dead body is שלך (hophal fem. ptc.), "thrown," into the road. Likewise, in 1 Kgs 13:24, a lion mauls a body and שלך, "throws," it in the road. In 2 Sam 20:21, a severed head is שלך (hophal masc. ptc.), "thrown," over a wall. And, in Jer 7:15, YHWH says he will שלך (hiphil pf. first sg.), "cast," the people out of his sight. Hagar, dying in the desert and unable to care for her child, casts her baby under the shrub (Gen 21:15). YHWH, in his aggression, accuses Jerusalam of her abominations, saying she says she was not swaddled when she was born but was cast out into an open field and loathed (Ezek 16:5). Goldingay explains the image as bursting out of the womb and notes that perhaps the image is to represent the breaking of the amniotic fluid. Noting the forcefulness of the verbs, Marianne Grohmann says the birth is not gentle.[16] However, the language is not only forceful, suggesting the breaking of the waters during birth; it is violent and suffused with bloodshed. Every image here involves death and damage done to the integrity of the body. Jeremiah 7:15 is significant because the context recalls the destruction of Shiloh, the death of the Elides, and very likely the disastrous battle of Aphek.

The womb is the first of several body-centric images that follow. The supplicant is brought to life from the womb, but the remainder of the psalm recounts how his body is slowly decaying into death, a cruel reversal of birth. The supplicant pleads for YHWH to come near (v. 12). Being encompassed by the womb, he was safe, but now the supplicant is surrounded by bulls (v. 13) that open their mouths, perhaps reflecting the opening of the womb (v. 13). Rather than being brought to birth, the supplicant is being delivered into the mouth of a

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[16] Grohmann (2007, 310) notes: "Gleichzeitig zeigen die Verben גחה q. (herausziehen; V. 10) und שלך ho. (geworfen sein; v. 11), dass Geburt keineswegs als' sanft' wahrgenommen wird." "At the same time the verbs גחה q. (pull out; V. 10) and שלך ho. (be thrown; V. 11) show that birth is not perceived as 'gentle.'"

lion (v. 14). The supplicant says that his body is poured out, his bones out of joint, and his heart melting (v. 15). Evildoers encircle him and his hands and feet have shriveled (v. 16). These images are reminiscent of a stillborn baby whose head might be caved in, bones out of joint. The skin on a stillborn baby separates from the bones and slips away if touched. All the organs and tissues are softened and fluid and blood leak as if the body is melting. The progression of this loss of fluid results in a baby that looks mummified (Faith n.d.). The supplicant's strength is dried up like a potsherd (Ps 22:16) as YHWH, the one who brought him from the womb, has laid set him in the dust of death (Ps 22:17).

Trust in YHWH is a requisite for a relationship with YHWH. The psalm begins with the supplicant pleading for YHWH to help, but YWHH is silent (v. 3). He recalls how YHWH saved his ancestor (vv. 4–6). The people remind him that he must commit his cause to the Lord and only then will YHWH save him (vv. 8–9). As Grohmann points out, the word "trust" occurs three times in Psalm 22 (vv. 5, 6, 10) and the theme of trust anchors the psalm.[17] Robert Alter says the purpose of the image of YHWH bringing forth from the womb is to show the supplicant's trust in YHWH. The fact that God brought him to birth is "proof that his present state of abjection will not continue" (Alter 2009, 72). However, the image of YHWH bursting the supplicant from the womb and throwing him down on his mother and then into the dust of death suggests that the supplicant cannot trust YHWH. Further, it is specifically the image of the womb that suggests that the supplicant questions if he should have ever trusted YHWH.

Relationship with YHWH requires absolute trust even in the face of absolute doubt. By invoking the womb, the supplicant can acknowledge YHWH as creator, proving his faith in YHWH yet still communicating

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[17] Grohmann (2007, 57) writes: "Die Verse 10–11 sind gut im Kontext von Ps 22 verankert: מבטיחי (*du gibst mir Vertrauen/birgst mich sicher*; בטח Part. *hi.*) in V. 10b nimmt das in V. 5.6 dreimal vorkommende בטחו (*sie vertrauten* בטח Perf. q.) auf." "Verses 10–11 are well anchored in the context of Ps 22: מבטיחי (you give me confidence/securely me, בטח Part. hi.). The word בטחו in v. 10b occurs three times in vv. 5 and 6 (they trusted בטח Perf. q.)."
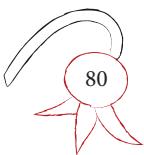
his distrust by describing his violent birth. By describing the process of his birth, the supplicant invites the reader to imagine the most vulnerable moment one can experience. Being brought out of the womb can end in birth or death and all is in the hands of YHWH. The image is powerful because the womb is multivalent. Most importantly, it is the one place where YHWH's presence is guaranteed and represents a connection that cannot be breached: YHWH's control of the womb is irrefutable.

Psalm 71

While the issues of trust in Psalm 22 revolved around the supplicant's lack of trust as he feels YHWH has abandoned him, in Psalm 71, the supplicant proclaims his trust in YHWH (v. 1). In Psalm 71, the supplicant is so confident in his relationship with YHWH that, rather than pleading with YHWH as the supplicant does in Psalm 22, he makes demands. In v. 2, YHWH must incline his ear to him (הטה־אלי אזנך hiphil imp.) and "deliver" him (והושיעני hiphil imp.; פלטני piel imp.). The supplicant demands that YHWH be his rock and fortress (v. 3) and tells YHWH to פלטני (piel imp.), "deliver," him. The supplicant in Psalm 22 asserts that YHWH has abandoned him. In contrast, in Psalm 71, the supplicant declares that he has trusted in YHWH since he was a child (v. 5). This affirmation of trust is repeated in 71:6, when YHWH brings the baby from the womb:

> עליך נסמכתי מבטן ממעי אמי אתה גוזי בך תהלתי תמיד
> I have leaned on you from the womb. From my mother's womb you severed the umbilical cord. My continuous praise is of you.

As noted above, it is common to compare Ps 71:6 to Ps 22:9 and to identify YHWH as midwife. For example, Declaissé-Walford (2012, 227) says Ps 71:6 "echoes the midwife imagery of Psalm 22," and Bester refers to the imagery in Ps 22:10–11 and Ps 71:6 as "parallel." Bester explains that both texts address the inner body of the mother and both

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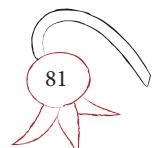
texts show God as midwife because the context of the image is the trust the supplicants have had in YHWH since they were born.[18]

However, the vocabulary used to describe YHWH bringing forth from the womb is not identical. There is no mention of laying the supplicant down as in Ps 22:10. The comparable word is the verb in question in Ps 71:6, גוֹזִי. גוזי is from the root גזה, and is also a *hapax legomenon*.[19] In the BDB, גוזי is rendered as "cut off" or "sever." In a translation that sounds like it is referring to a caesarean section, the BDB translation is "severed me from my mother's womb." This evokes images of a womb being opened rather than the umbilical cord cut (BDB, 159). Claassens interprets the reference similar to the BDB translation. She writes:

> Actually the "severing" or "cutting loose" language may be explained in terms of the duties of a midwife, who in a situation of near-death, where both the mother and the baby would most certainly die, would as a last resort cut open the mother's womb to free the baby. (Claassens 2007, 768)

Although evidence indicates that cesarean sections were performed during ancient times, the first written record of baby and mother surviving such a procedure does not occur until 1500.[20] However, the image of a woman being cut open in order to deliver a baby does not

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[18] Bester (2007, 144) state: „Die Nähe beider Texte wird durch die jeweils partizipiale Formulierung der Aussage noch verstärkt. Darüberhinaus steht das Hebammenbild in beiden Texten im Kontext von Vertrauensaussagen, die auf die vom Lebensanfang an bestehende Beziehung zwischen Gott und dem betenden Ich rekurrieren." "The similarity of both texts is reinforced in particular with the participial formula statement. Moreover, the midwifery image in both texts occurs in the context of statements of trust which refer back to the relationship between God and the praying I, a relationship that exists from the beginning of life."

[19] Dahood (1965, 2:173) argues that "gōzī remains an unsolved puzzle."

[20] The term "cesarean section" does not refer to Julius Caesar's birth and was not officially a term until 1598. The association with Caesar is due to the fact that he enacted a law stating that if a baby's life was in danger, the mother was to be cut open. "Cesarean Section – A Brief History: Part 1," Exhibitions (U.S. National Library of Medicine), https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/cesarean/part1.html.

fit within the context of the rest of the psalm, particularly in light of the paucity of bodily images across the text. *HALOT* has "cut off (the umbilical cord)" (*HALOT* 1:185–86). Samuel Terrien says it "might" refer to the cutting of the umbilical cord but could also simply refer to drawing forth from the womb. However, he describes elements that are not in the text. He writes: "The birth had perhaps been a difficult one. God acted to save the life of a half-dead infant" (Terrien 2003, 512). This type of interpretation aligns more with imager in Psalm 22. Bester translates "to cut the umbilical cord."[21]

James Crenshaw adds an emotional interpretation filled with disturbing imagery of the female body. He writes: "Trapped in the turbulent waters of the depths, the psalmist prays to be extracted from the jaws of death" (Crenshaw 2001, 151). In Crenshaw's interpretation, the opening of the womb is identified only with death, but the image is powerful only if the opening of the womb represents both life and death. In line with BDB, *HALOT*, and *DCH*, I translate "to cut the umbilical cord." The image of YHWH bringing to birth in Ps 71:6 is not reminiscent of opening pregnant bellies. The action of cutting the umbilical cord lends an image that is more distant than the image of bursting from the womb in Ps 22:10. Psalm 22 depicts the physical image of a womb opening. It invites the reader into the female physical space. In the cutting of the umbilical cord, on the other hand, the baby is already delivered, and the woman's naked vulnerable body, probably already covered with a sheet, is not part of the image.

The emotions of terror and fear that are prevalent in Psalm 22 are absent in Psalm 71. If one considers the image as a caesarean birth or

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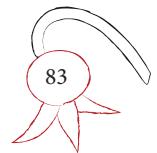
[21] Bester (2007, 143) states: „Die Annahme der lebensbestimmenden Bedeutung des Abschneidens der Nabelschnur steht möglicherweise im Hintergrund des Bildes von Ps 71,6. Sicher ist, dass das betende Ich in Ps 71 Gott als den sieht, in dessen Hände sein Geschick von Anfang an gelegt ist. Diese Überzeugung findet im Bild von Gott, der die Nabelschnur durchtrennt, seinen konkreten Ausdruck." "The assumption of the life-determining importance of cutting the umbilical cord may be found behind the image of Ps 71:6. What is certain is that, in Psalm 71, the praying self sees God as the one in whose hands his destiny has been laid from the beginning. This conviction finds its concrete expression in the image of God who cuts the umbilical cord."

a difficult birth, one might conjure up bloody images. Psalm 22 is ripe with references to the human body: breasts (v. 10); gaping mouths of lions (v. 14); the supplicant's body being poured out like water, bones, heart, and breast (v. 15); mouth dried up, tongue, and jaw (v. 16); hands and feet (v. 17); and bones (v. 18). However, in Psalm 71, other than the cutting of the umbilical cord in v. 6, bodily references are sparse and idiomatic: the supplicant requests for YHWH to incline his ear (v. 2), his mouth is filled with praise (v. 8), his mouth will tell of YHWH's deeds (v. 15), he has grey hair (v. 18), and his lips shout for joy (v. 23).

The supplicant in Psalm 71 demonstrates his confidence by not lamenting God's absence. Instead, he proclaims what he will do *because* he trusts in YHWH. He says, "I will hope" (v. 14), "my mouth will tell" (v. 15), "I will come praising" (v. 16), "I proclaim" (v. 17), and "I proclaim to generations" (v. 18). The supplicant's seemingly independent tone could be attributed in part to the fact that he is an old man (vv. 9, 18). He refers to his long life and asks God not to leave or forsake him until he has time to teach the new generation about YHWH's strength and power (v. 18). Whereas the supplicant in Psalm 22 accuses YHWH of throwing him in the dust of death (v. 16), in Ps 71:20 the supplicant says YHWH will bring him up from the depths of the earth (v. 20).[22] This type of agrarian imagery also occurs in Psalm 92, in which the righteous flourish like palm trees and grow like cedars (Ps 92:13). The righteous are planted in the house of the Lord and still bring forth fruit in old age (Ps 92:15). The association of the womb with the depths of the earth is also present in Job. Job bemoans that he was not left in his womb to die, buried like a stillborn infant (Job 2:16), so he could be lying down quiet and finding joy and peace in his grave (Job 3:17–22). Job blames his womb. If he had not been born, he would have no troubles. Job's wish is to return to the womb, to the dark depths of the earth. Perhaps the reference to YHWH bringing up from the depths of the earth suggests a rebirth, a restoration to his former glory, which is all the supplicant is asking for (Ps 71:21).

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[22] Claassens (1971, 763) writes: "The psalmist's confident, almost over-optimistic proclamation of the certainty of God's deliverance sounds throughout the psalm (cf. vv. 6, 8, 14–17, 19) forming a resounding climax in vv. 21–24."
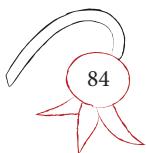
The image of the womb in Ps 71:6 does not invite the type of visceral feeling as Ps 22:10–11. Neither does it invite images of vaginal jaws of death (Crenshaw) or a dangerous birth (Terrien, Claassens). The womb is surrounded by images of trust, praise, and safety. The supplicant leans against YHWH (Ps 71:6). Interestingly, the female body is mostly absent. Although there is a reference to the mother's womb, the supplicant is not placed onto his mother's breast (Ps 22:10). The image of cutting an umbilical cord does not invite bodily images of a birth. The birth has occurred, perhaps the woman's legs covered, and the baby has been handed to the person who will cut the umbilical cord, in this case, YHWH. The supplicant in Psalm 71 trusts YHWH and while he is having a difficult time, he feels confident that YHWH will intervene and bring him back to his place of honor.

Conclusion

One thing remains certain in both psalms: ancient writers relied on the image of the womb to contribute meaning that is otherwise inaccessible. The image of the opening of the womb is effective because it is a place in between. It is the possibility of birth and the fear of death. It is confidence when a labor is easy and terror when labor is hard. Most importantly, it is movement. It is a movement from dark to light, from non-being to being, and from being safe to being vulnerable.

Whether it be YHWH claiming all the first born who breach the womb belong (Exod 13:2; 34:19), holding back the undulating waters of the birthing sea (Job 38:8), or Zion writhing in labor and bursting forth (Isa 66:7–9), the womb is a primeval image that encompasses all life. And, as a place of passage, it is also a story. In Psalm 22, it is a story of a turbulent relationship with YHWH. In Psalm 71, it is the story of a long-held and secure relationship with YHWH. By turning the focus on the actions of YHWH rather than finding a title for YHWH, be that midwife, mother, or father, we are able to see that understanding the contribution of the womb is crucial to the overall message of the psalm.

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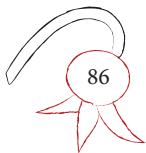
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Abstract

This article discusses the iconography of the deified Mediterranean Sea in Syrian glyptic from the Middle and Late Bronze Ages in light of textual evidence from the city of Ugarit (Ras Shamra). Building on the work of Paolo Matthiae in recognizing the visual vocabulary of the representation of the deity, the article argues that the reason for the depiction of the sea god as a winged deity was due to its role as a mediator between the celestial and terrestrial oceans in ancient Semitic conception. The article also provides a heuristic for separating depictions of the winged sea god from the representations of the winged goddess in the presence of water birds and fish in its visual vocabulary.

Dieser Aufsatz bespricht die Ikonographie des vergöttlichten Mittelmeers in der syrischen Glyptik der mittleren und späten Bronzezeit im Lichte der textlichen Zeugnisse aus der Stadt Ugarit (Ras Shamra). Die Arbeit von Paolo Matthiae zur Erkennung des visuellen Vokabulars der Darstellung der Gottheit weiterführend, argumentiert der Aufsatz, dass der Grund für die Darstellung des Meeresgottes als geflügelte Gottheit in der antiken semitischen Vorstellung lag, wo er ein Rolle als Vermittler zwischen dem himmlischen und dem irdischen Ozean hat. Der Artikel liefert auch eine Heuristik für die Unterscheidung von Darstellungen des geflügelten Meeresgottes von den Darstellungen der geflügelten Göttin die zusammen mit Wasservögeln und Fischen abgebildet wird.

WINGS, WEAPONS, AND THE HORNED TIARA: ICONOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF THE DEITY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA IN THE BRONZE AGE

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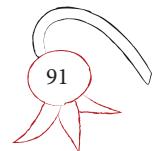
Introduction

This article offers a perspective on conceptualizing the deified Mediterranean Sea through iconographic representations from the Syrian region dating to the Middle and Late Bronze Ages in light of textual evidence. The god of the Mediterranean Sea was known by most of the peoples that inhabited the Levantine coast from the time of the Sargonic Empire (2334–2154 BCE) all the way down to the Hellenistic Era[1] – and

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[1] The texts that discuss the North West Semitic Sea god in particular have been collected in Töyräänvuori 2018. Regarding the *longue durée* of conceptions of the sea in the ancient world, see also Rollinger 2012, who does not, however, discuss the divinized sea but the actual Mediterranean. While texts from all over the ancient world seem to refer to the Mediterranean Sea, it bears noting that they use different names for the mythologized concept. In NWS texts, the personified sea is called Yamm, and it is called Tiamat in Mesopotamian texts.

perhaps even later.[2] There are several mythological texts from the coastal cities that either feature or mention the god of the sea, and the most complete text of these is the poetic epic called the Baal Cycle from ancient Ugarit.[3] In this article, it is argued that comparing these textual witnesses with the iconographic representations of the Sea god from the Levantine and Syrian regions benefits the interpretation of both the texts and the images.

This article builds on an important contribution by Paolo Matthiae (1992) on the iconography of the Syrian Sea god,[4] adds new representations to his discussion, and contrasts the information in the iconographic depictions with relevant textual witnesses.[5] This is done in the hope that it will not only help us better understand ancient mythological texts that pertain to the god of the Mediterranean Sea, but that it may also elucidate aspects of Late Bronze Age (1550–1150 BCE) kingship on the Levantine littoral, the sea having been an important facet in the political mythologies of the coastal cities.[6] Some of the concepts discussed in this article were probably also shared by the

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[2] Drummond 1826 reported a local, annual commemoration of the battle of the Storm god by the Abraham River (*Nahr Ibrahim*) in Lebanon in his own time. The river was formerly called the Adonis.

[3] The *editiones princie* of most of the tablets in the Baal Cycle were published between 1932–1938 in *CTA* and in issues X and XII the journal *Syria* by C. Virolleaud. For details on the publication of each column and tablet, see Smith 1994; and Smith and Pitard 2009. The text has been translated by Gaster 1933; Ginsberg 1950; Caquot 1974; Del Olmo Lete 1981; Bordreuil and Pardee 1993; Dietrich and Loretz 1997; Smith 1997; Wyatt 2002; Niehr 2015, and others.

[4] Matthiae 1992: "Some Notes on the Old Syrian Iconography of the God Yam." See bibliography for details.

[5] Many of the seals discussed here were examined by Williams-Forte 1983 and 1993, but the context of her discussion was entirely different, and she did ot recognize the figure suggested by Matthiae as the Sea god. Nevertheless, the present study owes Williams-Forte a debt of gratitude.

[6] Cf. Töyräänvuori 2018. Langdon 1989, 193, writes: "The fundamental religious significance of these representations of fishermen in the art of island and coastal societies comes as no surprise, for only in maritime communities is the fish such an important commodity that its eternal renewal is a matter to be taken to the gods."

Southern Levantine kingdoms, and traces of them may still be observed in texts from the Iron Age, chiefly the Hebrew Bible.[7] However, these are not the focus of the present study.

The article begins with background information on how modern scholars have learned about these conceptions, followed by an overview of the mythic texts that are the major source of information on the sea in the Late Bronze Age. The main body of the article presents iconographic representations of the Sea god in the Middle Bronze Age (2200–1500 BCE), followed by a discussion on the political aspects of the sea that emerge from both the textual and the iconographic witnesses, especially in connection with ancient kingship and monarchic succession.

The Sources for the Ancient North West Semitic Sea God

The sources for ancient conceptions of the Sea god in the Levantine cities are in the form of texts and iconography. Certain aspects of these mythological conceptions can also be deduced through analogy with Mesopotamian (especially Mariote) and even Egyptian texts and material remains,[8] but the most relevant textual sources are from the coastal cities of the Eastern Mediterranean, from the Bronze Age texts from Ugarit to texts of the Greco-Roman period (332 BCE–642 CE).[9] The city of Ugarit was located on the coast of modern-day Syria, and a repository of North West Semitic texts, clay tablets, were found there in archaeological excavations in the 1930s.[10] These texts were written

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[7] See the bibliography in Töyräänvuori 2018. Most recently, the connections of the myths to the biblical tradition have been examined by Scoggins Ballentine 2015.

[8] Cf. Durand 1993; Anthonioz 2009 for a comprehensive study of the Mesopotamian evidence, Töyräänvuori 2013 for a brief study on the Egyptian witnesses.

[9] The later Greco-Roman witnesses are discussed, e.g., by Redford 1992.

[10] For a general introduction to Ugarit, see Yon 2006. The discovery of the texts was followed by the decipherment of the cuneiform alphabet and the provisional translations of the principal texts between the years 1929 and 1932. Curtis 1985, 18–33.

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in a previously unknown language that is closely related to Aramaic, Phoenician and Biblical Hebrew.[11] The texts from the city include many different types of texts, ranging from economic tablets and epistolary correspondence to mythology.[12] The Baal Cycle, in which the dynastic Storm god of the city battles the sea, is one of the three major poetic epics from the excavations, and these texts have been compared with the texts of the Hebrew Bible ever since their discovery because, in addition to linguistic similarities, it is commonly accepted that the Bronze Age texts give us insight into the intellectual world in which the later biblical texts were conceived.[13]

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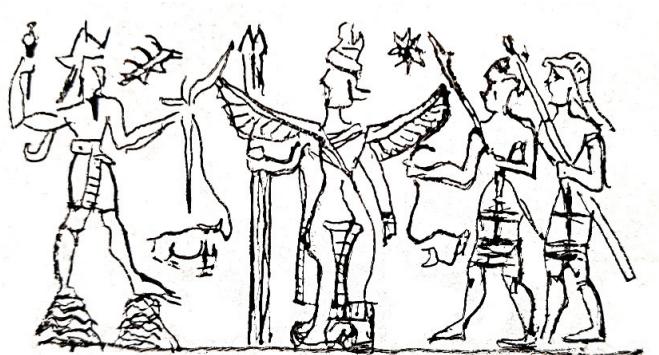
Figure 1. Cylinder seal impression of a steel-grey hematite seal 22.5 x 12.3 mm in size, dated to c. 1700 BCE. Redrawn from Williams-Forte 1993, Fig. 4 (BM 132824). The Storm god (left) stands opposite a winged deity flanked by two servants. The star-esque symbol often accompanies depictions of the god, associating the god with the sky while the fish carried by the god's servant associates him with the sea. A curator of the British Museum has interpreted the figure as the goddess Ištar.

[11] Published in *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places* (*KTU*: 3rd enlarged ed.), ed. M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín (2013). AOAT 360/1. This is the most recent edition of the texts that have been published in increments since 1929. The volume contains only the texts written in the native Ugaritic language and not texts written in the other languages from the city, including Akkadian and Hurrian.

[12] See Watson and Wyatt 1999 for discussion on the different types of texts found in the city.

[13] Connections between the Ugaritic texts and the Hebrew Bible have been collected in *Ras Shamra Parallels* volumes, edited by Fisher (1972, 1975) and Rummel (1981). Most of the history of Ugaritic studies have been conducted in tandem with Biblical Studies.

From this area, there are also iconographic pieces of evidence that pertain to the god of the sea (Fig. 1). The most interesting of these depictions come from Syrian glyptic of the Middle and Late Bronze Ages discussed presently.[14] Although iconographic representations do not always or necessarily correspond with what is written in the texts, in some cases they can help us interpret otherwise obscure facets of the narratives and myths.[15] A caution must be issued, however, in that the seals in which most of the depictions are found were not used to transmit mythologies in the ancient world but were used, for example, for the sealing closure of containers and the signing of clay tablets.[16] Mythological conceptions were evidently preserved in the iconography of the seals, but that is an unintended consequence of their use.

Matthiae cautions that, while the first-level reading of the Syrian iconography is easy, the second contextual or symbolic level is difficult, and the third iconological level is unattainable. He bases this taxonomy on his reading of the foundation laid by Erwin Panofsky, who separated iconographic and iconological readings of images.[17] What makes Syrian glyptic especially fruitful for investigations into mythological conceptions is their high formal quality and their neat compositional

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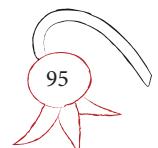
[14] Note that the dating of seals is largely based on their iconographies as they often do not come from dateable contexts. Teissier 1996, 19.

[15] Cf. De Hulster and LeMon 2014; and De Hulster, Strawn, and Bonfiglio 2015.

[16] Magness-Gardiner 1990, 62–63, points out that seals were not commonly used as signatures in texts until the Amorite Kingdom period (MBA). Change in the use of the cylinder seals may also have occasioned changes in iconography. While it is not strictly relevant for this article, it should also be noted that the specific scenes of motifs found on seals may have been decided either by the artisan or the patron that initially procured the seal. This choice is not in the foreground when the seal is used for administrative purposes, and there is evidence of the re-use of seals, e.g., in the royal seals of the kings of Aleppo at Alalakh. Cf. Teissier 1996, 14.

[17] Panofsky's model for reading images is best expressed in *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (1972), first laid out in the 1932 article, "Zum Problem der Beschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung von Werken der bildenden Kunst." Iconography is usually used to cover both iconographic and iconological interpretations in recent literature.

structure.[18] While there are no one-to-one correspondences between iconographic motifs and ancient mythological conceptions, iconographic representations allow insight into ancient views of the world when they are supplemented with the textual evidence. Supplementary textual evidence eases the iconographic and possibly even iconological reading of the images. The combination of sources may also help us understand concepts of the ancient cultural context and ideology that are not immediately recognizable to modern audiences.

The Ancient World View and the Sea in Cosmology

The mythological worldview underlying these ancient texts and images held that the world of ancient man was not only surrounded by water on all sides, but that there was a second ocean just as vast as the first that existed above the dome of the sky. This belief seems to have been shared by peoples of the ancient Near East.[19] There were certain correspondences between these "celestial" waters and the "terrestrial" waters.[20] Stellar constellations and rivers, for example, often carried the same names or were referred to in similar terms, which indicates that the constellations may have been conceived of and mapped as heavenly rivers.[21]

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[18] Matthiae 1992, 169. According to Teissier 1996, 42, the interpretation of iconography is "one [sic] the most elusive yet tantalising aspects of the study of glyptic in general."

[19] Day (1985, 4): writes "the archaic world view shared by the ancient Israelites along with other peoples of the ancient near east that both above the domed firmament of heaven and below the earth there is a cosmic sea. Rain was regarded as having its origins in the cosmic sea above the firmament and coming down through the windows of heaven, while the world's seas and lakes were thought of as connected with the subterranean part of the cosmic sea."

[20] The connection between *šamê*, "heaven," and *ša mê*, "of water," was already made by the Babylonians (e.g. in K 170 + Rm 520: 6', a mystical explanatory text meant for the eyes of scholars only). See Livingstone 1986, 32.

[21] Both rivers and certain constellations carried the names of serpents. For example, *bašmu* referred to the constellation Serpens, and *mušḫuššu* referred to the constellation Hydra (White 2007, 180), while *irhan* referred to the river
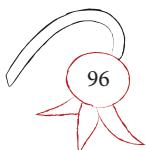
A number of Mesopotamian records also seem to count seven seas altogether around the earth, and these seven seas had an analogue in the seven moving or non-fixed stars, which were also called the "seven heavens," referring to the planets.[22] In the modern times, in fact, there is still a portion of the night sky that is called the "the Sea," which features constellations bearing the names of sea monsters.[23] This conception of the world is relevant to the iconography of the Syrian Sea god discussed in this article.

The sea was not merely a feature of ancient cosmogony or an aspect of creation. The texts from ancient Ugarit have instructed us that the sea was also a deity worshiped in the Levantine cities and to whom

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Euphrates. The lexical series Antagal (MSL 17, 233:6) actually explicitly spells out the concept: ÍD ᵈMUŠ TIN.TIR DÚB *pu-ra-tum*, which equates "'The Snake of Babylon' river" with the Euphrates. This text means that the river, which was "the snake of Babylon," was called the Euphrates in the Akkadian language, which, in turn, means that the Euphrates was known as "the snake of Babylon." Irhan was the proper name of the monster with which the serpent Euphrates was associated and equated with the river in several texts (e.g. RA 28, 134 ii 6: ᵈSA-*ha-an* = *pu-rat-tú*). Note that the heavenly rivers did not mirror rivers on earth but contained a particular geography (or astrography) of their own.

[22] Cf. Koch 1995. The astronomical systems of ancient Mesopotamia were not uniform and contain a certain amount of variation from era to era. The question of how much of these conceptions found in scholarly texts were shared by the people at large is also valid. The seven heavens in Mesopotamian astronomy were the sun, the moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Each planet had a corresponding divinity.

[23] Olcott (1911), who lists among the constellations of "the heavenly sea" the constellations Cetus, Pisces, Delphinus, Aquarius, Pisces Australis, Capricorn, Grus, and Eridanus, suggested that this grouping may have been borne out of the sun's journey through this part of the sky during the rainy season in the ancient Near East. This may be accurate at least insofar as the earth's axial procession goes. Olcott (1911, 31–32) also mentions an ancient Egyptian belief that the inundation of the Nile was caused by the Water Bearer (Aquarius) sinking his urn into the foundations of the river. Langdon 1989, 196, suggested that a festival of the re-opening of the seas may have taken place in Levantine societies in March, honouring the gods Asherat and Yamm. This coincides with the sun in Pisces.

regular sacrifices were made.[24] It is important to make a distinction between the sea as a divinity and the sea as a character of a narrative, as the portrayal of the character in narrative texts is at odds with the position of the deity in the Levantine pantheon.

In the Ugaritic Baal Cycle (KTU 1.1–1.6; see Dietrich, Loretz, and Sanmartín 2013), the Sea, whose native name was Yamm (*ym*), is the enemy of Baal, the Storm god of mount Saphon.[25] This myth, which has traditionally been called a *Chaoskampf*, a chaos battle myth, features the combat between the Storm god, who often functioned as the protector of the king, and the Sea god, who is understood as an embodiment of the Mediterranean Sea.[26] Since the sea is the opponent of the dynastic god, who was the protector of the city, it would be easy to interpret Yamm as an evil divinity. Often the god is seen as embodying chaos.[27]

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Fig. 2 Detail of a cylinder seal impression of a hematite seal, 27 x 14 mm in size. The theriomorphic winged god accompanied by a dolphin (left) faces two figures with raised weapons: the Storm god and the goddess Anat (right). The Sea god holds a weapon in one hand and a leashed dolphin in the other while a water bird resides at his feet. Redrawn from Williams-Forte 1983, Fig. 9. Originally published by Delaporte 1923, Pl. 96, Fig. 16 (A.918) Louvre inv. AO 1183.

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[24] The sea is mentioned in the sacrificial lists KTU 1.39, 1.46, 1.48, 1.162, and 1.118.

[25] For comprehensive studies of the Syrian Storm god, cf. Schwemer 2001 and Green 2003. See also Schwemer 2008a, 2008b for a summary of his findings.

[26] Ayali-Darshan 2016; Töyräänvuori 2018.

[27] Undoubtedly inspired by H. Gunkel's paradigmatic *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (1895).

Aside from Tiamat from the Babylonian epic *Enuma Eliš*,[28] "Prince Sea, Judge River" is the most familiar mythological aspect of the sea. The basic outline of the story – the Sea demands the rule of the assembly of the gods, the Storm god and the Sea god duel (see Fig. 2), Baal wins through difficulty and constructs his palace – may not be as straightforward as it is often presented due to the fragmentary nature of the texts. There is no physical description of the Sea god, and the best description is from his battle scene with the Storm god in KTU 1.2 IV 15–18:

yrtqṣ.ṣmd.bdb 'l.	The weapon leaps from Baal's hand,
km.nšr/[b 'u]ṣb 'th.	like a bird of prey from his fingers.
ylm.ktp.zblym.	It strikes the chest of Prince Sea,
bn.ydm.ṯpṭ/[nh]r.	between the hands of Judge River.
'z.ym.lymk.	Strong is the Sea, he does not sink,
ltnġṣn[.]pnth.	his joints do not shake,
lydpl/tmnh	his form does not fall.

The description is vaguely anthropomorphic and is enough to establish that the Sea god has a physical form, two hands, and a torso. While the Sea eventually loses the bout to the Storm god, at least for a while they are evenly matched.

There are administrative lists from the city that show another side of the divinity,[29] of a god recipient of sacrifices, particularly those of rams. Therefore, to paint the god as an adversarial force based on his role in the narrative of the Baal Cycle is to misconstrue the function that the god had in the pantheons of the societies occupying the shore, which, in many cases, depended on the god for their livelihoods (see

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[28] The tablets of *Enuma Elish* have been dated to 900–200 BCE. The tablets were published by L. W. King in *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum (Part XIII)* (1901), who also translated the text in *The Seven Tablets of Creation, or the Babylonian and Assyrian Legends concerning the Creation of the World and of Mankind* (1902). R. Labat made a more complete edition of the tablets in *Le Poème babylonien de la Création* (1935). A facsimile of the cuneiform was published by Lambert and Parker in *Enuma Eliš. The Babylonian Epic of Creation* (1966), and again in Lambert 2013 (cf. bibliography).

[29] See n. 24.

Linder 1981). The god of the sea, like the sea itself, seems to have been considered a provider of bounty, especially for fishermen and merchants (Fig. 3). As an enemy of the Storm god, the bringer of ill weather, the Sea would also have been the natural deity to which to turn for safe passage through the seas. But while the sacrificial lists tell us that sacrifices were made to the sea, it is not entirely clear whether the sacrifices were meant to entreat the god of the sea or to appease the Storm god, through whom the sea would have been calmed.[30]

Fig. 3 Cylinder seal impression drawn from a photograph in Matthiae 1992, Fig. 20. Originally published in Opificius, Berger-Haas, and Perry 1968. The photograph is of extremely poor quality. The cylinder seal is not located at a museum but was owned by Münzen und Medaillen AG Basel, n. 44. An enthroned god (right) is holding a goblet from which two streams of water issue. The winged and armed Sea god is in the middle, and a petitioner carrying two fish is featured on the left.

There are arguments that the god was worshiped and revered by the people of Ugarit, as the name of the Sea god is used as a theophoric element in personal names in the city,[31] and this would likely not have been the case with a divinity that was considered purely adversarial,

[30] Waschsmann 2009, 292. At least in the Aegean context, the domain of the Sea god was the saving of ships and the taming of horses. Langdon 1989, 191.

[31] There are 13 attestations of the element *ym* in personal names in the Ugaritic texts. These include names such as *ymil* (KTU 4.75 V 14)*, ilym* (KTU 4.116:13)*, mlkym* (KTU 4.126:19), and *abdym* (KTU 3.3:10; 4.7:7; 4.103:18, 47; 4.341:3). Tugendhaft 2013, 195.

as he is presented in the fragmentary myth. Theophoric names are similar to cylinder seals, which are discussed in the next section, in that they constitute a form of personal identification but at the same time contain mythic elements that can reveal details about the mythological conceptions that are not mentioned in the texts.[32] It is possible that the iconographic motifs might also contain competing mythological narratives that were never written down, so they are not necessarily complementary evidence for what is found in the written sources. It cannot be assumed that all the sources present a unified image of the sea god. Since the seals were used in administrative and archival contexts, they do bridge the gap between textual and archaeological sources of the past (Magness-Gardiner 1990, 61). It should also be pointed out that individual depictions naturally carry less weight than cumulative patterns of evidence (Teissier 1996, 40). Finding patterns of motifs is possible because Syrian seal-cutters had conventions for arranging their subjects (Teissier 1996, 39). What is inarguably shared by the textual witnesses and the iconographic depictions is the ambivalent character of the sea.

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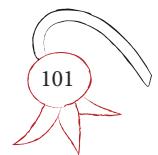
The Iconography of the Sea God

The iconography of the Sea god is interesting as it displays aspects of the god that are not explained by the texts (Fig. 4). An important piece of evidence depicts the sea as a winged and armed deity, one of the core deities in Syrian glyptic.[33] The Sea god is usually classified as a terrestrial divinity and not an astral divinity, which often boasted wings in Syrian iconography. It is the suggestion of the author that this depiction is due to the wings making the Sea god capable of traversing the distance between his two realms: the ocean encircling the earth

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[32] Teissier 1996, 10: "Seals and sealing had a vital role to play in communication, not only as transmitters of iconography and ideas of status but of geographical and often ethnic identity. They were also transmitters of political and cultural perceptions."

[33] Teissier 1996, 41. Teissier interprets the figure as a goddess, but there is no question that she is not referring to the same figure.

disk and the vast sea above the sky. This double ocean seems to be the reason for this rare occasion of giving wings to a god not associated with a planet in Syrian iconography. This fits in with the adversary of the hero later being portrayed as a winged dragon or the sea-serpent on the Eastern Mediterranean, which symbolically collapses both the heavens and the seas as its domain.[34]

Fig. 4 Cylinder seal impression of a hematite seal, 24 x 12 mm in size dated to c. 1700 BCE. Redrawn from Matthiae 1992, Fig. 6. Originally published in Bleibtreu and Constantinescu 1981, Fig. 78, inv. KHM AS X 71. A winged figure with a horned cap (left) is holding two spears in one hand and a melee weapon in the other hand, standing next to a guilloche of water on one side and the ankh-type symbol on the other. The figure on the right side is wearing the shepherd's hat character-istic of Mesopotamian kings. The identification of the middle figure is uncertain.

Elements such as costumes, headgear, insignia, weapons, symbolic animals, and the positions of the figures, as well as the context in which they appear, can be used to identify individual deities in the glyptic.

In the typology devised by Matthiae (1992), it has been demon-strated that the winged male deity portrayed in the Old Syrian

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[34] The dragon-motif also collapses the bird, the fish, and the horse into one chimera, all animals connected to the Syrian Sea god in iconography. Possibly the best-known example of the narrative of the hero conquering the dragon on the Eastern Mediterranean is the Golden Legend of St. George of Lydda, given the afterlife of the St. George and the dragon traditions. Cf. Töyräänvuori 2016.

cylinder seals from the second millennium BCE (MBA II),[35] carrying a spear and a curved scimitar or an Egyptian-style sickle sword (Fig. 3), represents the god Yamm.[36] Although the weapons can be in a lowered or raised position, in Syrian glyptic the god is never found without them.[37] The figure is often misidentified as a goddess since the pictorial representations of Ištar in Assyrian and Babylonian iconography contain similar symbols: wings, a bare front leg, and a curved sword.[38] The winged deity that Matthiae identified as the god Yamm is "well defined in almost all of the above mentioned primary elements." It also appears in "relatively unchangeable compositional patterns," making the identification of the god as Yamm more solid than that of most deities (Matthiae 1992, 169).

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[35] Many of the seals come from Alalakh and Ebla. See Matthiae 1992 for bibliography. Syrian cylinder seals derive from three periods: Pre-classical (1920–1830 BCE), Classical (1830–1600 BCE), and Post-Classical (1600–1550 BCE). Teissier 1996, 12. Most of the seals discussed in this article fall under the Classical period.

[36] Matthiae 1992, 175: "If the basic element for the characterization of the mythical role of the winged deity is the duel against Hadad, it seems possible to propose that the image of this god in the formulation of Old Syrian glyptic represents the god Yam of the mythical cycle of Ugarit." On p. 187, he also points out that this is the only winged deity in Old Syrian glyptic that is male.

[37] It may merely be that the god is impossible to recognize without his characteristic weapons. Pittman and Aruz 1987, 68, Fig. 59, display a character facing off against the Storm god that has similar head-wear as the Sea god and is surrounded on both sides by *ankh*-symbols, but he has neither wings nor weapons. Teissier 1996, 23, Fig. 81 and 92 from Alalakh, likewise show horned figures bearing two weapons but without wings. In Fig. 81, the figure's front leg is bare in similar fashion to the seals discussed by Matthiae.

[38] According to Matthiae 1992, 172, the figure is often confused even in the archaeological literature on Syrian glyptic with the armed nude goddess who is sometimes winged (the wings of the goddess derive from the "figure of the great goddess inside the winged shrine"; although Matthiae does not discuss it, this may have led to the later presentation of Ištar with similar iconographic signs), even though the figure of Yamm has a "clear enough autonomy in comparison with other figures of deities that are superficially comparable." The skirts of the armed female deities that are not a derivation of the nude goddess are different from those of Yamm, who bears a "peculiar fringed one."

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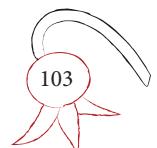
In addition to its curved scimitar and the two wings rising from its shoulders, the character wears a short but long-fringed skirt (decorated with horizontal stripes and closed with a belt) that covers its back leg, and a headdress with horizontally free-standing horns at the bottom and a high conical or cylindrical cap with a high central point. The wings are the most characteristic element of the deity, as there is no variation in their position, whereas the horned tiara of the god takes many different forms (Matthiae 1992, 169–70). The tiara of Yamm sometimes resembles that of the Storm god Baal and sometimes that of the goddess Anat (Matthiae 1992, 170). The skirt worn by the divinity and the dagger sheathed at its belt also derive from the canonical iconography of the Storm god of Aleppo, which places the god in this constellation of the combat myth.[39] Both of these characteristics link the character to the mythology of the Baal Cycle, and they suggest an Amorite origin of the mythology. Although the curved scimitar is one of the most defining characteristics of the god, he also wields other weapons, such as spears or axes. Often, the figure has a weapon in both hands (Fig. 3), but sometimes he holds his two weapons in one hand (Fig. 1).[40] According to Matthiae, grasping the weapons conveys the "unequivocal" visual message of struggle, even in contexts where the figure is not taking part in the struggle *per se* (Matthiae 1992, 172). It ought to be noted that the Storm god likewise holds on to his weapons even when not engaged in battle.

There are three different kinds of scenes in which the figure appears, and they are categorized by Matthiae as follows: (a) cultural schemes in front of a royal figure or two/three other praying figures, (b) mythical contexts in front of an enthroned god accompanied by other deities, and, most importantly, (c) in front of or facing off against the Storm

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[39] Matthiae 1992, 171. Cornelius 1994 has conducted a comprehensive study of the iconography of the storm god Baal.

[40] Matthiae 1992, 171–72. Matthiae writes that the "strong curved weapon" appears more rarely than the spear, which is statistically speaking true of the figures provided by him in his article. But with regard to the weapons of other male divinities in Syrian glyptic, the curved scimitar is much more easily recognizable.

god, who is sometimes accompanied by the goddess Anat.[41] The scene may also take place before an enthroned divinity (Matthiae 1992, 172–73). The author suggests that the scenes might more succinctly be named (a) the intercession scene, (b) the presentation scene, and (c) the combat scene. It is noteworthy that the idea of kingship is present in all three types of scenes, either in the figure of the king himself or in the figure of the enthroned divinity ("god characterized by majestic behaviour").[42]

It is important to note that the winged deity is presented in multiple depictions in a mirror-image of or opposite from the Storm god, which is unusual for combat scenes that generally indicate a power differential in the composition. When facing off, both gods often brandish all of their respective weapons. According to Matthiae, this represents the warlike impulses of both characters.[43] The antagonism between the characters is easily observable in the iconographic witnesses. The representation of the Sea god opposite the Storm god presents an instant, jarring conflict.

Usually, this configuration indicates either the doubling of one character seen symmetrically from both sides at once.[44] This mirroring has also been used to create an association between mortal kings and their patron deities, as in the case of a king and a god presented as opposite one another, a famous example of which is from the temple of the Storm god at the Aleppo citadel in which the king is the double

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[41] According to Matthiae 1992, 173, "usually Hadad does not appear facing other gods" with the exception of Anat. Contra Teissier 1996, 39, who points out that the characters in Syrian glyptic are "normally turned inwards, facing each other, rather than following each other in rows."

[42] Matthiae (1992, 173) points out the important relationship between Yamm and the royal figure in the first two types of scenes.

[43] Matthiae 1992, 173. On p. 174 he describes the figure as a protagonist in a duel against the Storm god (with Anat or the enthroned god playing a secondary role), but the scene might just as well be described as the Storm god playing the part of the protagonist and Yamm the part of the antagonist.

[44] This is called mirror symmetry or bilateral symmetry. Cf. Sparavigna 2013. She describes this as a symmetry with respect to reflection in which an image is indistinguishable from its mirror that is used to create static images.

image of the Storm god (Fig. 5).[45] What is interesting about the image is that the Storm god is portrayed with his hands raised as if holding weapons, especially with his right hand raised in the image as if to strike, but the weapons are absent from his hands. This may be due to the fact that the weapons of the Storm god of Aleppo were housed in the temple, which the orthostat relief once decorated and in the remains of which the image still stands today (Töyräänvuori 2018, 375–76).

Fig. 5 A drawing of a basalt frieze wall relief from the Aleppo citadel. Original publication in Gonnella, Khayyata, and Kohlmeyer 2005, Fig. 124. The relief does not have a museum inventory number and is still in situ. The Storm god (left) stands facing a king. The figure on the right is King Taita of Palistin. The relief was erected in the eleventh century BCE to replace an older image. Based on the iconography discussed in this article, it is likely that the position of the hands of the king in older images have largely been replicated in the newer image.

Matthiae attempted to explain the winged nature of Yamm as symbolic of the sea as a primeval element, connecting it with representations of Tiamat as a winged dragon in the Neo-Assyrian art of

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[45] Gonnella, Khayyata, and Kohlmeyer 2005. Note that, unlike in other images presented here, the Storm god is not holding his signature weapons in this image. Cf. Töyräänvuori 2012 for the suggestion that this is because the cultic objects that were the divine weapons of the Storm god were likely stored in the cellar of the temple of the Storm god at Aleppo where this relief was discovered. The weapons themselves have not been found.

the ninth century, which would have been influenced by these older depictions (Matthiae 1992, 177). These younger zoomorphic images can hardly be used to explain the wings on an older anthropomorphic figure.[46] His solution is that both derive from "an ancient figurative tradition, according to which the primeval sea was represented as a winged deity," of which no examples have apparently survived.


Fig. 6 Detail of a cylinder seal impression of a hematite seal, 24 x 12 mm in size. El-Safadi (1974), Fig. 63 from Aulock 239. Redrawn from Williams-Forte 1993, Fig. 6. The Storm god (left) with lowered weapons in front of an enthroned figure. For an interpretation of enthroned figures bearing cups as El-type deities, cf. Töyräänvuori 2020.

My solution is different. As discussed earlier, in ancient cosmology the sea was both above the dome of the sky as well as below it.[47] Therefore, as the domain of the sea both surrounds the earth and is

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[46] Pritchard 1954, 218, Fig. 670 is an eighth-century BCE relief from Malatya in Turkey that shows a god battling a serpent-dragon with a spear while another armed deity looks on, which at least witnesses to the existence of the iconographic motif of divine combat in this period. See also L. Delaporte: Malatya, Arslantepe I 1940, pl. 22,2; E. Herzfeld: Archaeologische Mitteilung aus Iran II, 1930, pl. 12; Bossert, Anatolien 769; A. Götze: Kleinasien 1933, Fig. 13.

[47] Note also the existence of the homographs (although not necessarily homophones) *ym-ym* and *nhr-nhr*, one of which refers to water and the other to light (which, it must be pointed out, always causes a reflection on the waters), or one to terrestrial waters and the other (by and large) to celestial waters.

above the dome of the sky, portraying the god of the sea as a winged divinity capable of traversing the distance between them makes perfect sense. Figure 2 is especially illuminating in this regard as it not only represents the deity as a hybrid that is part man, part beast, and part bird, but also frames him with both a dolphin and a water-bird. A leaping dolphin, being a mammal, may well have been conceived as a "fish that flies" by ancient people. The dolphin is capable of surviving in water, on land, and in the air.[48] A water-bird, "a bird that dives," also occupies all three realms: air, land, and water. It can hardly be doubted in this instance that the figure in the seal is the Sea god. Because of the double ocean, the god of the sea is the only deity that is necessarily connected with all three domains: water, air, and the earth between them.

The depiction in Matthiae's Fig. 20 (reproduced here as Fig. 3) is likewise interesting. The image contains three figures: an enthroned deity (probably El), Yamm standing in front of the enthroned deity with his back to the throne and his weapons lowered, and a non-divine supplicant (unlike the other two, the supplicant does not wear a horned mitre) opposite Yamm with his hand raised in prayer or supplication.[49] This non-divine figure, whose status is signalled by the lack of horns on his headdress, likely represents the mortal king as the supplicant figure bears no divine characteristics and is seen wearing the "shepherd's hat" of kings (also in Figs. 4 and 6).[50] In this presentation scene, the Sea god

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[48] Oxygen-breathing dolphins can survive on land for hours, which would likely have been witnessed by ancient fishermen. Cf. Conigliaro and Del Mar Otero 2012.

[49] Matthiae (1992, 174) has interpreted this as a "praying faithful" adoring the winged deity.

[50] Kings and gods can be distinguished through their head-wear in ancient iconography. In the Mesopotamian and Syrian regions, gods are usually depicted as wearing horned mitres or crowns. In the Syrian region, gods usually boast only one set of horns on their headdresses, whereas in the Mesopotamian area, the great gods can boast up to four pairs of horns. The kings, on the other hand, wear a non-horned headdress that may ultimately derive from a Sumerian shepherd's hat. This iconographic convention may date back to the Ur III-period king Gudea. Cf. Van Buren 1943 and Suter 2015. The kings in Syrian glyptic actually wear
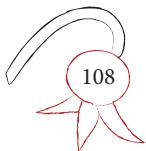
is between the king of the gods and the mortal king in the role of the mediator of kingship.[51] Susan Langdon describes a "popular cylinder seal theme of the fourteenth–thirteenth centuries" in which the young god of the sea offers homage to a seated deity, offering "a jar on a stand before a deity on a high-backed throne." She connected the Ugaritic vessel (Fig. 8) with this motif (Langdon 1989, 195–96). It is especially in this mediating position that the Sea god's weapons are often lowered, while they are raised when he faces off against the Storm god.

These scenes of mediation are poorly attested in the textual record, but they are found in multiple iconographic sources. This presents a discrepancy between the depiction of the gods in the mythical narrative and how he may have been conceived in the cultic lives of the Levantine cities. The supplicant seems to have two fish behind him, possibly representing a tribute that he is bringing to the enthroned divinity.[52] Yamm clearly functions as a mediator in the image.

There do not appear to be enough defining characteristics of the supplicant figure to insist that he is necessarily a royal figure,[53] but whether or not the mortal represents the king, Yamm is the go-between for the wealthy human and the father of the gods.[54] Matthiae suggested

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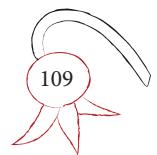
two distinct headdresses, the shepherd's hat, which Teissier 1996, 40, called "the bonnet", and a high oval headdress. The former is characteristic of north-east Syria, and the latter of north-west Syria.

[51] On the presentation scene, cf. Zajdowski 2013. His study suggests that the presentation scene was a development from an earlier banquet scene. According to Zajdowski 2013, 3, the presentation scene "conveyed the message of legitimisation and individual place in the social hierarchy." The Ugaritic crater may represent an intermediary stage in this development, appearing to contain aspects of both banquet and presentation.

[52] Fish offerings are mentioned in the Ugaritic texts RS 19.15, 24.250+159.

[53] Matthiae (1992, 182), however, raises the possibility that the character is wearing a high oval tiara, which would suggest his royal identity, this being "the canonical figure of the king not only in the Yamhad milieu, but also in the kingdoms of Northern inner Syria." Compare the figure of the king with the "sandal-bearer" figure in the *Baal au foudre* stele.

[54] Matthiae (1992, 174) noted that there are other images in which the king appears before the winged figure in prayer, "as happens with all the major deities of the Old Syrian pantheon."

that the supplicant figure only appears before great deities that are related especially to the protection of kingship (Matthiae 1992, 174). Although Matthiae's association of the images in the cylinder seals with the text of the Ugaritic Baal Cycle is a little too straightforward,[55] the case he presents for interpreting this figure as Yamm in Old Syrian glyptic is nonetheless convincing. He also claims that Yamm is clearly a protector of kingship in the iconographic patterns of the Old Syrian glyptic. Matthiae also pointed out that Yamm's connection to kingship is hardly astounding, based on textual evidence, but he does not elaborate further on this topic (Matthiae 1992, 176).

The Sea and the Goddess
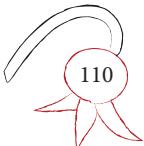
The iconography of the Syrian Sea god resembles the depiction of the Mesopotamian goddess Isthar, especially in her war-like character (Fig. 7). While there are iconographic depictions from the Mesopotamian region that feature the name of the goddess next to the portrayal of her winged, armed form, these witnesses from the Syrian region give reason to question the automatic labelling of such figures with the name of Ištar. There are scholars who have likely been mistaken in their interpretation of the figure on Syrian seals as a warrior goddess in analogue to Ištar, suggesting that the figure represents the goddess Anat. This is a false identification since the winged warrior goddess in Syrian glyptic that occasionally accompanies the Storm god consistently has her wings at the midriff and not at the shoulders like the Sea god figure (Fig. 2). The goddess and the Sea god share certain characteristics, but they are distinct figures. The goddess also does not face off against the Storm god as they are not antagonistic toward one another in the seals.

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[55] For example, on p. 176, he interprets scenes in which the winged deity and the enthroned deity are unaccompanied by the Storm god as "certainly pointing to the declaration of the god's hegemony by the father of the gods", witnessing El's "role at the origin of the fight." However, El and Yamm seem to have a complex relationship both symbolically and narratively, so there may have been other occasions for a scene of this type.

Fig. 7 A redrawn detail from a Mariote cylinder seal impression belonging to Mukanišu, servant of king Zimri-Lim. The seal likely depicts Zimri-Lim wielding a weapon in the centre with the goddess Ištar on the left side. A divine symbol associated with the Storm god (according to Williams-Forte 1983) is situated above the weapon, between Zimri-Lim and an unidentifiable deity (right). Originally published in Ornan 2007, Fig. 7.

For example, Pittman and Aruz, in their description of deities and rulers on Syrian seals,[56] categorize this figure under the heading of "the winged and armed goddess." They describe the figure as dressed "in a long, flounced robe open at the front" but also, according to them, later "in a short kilt and a conical or square horned mitre." They also note that "this winged figure wields spears and a scimitar." This matches Matthiae's description of the Sea god. Pittman and Aruz also associate the figure with Ištar: "deriving her appearance in part from an earlier Akkadian deity, this goddess has been associated with the death-causing aspect of the maiden goddess of love and war, Anath, in the Ugaritic texts," citing only Ginsberg's 1969 translation of the Baal Cycle for this association.[57] The symbol that seems to resemble the Egyptian *ankh*-sign has also been used to connect the figure with the goddess, but this seems to be a stylized fish that appears horizontally in older depictions and is raised to a vertical position in Syrian glyptic.[58]

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[56] Pittman and Aruz 1987, 39–40. The winged goddess appears in their Fig. 47 (p. 65), an Old Syrian cylinder seal.

[57] H. L. Ginsberg, *Ugaritic Myths, Epics and Legends* (1969).

[58] Contra Teissier 1996, who views it as an Egyptian influence on Syrian glyptic in the Middle Bronze Age. She, however, concludes that Egyptian imagery was

It is not surprising that the sea and the goddess share aspects of iconographic representation. The Sea god and Ištar share a kind of ambivalence: the sea embodied and provided both life and death, it was both terrestrial and celestial, it was both a protective deity and a threatening monster, anthropomorphic and theriomorphic, it was both untamed and conquered, an enemy and a benefactor. Many of these roles of the god probably derive from the nature of the sea itself. Androgyny, having both male and female characteristics, is something that Ištar shared with the Sea god. In fact, in the ancient Semitic cultural sphere, the god of the sea could be both male, like Yamm, or female, like the Babylonian Tiamat.[59] The Ugaritic language likewise has two words for the sea: *ym*, which likely predominately referred to the Mediterranean, and *thmt*, which may have been considered to be some kind of primordial sea. While the similarities between the depictions of the goddess and the winged sea are interesting and should occasion a re-evaluation of a number of depictions of winged deities as representations of the Sea god, Matthiae's case for why the figure ought to be interpreted as the Sea god in Old Syrian glyptic is convincing.

There is also a connection between the Sea god and the horse in iconographic depictions. Langdon examined the "horse-leader" motif in her 1989 *American Journal of Archaeology* article titled "The Return

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coherently assimilated into the Syrian glyptic repertoire, so the meaning of the symbol is not necessarily the same in Syrian glyptic as it was in Egypt. Note how the Williams-Forte 1983 Fig. 16 from Ebla contains this *ankh*-type sign next to a clearly bearded figure against whom the Storm god is facing off with a raised club ready to strike. This image is ill-fitting with the interpretation of the figure as a goddess and is in line with finding the symbol next to the Sea god, suggesting that, in Syrian glyptic, it represents a stylized fish. There does appear to be some kind of connection between the *ankh*-type glyph and water in Syrian glyptic. Cf., e.g., Teissier 1996, Fig. 1b, in which liquid is poured over a mortal man by two divinities, Fig. 1c, 4, in which the same scene is repeated with a shower of *ankh*-type glyphs being poured on the mortal man, and Fig. 149, which features similar streams of water around a male figure with fish symbols swimming up the stream.
[59] Cf. Töyräänvuori 2016 for discussion on the gendered depiction of both the sea and Ištar.
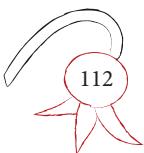
of the Horse Leader." The horse leader is a figure known from Argive geometric pottery and, according to Langdon, the figure is its most characteristic motif (Langdon 1989, 185).

Fig. 8 Detail from a clay pottery drinking mug with pinkish slip, decorated with brown glaze (RS 24.440). BP1 Damascus Museum inv. 6886. Redrawn from Schaeffer 1966 3 Fig. 1* Pl. I right. Height 21.5 cm. Most often, the seated figure (right) has been interpreted as El and the standing figure (middle) as Baal, but the presence of a fish, a horse, and a bird – which constitute the symbols of Yamm – warrant a reinter-pretation of the standing figure as the Sea god. The interpretation of all seated deities as El is likewise uncertain. Cf. Töyräänvuori 2020.

The horse-leader motif of Mycenaean craters features a human figure flanked by horses and most often also with fish.[60] It is the combination of horses and fish that is of interest with regard to Mediterranean Sea deities.[61] Langdon presented several craters from the Eastern Mediter-ranean that display this motif, even connecting the offering scene on a Ugaritic amphoroid crater (RS 27.319, Fig. 8) with it (Langdon 1989, 188). While beginning her argumentation by denying that the figure

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[60] Langdon 1989, 185, describes the Argive motif as containing "plump isolated water birds, lines of sinuous marshbirds, a variety of fish, and panels with characteristically slender horses." According to her, the image of the fish appears underneath the horse far too regularly for it to be considered a mere filler of space. Horses and fish appear on Syrian glyptic outside of the Ugaritic examples also, e.g., in Kishite seals (Langdon's Fig. 12).

[61] Langdon 1989, 191: "The association of fish and horse in a potentially religious context recalls Homeric and Classical attributes of Poseidon, sea-god, helper of fishermen, breaker of horses, and in certain accounts, even father of the horse."

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in the craters represents Poseidon, Langdon does come to the conclusion that it probably depicts a sea-god and that the motif was adapted from local Syrian mythology (Langdon 1989, 201). The reason for this connection between the horse and the sea may come from the ancient practice of breaking horses by forcing them into the sea.[62]

The Doubled Image of the King

One of the questions that has driven the author's interest in the Levantine Sea god is why the Sea needed to be defeated by the would-be king of the gods in what has been described as a political myth.[63] Traditionally, the answer has been sought in the creation of an ordered world out of primordial chaos,[64] as though order, rather than subjugation, was brought to chaotic uncivilized savages in the establishment of government (kingship). But, in fact, we often find the chaotic aspects of the adversary attached to the character of the king and to the king of the gods himself – to the mercurial if not outright chaotic character of the Storm god – making the traditional explanation somewhat unsatisfactory.

While they were antagonistic toward one another in the myth of the Baal Cycle, the desires of the sea and the Storm god were basically the same: they both wanted a palace for themselves, and neither desired to be subjugated. The difference between the contestants was that Baal had help in the form of the smith god Kothar-wa-Hasis and the maiden goddess Anat and that Baal ultimately won the contest, taking for himself the throne of the king of the gods. But as narrative actors, the two gods are not so different.[65] The similarity between them may be further elucidated by the iconography.

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[62] Langdon 1989, 198. Breaking a horse refers to the practice of getting a horse ready to be mounted by a rider.

[63] Smith 1994; Smith and Pitard 2009; Töyräänvuori 2018.

[64] See essays in *Chaos & Cosmos: A Reassesment of Herman Gunkel's Chaoskampf* (2013), eds. J. Scurlock and R. Beal. The edited volume contains Scurlock's essay on the history of the paradigm (pp. 257–68), "Chaoskampf Lost – Chaoskampf Regained: The Gunkel Hypothesis Revisited."

[65] See the discussion in Töyräänvuori 2018.

Fig. 9 Detail of a cylinder seal impression. Redrawn from Williams-Forte 1983, Fig. 7. Published in Bossert 1951, Fig. 852, originally from Furlani 1939, 368. Size 4 x 2.1 cm. The Storm god (right) holds a mace weapon and a serpent while the winged figure holds a curved weapon and two fish.

Fig. 10 Detail of a cylinder seal impression. The Storm god (right) gives his tree weapon to a figure wearing the shepherd's hat on top of what seems to be an altar. Redrawn from Williams-Forte 1983, Fig. 14. AO 10871.

These images form what Elizabeth Williams-Forte called "an iconic constellation,"[66] where the iconographic motif develops or evolves from one stage to the next, usually from detailed descriptive scenes toward more abstract representations. In the earliest stage, we have a scene from the Combat myth in which the Storm god battles the god of the sea for the kingship of the gods (Fig. 9). This scene is witnessed by multiple texts, the most famous of which is the Ugaritic Baal Cycle.

The second stage presents the Storm god opposite a human king, with the human king as a mirror image of the god (Fig. 10). This scene is alluded to by certain texts like the famous letter from a Yamkhadian prophet to King Zimri-Lim of Mari in which the prophet informs the king that he will receive the weapons with which the Storm god had defeated the sea.[67] The Storm god had defeated his enemy, the Sea, on behalf of the mortal king and is seen presenting the mortal king the symbol of his divine power. This scene may also have been portrayed by the relief from the Storm god of Aleppo (Fig. 5), where the Storm god's weapons had been located in the Bronze Age.

These kinds of divine weapons were housed in temples, and their main function was to witness oaths, treaties, judgments, the sealing of documents, and so forth. They also had a number of symbolic functions for the sake of which they could be paraded out of the temples, either in celebration or before marching armies. The use of divine weapons in the coronation ceremonies of kings has also been suggested. In particular, the mentions of the divine weapons of the Storm god of Aleppo in the two texts from the royal archives of Mari have been connected with the concept of a coronation ceremony, but the extant textual evidence from the period seems overwhelmingly to favour uses other than coronation.[68] One of the most important functions of the divine weapons was to be carried as standards at the spearhead of marching armies, and it was through the physical manifestation of the

[66] Williams-Forte 1993. The iconic constellation she discusses concerns the Storm god and the god of death, Mot. Teissier 1996 uses the term "patterns of association" or "'circle' of associations" instead.
[67] Cf. Töyräänvuori 2012; Dossin 1956; 1970; Schwemer 2001, Nissinen 2003.
[68] See Durand 2002; 2008; Feliu 2003; Töyräänvuori 2012.

weapons that the political mythology was transported to the recipients of the Amorite traditions.[69]
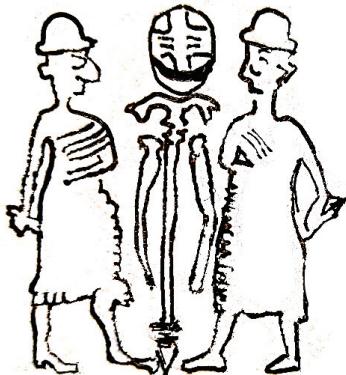
Fig. 11 Detail of a cylinder seal impression from Kültepe. A mirrored figure wearing the shepherd's hat flanking a standard. The figure likely represents a king. Redrawn from Williams-Forte 1983, Fig. 17. Originally published by Özgüç 1968, pl. XXIX, 2. The sphere above a crescent moon is a symbol that often appears in association with the Storm god.

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The third stage in the evolution of the iconographic depiction presents the human king alone (Fig. 11). The king's image is doubled in the manner of earlier depictions, but he stands on his own, flanking the symbolic representation of the Storm god's divine power. This scene is not directly addressed in textual witnesses, but there are texts that could be connected with this stage of the iconographic constellation, for example, in the Hebrew Bible.[70] While Williams-Forte discusses a different iconic constellation (that of the serpent and the tree), she suggested that the development of the motif[71] culminates in the god's (lightning) tree standard, which is finally depicted on its own as a representation of the Storm god's divine might. Most of the seals discussed here ultimately come from palace contexts (Magness-Gardiner 1990, 66), so it is only natural to find chapters of this political narrative engraved in them.

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[69] See Töyräänvuori 2012; Charpin 2015.

[70] For example, Ps 89:25: "I will set [the king's] hand over the sea, and his right hand over the rivers." Cf. Töyräänvuori 2012 for a discussion on possible references to divine weapons in the texts of the Hebrew Bible.

[71] She calls this the "four stages of a seemingly narrative cycle" in the iconography.

Conclusion

This study has shown that there is real coherence in the iconographic representations of the sea deity, and it proposes new identifications for the representations of the deity. Distinguishing these representations from those of the goddess Ištar is especially important. The analysis of the glyptic and other documentation also makes it possible to show the place this deity held in Levantine ideology. The reasons why the winged and armed deity in Syrian glyptic can securely be interpreted as the god of the sea, as already suggested by Paolo Matthiae, can be summarized in the following:

a) The figure appears in scenes of conflict with the Storm god (Matthiae's argument).

b) The figure is associated with fish or presented together with fish and later with horses. Horses have been connected to the sea on the Eastern Mediterranean possibly because the sea was used in breaking horses.

c) A plausible explanation for the god's wings relates to the double ocean of ancient cosmology, which also explains the presence of water-birds in the iconography.

d) A reason for why the god shares an iconographic resemblance to the goddess of the morning and evening stars can be provided. The iconography also displays differences between their portrayals, for example, the presence of fish in the iconography of the Sea god.

Since the figure may be interpreted as the Sea god, the iconographic depictions of the deity appearing together with both divine and mortal kings in scenes of presentation and intercession require an explanation.

The ancient Levantine king ruled with the authority of the Storm god, with the god's power and prestige, presenting himself as the representative of the divinity to his people.[72] The symbols and symbolic

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[72] Rendsburg 2007, 101, describes the ancient king as "God's agent on earth."

investiture of kingship were shared by gods and men.[73] As an icon or a proxy for divine power, the mortal king performed the role of the divinity for his people.[74] But it was through the sea that the king was made. The myth of Baal's defeat of Yamm is inexorably intertwined with the conquest of the Mediterranean Sea by Mesopotamian kings, which frequently took place in the real world.[75]

According to Robert Rollinger, throughout Mesopotamian history, the coastal areas were identified with the borders of the known world, "felicitously underlined by the royal claim to rule the world" from the Upper sea to the Lower sea. The motif is especially visible in the monumental bull inscriptions of Shalmaneser from Calah (A.0.102.8:24–40), in which the description of Shalmaneser as the

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[73] See the classic study by Engnell 1967. More recently, divine kingship in the ancient world has been discussed by Brisch 2008 and, in the context of ancient Israel in particular, by Flynn 2014.

[74] On the transcendence of the king's corporeal form (or how the king was thought to inhabit a mortal body, a political body, and a permanent body simultaneously), see Hamilton 2005. For features once shared by other divinities that were transferred to Yahweh after the Exile, see Human 2007, 150. Human also writes: "they survive in a new context, in this instance Yahweh-faith, only as literary symbols or images. In other words, they become mere vestiges serving as poetic vehicles in order to portray the theology about Yahweh." Talon 2005, 100, writing on the Assyrian context, mentions the concept of the king as the "mirror image of Aššur on earth" (e.g. in SAA 10 207 r. 12–13). Kutsko 2000, 60, discusses the king as an image (*ṣalmu*) of the storm-god Enlil in the Middle Assyrian Tukulti-Ninurta Epic. Sasson 2014, 675, also discusses the role of the king in the fragments of the then unpublished Zimri-Lim epic (FM 14), describing the king as the *zikrum* (translated by Sasson as "image," but also containing connotations of the name and the fame) of Enlil – now published in Guichard 2014, in which it is the gods Anu and Dagan for whom Zimri-Lim is described as the *zikrum* (col. i 13, 15; col. iii 31, 33). The concept of the "body politic" and "body natural" of the king in the ancient Near Eastern context has been discussed recently by Kühn 2015 and 2018, who discussed the continuation of the king's political body after death, which is manifest, e.g., in their throne names.

[75] Rollinger 2012 discusses the persistence of the traditions of conquering the Mediterranean from Sargon the Akkadian to the Sassanid king Khusrau (Khosrow). See also Töyräänvuori 2012, who discusses the motivation for this practice.

conqueror of the world bordered by the seas and the rivers follows immediately after the description of his patronage, epithets, and lineage, effectively opening the actual inscription. While the river functions as both a physical and ideological boundary marker,[76] the two major rivers of the Mesopotamian Basin, the Euphrates and the Tigris, could also be seen as forming the core and centre of the Empire. Shalmaneser's inscription claims that the king had conquered the sources of these rivers. This could indicate an ideological shift in royal presentation. With an Empire bordered by coastal regions, the central rivers could also refer to the source and wellspring of the king's power. However, Shalmaneser's inscription also makes particular reference to the world-encircling river, *nâr marratu*, which literally delimits the Empire.

Rollinger suggests that the mention of Shalmaneser washing his weapon and setting up his stele on these different water courses was a function of the king marking the boundaries of his Empire, achieving, according to Rollinger (2012, 730), a
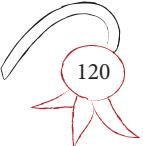
> natural and divinely sanctioned borderline which was soon integrated into a world view which presented the Ancient Near Eastern empires as "world empires" and conceptualized their kings' power reaching as far as the fringes of the world.

As the Storm god's victory over the sea legitimized the rule of the king, so did the character of the sea itself mediate kingship. Yamm, the sea, was as necessary for the dynastic succession of North West Semitic kingship as was its patron, the dynastic Storm god, the two gods functioning not as the opposite sides of a coin, like they are often described, but more as the before and after picture of the king: an ancestral seat of kingship and its vital, living representative.

The author has argued that the function of the combat myth was to establish and legitimize the rule of the monarch by basing it on the claim of the ancient conquest of the (Mediterranean) Sea because it was through conquest that the ancient North West Semitic king was made, not through primogeniture.

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[76] Rivers function as natural boundaries even in modern international legislation. Cf., e.g., Dellapenna 1996.

The Sea in the texts from Ugarit actually possesses epithets such as "the beloved" (*mddil ym*) that were epithets of the mortal kings in the Amorite Kingdom period, which was the formative period for this tradition (cf. Töyräänvuori 2015, 2017). The two gods are very much alike, and it may therefore be that, in addition to merely being in conflict, the Sea is presented as the doubled image of Baal in Syrian glyptic. The author suggests that, in presenting the old king with the new, the retiring king with the incumbent, the source and wellspring of kingship with its current manifestation, the story of the combat myth itself may present us the doubled image of the king.

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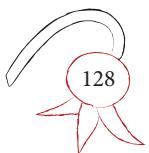
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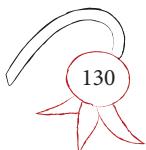
Abstract

Demons and monsters are inherently moveable creatures: from the late second millennium BCE onwards a number of demons and monsters migrate from their native Mesopotamian contexts, moving westward. Of course, these figures do not remain static throughout their journey, instead acquiring the characteristics of the different cultural contexts wherein they are now found. This paper considers the different representations of several of these demonic figures within the context of the Levant, analyzing their artistic representations as well as the more diffuse textual evidence for them. As the line between demonic and divine was already thin and mutable in Mesopotamia, we see a similar flexibility to their definitions when these figures move into their new contexts. As deities are, generally speaking, less marginal beings than demons, the deities that do move westward, or are employed in the west in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian sources, do so because they are already demonstrate a more flexible character and wider possible applicability and use. This principle is especially seen in the attestations of one such figure, a group of seven divine-demonic beings known as the Sebettu, who are employed with particular focus in Neo-Assyrian references connected to the western frontier.

Dämonen und Monster sind von sich aus bewegliche Wesen: Ab dem späten zweiten Jahrtausend v. Chr. wandert eine Reihe von Dämonen und Monstern aus ihren ursprünglichen mesopotamischen Kontexten nach Westen. Allerdings bleiben diese Figuren auf ihrer Reise nicht statisch, sondern nehmen in verschiedenen kulturellen Kontexte dem Lokalkolorit entsprechend neue Eigenschaften an. Dieser Aufsatz betrachtet die verschiedenen Darstellungen einiger dieser dämonischen Figuren im Kontext der Levante, wobei sowohl ihre künstlerischen Darstellungen als auch die betreffenden diffuseren textlichen Belege analysiert werden. Da die Grenze zwischen dämonisch und göttlich bereits in Mesopotamien vage und flüssig war, sehen wir eine ähnliche Flexibilität ihrer Definitionen, wenn diese Figuren in ihre neuen Kontexte ziehen. Da Gottheiten im Allgemeinen weniger marginale Wesen sind als Dämonen, tun die Gottheiten, die nach Westen wandern oder im Westen in neuassyrischen und neubabylonischen Quellen verwendet werden, dies, weil sie bereits einen flexibleren Charakter und eine breitere mögliche Einsetzbarkeit und Verwendung aufweisen. Dieses Prinzip zeigt sich besonders in den Belegen einer solchen Figur, einer Gruppe von sieben göttlich-dämonischen Wesen, die als die Sebettu bekannt sind und die besonders gezielt in neoassyrischen Belegen im Zusammenhang mit der westlichen Grenzzone verwendet werden.

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MIGRATING DEMONS, LIMINAL DEITIES, AND ASSYRIA'S WESTERN CAMPAIGNS

Gina Konstantopoulos

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Introduction

This article considers how religion was manifested and utilized on the edges of empire in the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods in Mesopotamia. In particular, it focuses on how the figures of monsters and demons moved about these same edges. In some instances, they naturally travelled from location to location, traversing boundaries, both geographic and cultural. These figures may change as they move, but they retain a degree of inherent consistency in their depictions, despite their adaptations. In other instances, these figures are subject to more direct manipulation, deliberately invoked in royal inscriptions to paint a picture of the power and standing of the king. This less organic movement is matched by a more stable depiction of their characteristics.

In tackling these themes, this study will first present a brief overview of some of the theories that more broadly underscore the conception of monsters and demons, to highlight how that same methodology may apply to the monstrous creatures of Mesopotamia. Following this are

two case studies of "monsters on the move." The first is a brief investigation of the peregrinations of the monstrous figures of Humbaba, the guardian of the Cedar Forest best known from the Akkadian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and Pazuzu, the demon who was used to ward off the demoness Lamashtu in the first millennium BCE. The second case study presents a brief overview of some of the ways in which the liminal qualities of a group of demonic figures known as the Sebettu could be employed in a martial context, as a group of far-ranging warriors bound to the service of the Assyrian king. This second example is a more deliberate instance of "wandering monsters" than the first, but both represent useful models to consider.

Monsters on the Move
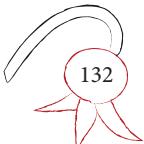
Both monsters and demons function as reflective expressions of culture and society. Despite being thus contextually dependent, certain methodological tools and frameworks facilitate their consideration as more universal expressions of the liminal and the Other, regardless of different cultural and historical contexts. As an initial caveat, using such methods does inevitably imply a degree of both simplification and contradiction. A number of different scholarly approaches to creating and defining demonic or monstrous beings within Mesopotamian contexts alone already exist, and even the terms "demon" and "monster" are not without their problems.[1] Such imperfect terms are a compromise that allows one to circumvent repeated and lengthy considerations on the problems of terminology before being able to move into further discussion.[2]

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[1] For an overview of demons and monsters in Mesopotamia, see Konstantopoulos 2019. An accounting, of sorts, of the various demonic and monstrous denizens of Mesopotamia is found in Wiggermann 2011; Sonik 2013.

[2] To further avoid engaging in debates on terminology here, see Konstantopoulos 2015, 10–14 and Lucarelli 2013, 12–13 for summaries of terminological issues. I would note that Jonathan Z. Smith critically spoke of the difference between monsters and demons, positing that the former were more attached to place and tied to specific locations, while the latter were less geographically bound

One such tool may be found in a set of seven "monster theses" outlined in a similarly titled article by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1996). Each thesis describes an essential aspect of monstrous beings that may be used to define them within a variety of contexts. Of the seven, three are most useful for a discussion of Mesopotamian monsters: that the monster possesses a body that is inherently a cultural construction; that it dwells "at the Gates of Difference"; and that it represents, even when feared, an object of both fascination and desire.[3] If we consider these three points together, they construct the basic idea that monsters embody culturally intrinsic concepts or ideals; articulate the differences seen within one culture or between other cultures when compared to one another; and are inherently compelling because they represent both the foreign and the forbidden (Cohen 1996, 4, 7–12, 17–20).

Such theses speak to the ability of monsters to operate as a distillation of core, often cultural, concepts, to the point where such qualities become inextricably associated with the monstrous or demonic figure themselves. This can be observed in some of the more prominent Mesopotamian demonic and monstrous figures, such as Humbaba, the monstrous guardian of the Cedar Forest from the *Gilgamesh* texts, and Pazuzu, who provides a sort of demonic protection against the demoness Lamashtu's baby-killing ways. In both instances, the power of the figure is localized in its gaze. In the case of Pazuzu, this meant that amulets of the figure could be reduced down to his gaze alone, or at least the vector of it, resulting in the widespread distribution of Pazuzu-head amulets, clearly meant to be worn by individuals, often with the demon's snarling visage and forward-facing eyes positioned directly outwards from the bearer.[4] Humbaba, in turn, has references

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(Smith 1978, 429–30). This distinction, and Smith's interpretation of it, has been discussed by Lucarelli (2013, 15), who also points out that such a categorization, while generally present to some degree, does not universally hold, as demons may also be intrinsically connected to one particular location.

[3] See Cohen 1996 for the full presentation of each of these theses; I will only discuss the most relevant here in greater detail.

[4] There are many surviving Pazuzu-head pendants; see MMA 1993.181 and BM 93089 for two examples. Many are uninscribed but some bear incantations on their reverse or other surfaces (Niederreiter 2017).

to his gaze rooted in both text and art, with the latter forming a large part of his representations: though he may appear in full-figure on reliefs and cylinder seals, plaques of his head, vigilant gaze prominently displayed, are also found, particularly in apotropaic contexts.[5] Such qualities – here, the gaze and the protection it confers – may become so strongly representative of the figure that they alone can be used to represent the figure as a whole.

If we examine the phenomenon of traveling monsters and demons, then, it need not always be the entire monster that travels, but rather only its most representative and salient aspect or quality. A similar principle underlies the connections and thematic influences found between Mesopotamia and the ancient Mediterranean, as seen in textual examples: the entire text may not travel, but distinct imagery, wordplay, and other key features certainly do.[6] Artistic representations of demons and monsters, similarly, highlight their most emblematic qualities, and these qualities may then move, influencing other monstrous figures.[7]

In the case of Pazuzu and Humbaba, they move west. They may appear directly as themselves in Levantine, Egyptian, and Greek contexts or influence depictions of other monsters. Regarding he former, I would point to the example of a statuette of Pazuzu now in the

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[5] Cylinder seals and plaques featuring Humbaba's full form are often depictions of his battle (or, more specifically, his defeat) with Gilgamesh and Enkidu, as featured in the Standard Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* (Graff 2013, 134); these images have been collected by Collon 2010, though as Graff (2012, 476) notes, this catalogue includes images that may not necessarily be of Humbaba. This combat motif is itself popular, traveling outside the borders of Mesopotamia proper to appear in representations from Anatolia and the Levant.

[6] In particular, see Haubold 2013, 2014; and Bachvarova 2016, who discusses the Hittite context and native influence for such connections. Some of the more foundational scholarship to consider these connections was done by West (1997) and Burkert (1992); however, as works such as Hopkins's (1934) examination of Assyrian influences in the story of Perseus and Medusa attests, these connections have been explored for some time in scholarship.

[7] This transference exists alongside the broader pattern of artistic connections and Orientalizing influences seen between the ancient Near East and ancient Mediterranean, as studied in works such as Gunter 2009; Feldman 2005; and Feldman 2014.
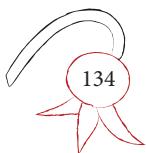
Ashmolean Museum. The eighth-century object is likely from the site of Tanis in Egypt and retains the core features of the demon but is personalized with an Aramaic inscription (DeGrado and Richey 2019). Pazuzu has moved west – and south – but maintains its core iconographic elements, most of which are closely tied to the figure's power. The inscription, then, is one way in which the figure may be adapted to its new context. When we consider the latter category of movement-by-influence, we see that Pazuzu and Humbaba impose their most characteristic tropes upon other beings that belong to their new environment.[8] This latter category is populated by a number of figures, none so distinct as that of Medusa and other Gorgons, which utilize that same gaze apotropaically.[9]

The most significant – and, moreover, the most useful – aspects of each monstrous figure may come to represent the entire figure, and invoking, or transposing, that one aspect allows for the metonymic invocation of the whole. While these singular representative qualities thus have their own attached symbolic baggage, the distillation of an entire monstrous being along the lines of its most distinctive traits, and thus into smaller and more contained elements, eases its travel, particularly across cultural and historical lines. Monsters and demons can, and do, travel, but the frequency and speed with which this movement occurs has its own spectrum of greater or lesser ease. The same general principle may be applied to the Sebettu and their use: though they are marvelously complicated figures, they are also capable of being distilled to several salient and easily transmitted points. Their warrior nature numbers, for the Assyrian kings, among their must useful traits, but this single quality is still emblematic of their messy and complicated whole. Moreover, these traits are attached to other key aspects of the

[8] Graff 2014. The representation of Humbaba, Pazuzu, and Lamashtu in western (relative to Mesopotamia, at the least) contexts was one focal point in the 2014 "Assyria to Iberia" exhibition held by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, which included a Humbaba-influenced pottery plate with a head of Medusa from Rhodes, dated to c. 600 BCE (British Museum 1860,0404.2).

[9] For an overview of gorgoneions and the place and prominence of their gaze, see Mack 2002.

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Sebettu, including their inherently liminal nature as demons and their astral identity as the Pleiades, both of which position them at home on the margins.[10]

Demons on the March: The Sebettu

The group of seven warrior figures known as the Sebettu, or the ᵈimin-bi, as they were most often represented in texts, navigate an identity both demonic and divine. While they never lost their demonic qualities or connotations, their divine identity allowed them to be referenced in royal inscriptions. They were increasingly utilized in texts concerned with controlling the periphery, especially its far western edges, during the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods. Just like Pazuzu and Humbaba, the Sebettu were most often found on the margins – and again, just as with the previously discussed figures, their effectiveness in such a position rested on both their innate martial qualities and their inherent, underlying, and longstanding demonic nature. Thanks to the smaller number of references to them, the Sebettu are among those figures who may be more easily tracked, though they are far from the only examples of such a targeted political manipulation.

The kings of the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods possessed a wide array of tools that could be employed in their attempts at maintaining and ultimately increasing the territories under their control. These ranged from directly applicable and concrete aspects of control, such as military forces, to more subtle instruments, such as political and religious propaganda that worked to serve and bolster the image of the king and thus help cement his power and control.[11] In the case of the Assyrian propaganda machine, the gods themselves became

[10] On the Pleiades in Mesopotamia, see Verderame 2016.

[11] Should the king himself be lacking in his ability to demonstrate and exert control, the overall response in both the Middle and Neo-Assyrian period was a corresponding and subsequent increase in the power of more locally oriented elites, which often proved destabilizing on the broader overall scale; see Brown 2013; Pongratz-Leisten 2013.
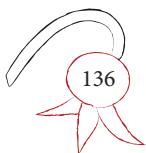
tools, invoked to help support and stabilize Assyria by demonstrating its supremacy, particularly when on military campaigns to help quell rebellions in distant regions or acquire new ones. It is this model of use wherein the Sebettu find themselves, and this greater distance from the Assyrian core could facilitate a more flexible expression of particular deities. Such figures often found themselves in the company of local deities, for example, the latter of which could also be in various stages of being incorporated into the broader Assyrian pantheon, either in their own right or through their syncretism with another deity.[12]

The Sebettu's role on the margins, and in the west in particular, is rooted in their dual nature as divine and demonic beings; this duality is in turn a consequence of some two thousand years of attestations across a wide range of different textual attestations and iconographic representations.[13] Because the Sebettu could lay claim to this long-standing demonic heritage, they were able to access qualities most closely associated with demonic beings, which included both liminal and far-ranging geographic habits and a fearsome bearing and aspect. Demons and monsters in Mesopotamia were already and inherently predisposed to being useful at the margins, and thus move in liminal spaces and contexts. For the Sebettu, the expansionistic nature of the Middle and Neo-Assyrian rulers proved a perfect testing ground for those abilities to be put to use.

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[12] The larger deities in Mesopotamia expressed themselves through both local representations of themselves, as found in one particular city or another, or through the syncretism of smaller figures under their eventual umbrella. The goddess Inana/Ištar, inarguably the most prominent female deity in Mesopotamia was well-known for both of these tactics, particularly her ability to devour the roles of smaller female deities under her own aegis, a process that extends beyond Mesopotamia itself. See Budin 2004; Porter 2004; Allen 2015.

[13] The role of the Sebettu is explored in full in Konstantopoulos 2015; this article integrates its arguments to some degree with an investigation of the transient and liminal qualities of demons of the ancient Near East in the late second and first millennia BCE.

First Mentions in Assyria

The Sebettu first appear within the corpus of Assyrian royal inscriptions during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243–1207 BCE). Though the inscriptions of his predecessor, Shalmaneser I, do not reference the Sebettu, they do provide hints as to the utilization of the Assyrian pantheon in the periphery. Although the ruler continues to rely upon the sanction of the god Aššur to legitimize his actions and rule,[14] he also focuses on temples located in peripheral regions, making a point to describe his restoration of the temple of Ištar in the city of Talmuššu, for example.[15] Such focused attention was not without cause, as the king faced a number of foreign threats from the west, particularly the land of Hanigalbat, and centered his military efforts in that direction as a result.[16] Tukulti-Ninurta I's reference to the Sebettu centers on activity closer to home, as the inscription recounts the king's dedication of a temple to the Sebettu in his new capital of Kār-Tukulti-Ninurta shortly after his successful siege and sack of Babylon in 1222 BCE, with the temple listed alongside those dedicated to other deities.[17]

When the Sebettu next appear, it is in the inscriptions of Aššur-bēl-kala (1073–1056 BCE) and with a direct association with the west. The king, who was responsible for reviving Assyria's strength after conflict with the Arameans, recorded his exploits, mostly military

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[14] For example, the god bestows Shalmaneser I with the "sceptre, weapon, and staff to (rule) properly the blackheaded people" in addition to giving him "the true crown of lordship" (RIMA I: A.0.77.1: 22ff.). Similarly, when Shalmaneser I recounts how he subdued the cities and lands of Arinu, Muṣri, and Hanigalbat, he does so with the support of Aššur, who thus fully legitimates such military actions.

[15] RIMA I: A.0.77.16. On the location of Talmuššu, see Pappi 2012, 46–47.

[16] Hanigalbat posed a particular threat. The infrastructure of its provincial administration was tenuous (Llop 2011) and the status of local leaders may have differed from more central Assyrian sites, though this too was ambiguous (Liverani 1988, 87). The natural borders of the region presented their own difficulties, contributing to the problematic independence of Ḫanigalbat and its surrounding regions.

[17] RIMA I: A.0.78.22. Prior to the Assyrian reference by Tukulti-Ninurta I, cultic attestations of the Sebettu were found primarily in Babylonia in the south, with the earliest hailing from the First Sealand dynasty (Boivin 2018, 277).
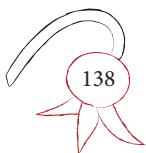
campaigns, in over a dozen inscriptions, and the text that concerns the Sebettu numbers among these. Inscribed on the back of a stone female torso excavated from Nineveh, the text opens with a standard four lines detailing Aššur-bēl-kala's position as king of Assyria and the entire world.[18] It ends with the line: "The one who removes my inscriptions and my name, the Sebettu, the gods of the West (ᵈ*Sebettu*(IMIN.BI) DINGIR.MEŠ ᵏᵘʳ*mar-tu*) will attack him on the battlefield."[19] Such a reference marks the Sebettu as foreign, associated in particular with a region with which the king was in direct conflict. The admonition that they will strike down one who removes the king's name places the Sebettu in a role identical to the potentially vengeful deities in curse sections of treaties. However, their position also situates them under the dominion of the king, and extends his own geographic sphere of influence at the same time.

Foreign Gods and Western Use

The kings directly following Aššur-bēl-kala's reign left less in the way of inscriptions and records. As such, we have little evidence for how they might have employed the core pantheon of deities in their reigns, let alone the roles more peripheral or liminal deities, such as the Sebettu, may have taken. When the Sebettu do once again appear, it is in the context of temple construction. Aššurnaṣirpal II (810–783 BCE) twice references the construction, or rather restoration, of temples to the

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[18] RIMA 2: A.0.89.10. The purpose and identity of the statue is unclear: Bahrani (2011) argues that it may have served as a Mesopotamian "pin-up" for Aššur-bēl-kala's own soldiers.

[19] RIMA 2: A.0.89.10: 4–7: *mu-né-kir₆ šiṭ-ri-ia ù* MU-*ia* ᵈ*Sebettu*(IMIN.BI) DINGR. MEŠ ᵏᵘʳ*mar-tu me-ḫe-eṣ ṣe-ri i-ma-ḫa-ṣu-uš*. Note that the final line of this text has been interpreted in various ways, and I diverge here from the reading in RIMA of *meḫeṣ ṣerri imahhaṣūš*, or "will afflict him with snake-bite." The different translation hinges upon interpreting *ṣe-ri* as *ṣerru*, "snake"; or as *ṣēru*, "steppe, plain," with the additional meaning of campaign or battlefield. For the latter, see also CAD M/2 s.v. *miḫṣu* 3c.

Sebettu.[20] The ruler does not, however, invoke the support of the deities in any other context. Following this, we see the use of the Sebettu in royal inscriptions truly expand. Given the number of these attestations, I will focus herein on a selected few.[21]

Several examples from the Neo-Assyrian period clearly demonstrate a connection between the Sebettu and peripheral territories. Shalmaneser III (858–824 BCE) only refers to the Sebettu in one of his inscriptions, on a stone altar dedicated to the Seven found at Nineveh, but the text describes them in some detail. Its opening lines focus on qualities that would be useful to them while on campaign, citing their ability to move through the mountains and survey the heavens and earth, with the text's closing lines centered on the Seven's martial qualities.[22]

After Shalmaneser, the Sebettu appear in a treaty text between the Assyrian king Aššur-nerari V (754–745 BCE), and Mati'ilu, the ruler of Arpad, located in the vicinity of present-day Syria. They appear near the likely end of the list of gods found at the text's conclusion, arguably positioned to take advantage of their associations with the western periphery (Parpola and Watanabe 1988). The list of divine witnesses is fronted by the god Aššur and a number of divine pairs, all attested members of the Assyrian pantheon.[23] After this, the text cites deities such as Ištar of Nineveh and Arbela; deities of Kurbail and Aleppo; and then presents the Sebettu. Following the Seven, entirely foreign deities appear.[24] In this manner, the treaty text incorporates smaller, more locally oriented deities, particularly those of importance to the

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[20] RIMA 2: A.0.101.30; A.0.101.131.

[21] Neo-Assyrian references to the Sebettu are considered in full detail in Konstantopoulos 2015.

[22] See edition in RIMA 3: A.0.102.95. Given Shalmanser's constant campaigning to the west, the Sebettu's far-ranging qualities would have served him well in such efforts; the place the ruler's western campaigns in his inscriptions is discussed in depth by Yamada (2000).

[23] Aššur's position in divine witness lists is observed in Barré 1983, 22. This initial section of divine pairs constitutes col. VI: 8–15 in the text.

[24] Col. VI: 21–23. On the reconstruction of these last divine names, see Lipiński 2006, 136–39.
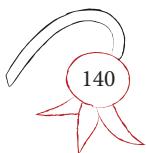
western territories with which it is concerned, and the Sebettu serve as, depending on one's point of view, either a transition to or a barrier between the gods closely associated with Assyria and those belonging to foreign lands.[25]

The Sebettu continue to be found throughout the inscriptions of the remaining Neo-Assyrian kings. Many of their references highlight what is, at this point, the key qualities of the figures: martial strength and far-ranging, often western-focused, movement. Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BCE), for example, refers to them as the "mighty lords, who lead my troops, who strike down [my enemies]" in one inscription,[26] reinforcing their position of vanguard. Such language repeats under the inscriptions of Sargon II (721–705 BCE), who describes the Sebettu as the "ones who go before the gods" and help the king achieve victory in battle. The ruler utilizes a nearly identical composition several times, on stela found at the sites of Tell Tayinat, Kition, and Tang-i Var.[27] The Seven appear at the end of the lists of deities in the royal inscriptions of Sennacherib (704–681 BCE),[28] and Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE),[29] with the Sebettu appearing again as the boundary between Assyrian and foreign gods in the list of divine witnesses presented at the close of his succession treaty.[30] Once again, the group operates as the most foreign of the familiar: accepted members of the Assyrian pantheon set against the ranks of foreign deities.

At Home on the Margins

From even this brief overview, it seems clear that the Sebettu were connected with the periphery and the edges, and thus employed as

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[25] This practice is also expressed in the Middle Assyrian period: see Pongratz-Leisten 2011.

[26] RINAP 1 Tiglath-pileser III 37, 9.

[27] See Lauinger and Batiuk 2015; Malbran-Labat 2004; and Frame 1999, 35–36 for the respective editions of these three texts.

[28] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 230, 2.

[29] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 48, 14.

[30] Parpola and Watanabe 1988, No. 6, 464.

leverage while the king was on campaign. The Seven could be specifi-cally invoked to target the more distant areas under the king's control, or even locations that may have been beyond his current reach. That such areas were also located predominantly to the west may arise from an intersection of frequency – such areas were home to threats that required the Assyrian ruler's more frequent military attention, and were thus referenced more often in his inscriptions – and utility.

The second quality is the more intriguing of the two. At this point, the Sebettu's connection to these distant areas under Assyrian control seems to be a clear pattern of their use. However, the questions under-lying this use break down, in essence, to means and motive – or, rather, *how* were the Sebettu employed, and *why* were they so suited to this employment. The "how" may be addressed through a consideration of their imagery and epithets, which depict their martial qualities and present them as far-ranging warriors and chaotic but ultimately useful protectors of the king. The underlying "why" governing their use is more complicated, thanks in part to the complex nature of the Seven themselves.

Though the present study has primarily considered one facet of the Sebettu's use – namely, their representations in royal inscriptions of the Middle and Neo-Assyrian rulers – the Sebettu existed as a complicated tangle of identities and attestations, all of which contributed to their use. Beyond their underlying and inherent demonic nature, the Sebettu were also represented as the Pleiades star cluster. Many deities had astral representations, and it has been argued that the observable actions of those astral bodies effected the behavior of their corresponding deities in texts.[31] The Pleiades were clear and easily identifiable, and, moreover, depending on the time of year, would appear on either western or eastern horizon, naturally positioned at the frontiers.

The true victory of the royal inscriptions is the re-positioning of the Sebettu's violence that was a hallmark of their demonic nature. While their demonic nature set them on the outskirts, it also positioned them

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[31] Such a relationship has been examined in light of how the observable astral behavior of Venus affects the actions of its connected goddess, Inana, in Sumerian myths, particularly the text of *Inana and Šukaletuda* (Cooley 2008).

to serve as the farthest ranging of any and all members in the service of the king. Such a position also allowed a certain buffer between the ruler and the Sebettu, as if their underlying chaotic nature predisposed them to a violence that could not be fully controlled, only directed towards hopefully useful objectives. These qualities are all on display in the poem of *Erra and Išum*, a work with a close relationship to the Neo-Assyrian kings' use of the Sebettu. In the early passages of the text, the Sebettu, frustrated with Erra's lack of military action and campaigning, stress that their place is on the field, out in the distant steppe. They make it clear that to stay within the city not only strips both them and Erra of any respect due to them as warriors, but also removes their very identity. To stay in the city is to be elderly, a child, or a woman: in military terms, a non-combatant, and such a role is anathema to them. They complain to Erra that the lack of military action, of battle, has caused them to forget the mountain passes they once knew and to lose the ability to draw back their bow. Their arrows are bent and useless, and blades "corroded for want of a slaughter."[32] Warfare and combat is not just one expression of the Sebettu's abilities, but a fundamental quality of their character. In this regard, *Erra and Išum* serves as both a reinforcement of the destructive, demonic nature the Sebettu possess even as deities, and a cautionary tale that, as in the text, that nature, particularly if left idle for too long, could easily turn into a calamitous storm that would decimate the inhabited cities of Mesopotamia, rather than their enemies.

Such qualities made the group a readily available and attractive aid to the Middle and Neo-Assyrian kings, but one that required care and delicacy in their implementation. In their inscriptions, these rulers could utilize the divine sanction inherent in their own rule to harness the Sebettu, even if only nominally, to their own will and the service of the state. Moreover, the Seven were inherently most useful when positioned at the naturally liminal frontier, where all of their qualities combined to fully support their role in Assyrian royal inscriptions.

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[32] *Erra and Išum* I, 87–91, following edition in Cagni 1969. On depictions of war in *Erra and Išum*, with a focus on this passage in particular, see George 2013, 52–54.

When we compare the manner in which the Sebettu appear and are utilized in texts to the wandering monsters discussed earlier, the two differ in mobility and the intent behind that movement. The monsters, aligned with the cultural principles discussed by Cohen in his "monster theses," move slowly but organically, assimilating to their new environment and cultural context. In doing so, they themselves also shift: their core traits remain present but are altered or embellished to suit the situation wherein they are now found. The Sebettu, on the other hand, are more fixed in their imagery. In general, demons may move about more freely when compared to monsters, which are often rooted to their geographic contexts. By this logic, the Sebettu would less often need to shift to match their surroundings, able to enter a new context without the slower drift seen when monsters move. The Seven are also deliberately employed in their references, invoked for a specific purpose which governs how they are depicted in texts.

Abbreviations

RIMA 1   Grayson, A. K. 1987. *Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennia B.C. (to 1115 B.C.)*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

RIMA 2   Grayson, A. K. 1991. *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium B.C. I (1114–859 B.C.)*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

RIMA 3   Grayson, A. K. 1996. *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium B.C. II (858–745 B.C.)*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

RINAP 1   Tadmor, H., and S. Yamada. 2011. *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 B.C.) and Shalmaneser V (726–722 BC)*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.

RIMA 4   Leichty, E. 2011. *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 B.C.)*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.

RINAP 3/2   Grayson, A. K., and J. Novotny. 2014. *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria 704–681 B.C.), Part 2*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.

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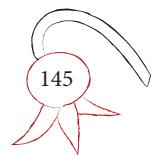
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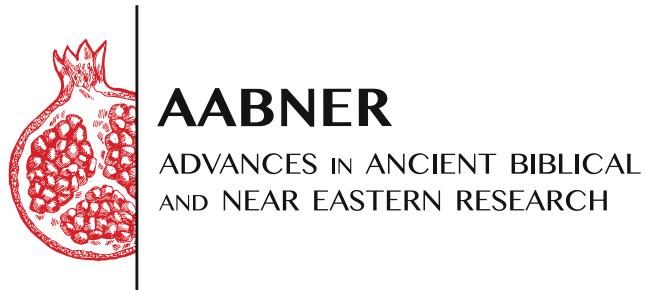
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THE TEMPLE OF IŠTAR OF ARBELA

Martti Nissinen and Raija Mattila

Abstract

The Neo-Assyrian city of Arbela (modern Erbil) was the city of the goddess Ištar, whose temple called Egašankalamma "House of the Queen of the Land," was the foremost temple of the city and one of the most important Neo-Assyrian temples of Ištar. The temple was a strong nationwide economical centre and the venue of royal festivals after military conquests. Moreover, Egašankalamma was the cradle of Assyrian prophecy. This article explores all cuneiform evidence of the temple of Ištar in Arbela: its decoration, cultic and economical activities, and personnel including the prophets.

Die neuassyrische Stadt Arbela (mod. Erbil) war die Stadt der Göttin Ištar, deren Tempel Egašankalamma, "Das Haus der Königin des Landes", der zentralste Tempel in Arbela und ein von den bedeutendsten Tempeln von Ištar in der neuassyrischen Zeit war. Egašankalamma war ein starkes, reichsumfassender ökonomisches Zentrum, wo auch die Könige ihre militärischen Eroberungen gefeiert haben. Darüber hinaus war der Tempel die Wiege der neuassyrischen Prophetie. In dem vorliegenden Artikel werden die gesamten Keilschriftquellen, die über den Temple von Ištar in Arbela Auskunft geben, untersucht: die Ausgestaltung, die kultischen und ökonomischen Aktivitäten, und das Tempelpersonal einschl. der Propheten.

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THE TEMPLE OF IŠTAR OF ARBELA*

Martti Nissinen and Raija Mattila

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Egašankalamma: The Foremost Temple of the City of Arbela

According to cuneiform sources, the city of Arbela/Arbail (as Erbil was called in ancient times) was the city of the goddess Ištar. Most occurrences of name of the city of Arbela in cuneiform texts mention also the goddess and her temple Egašankalamma (é.gašan.kalam.ma/*bēt šarrat māti*), "House of the Lady/Queen of the Land,"[1] which was the foremost temple of ancient Arbela.[2] Indeed, it was probably the temple, more than anything, that made Arbela one of the principal cities of Assyria.

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[1] SAA 20 49:178: É.GAŠAN.KALAM.MA É *šar-rat* KUR.KUR É-ᵈGAŠAN-*arba-ìl* "Egašankalamma, 'House of the Lady of the lands': the house of Lady of Arbela"; Parpola 2017, 137.

[2] See Menzel 1981, 6–10; George 1989, 351; cf. Nissinen 2001, 176–83 and 2020.

Ištar of Arbela was not just a local deity, she was known all over the Assyrian Empire as the goddess of prophecy.

The cuneiform sources informing on the temple of Egašankalamma are, unfortunately but not surprisingly, far from being comprehensive. As the temple itself is buried deep under later historical layers of the citadel of Erbil, no archaeological data on the temple is available and information concerning the temple can be only retrieved from ancient textual sources. These, again, are very unevenly distributed, the overwhelming majority of the sources deriving from the late Neo-Assyrian period. Any reconstruction of the history and functioning of the temple is, therefore, most reliable when it comes to the time of the Sargonid kings, but less so concerning earlier periods.

Some important information can nevertheless be drawn from sources dating to the Middle Assyrian period. The first mentioning of Egašankalamma in sources known to us can be found in an inscription of Shalmaneser I (1273–1244) mentioning the rebuilding of this temple and its zigurrat among other temples in other cities.[3] Some twelfth-century documents include a list of cultic clothing of Ištar of Arbela[4] and a note on the slaughtering of a sheep for the *nugatipu* of Ištar of Arbela.[5] A private dedicatory text to Ištar of Arbela for the life of King Aššur-Dan even mentions the temple:

> To the goddess Ištar, the great Lady who dwells in Egašankalamma, Lady of Arbela, his Lady.[6]

The text is written on a bronze statue found at Lake Urmia, probably originating from Arbela. Dating it to the twelfth century is, of course, only possible if the text refers to Aššur-Dan I and not Aššur-Dan II, who ruled in the late tenth century. Moreover, an inscription of Tiglath-Pileser I refers to Aššur and Ištar of Arbela listening to prayers without mentioning the temple specifically.[7]

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[3] RIMA 1 A.0.77.16; see Grayson 1987, 204–205.
[4] MARV 3 8; see Freydank 1994.
[5] Weidner 1935/36, 38 no. 76.
[6] RIMA 1 A.0.83.2001:1–3; see Grayson 1987, 308.
[7] CUSAS 17 68 par. 69; see Frame 2011, 130.
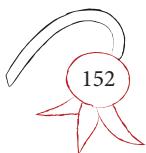
As few as the pre-Neo-Assyrian references to the temple of Egašankalamma are, they at least confirm the existence and functioning of the temple from the thirteenth century BCE at the latest. Moreover, since Shalmaneser I claims to have made "those cult-centers and shrines better than previously,"[8] one can assume that he renovated an already existing temple. This is probable anyway, since even older historical records mention the name of the city which probably was never there without a temple.[9]

The Neo-Assyrian texts beginning with Shalmaneser III are much more informative about Egašankalamma, although even these sources are not quite as specific about the structure and goings-on of the temple as we perhaps would like them to be. The *Hymn to the City of Arbela* praises the city as a religious center, as "the city of the temple of jubilation"; indeed, as "lofty sanctuary, shrine of the fates, gate of heaven." The hymn mentions two goddesses, Nanaya and Irnina, but more than anything, it praises the temple of Ištar, referring to the offerings and music performed there and presenting Ištar as being seated on a lion and surrounded by further lions crouching beneath her.[10]

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The Decoration of Egašankalamma

Further information concerning the structure, decoration, and the statues of the temple can be drawn from Neo-Assyrian letters and royal inscriptions. The earliest references to the temple of Ištar of Arbela in the royal correspondence date to the reign of Sargon II, and come from letters written by Amar-ili, an official of the king working in Arbela.[11] Amar-ili reports to the king that he has searched for jewels in a temple but has not found any beautiful stones.[12] The temple is not specified as

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[8] RIMA 1 A.0.77.16: 18–19; see Grayson 1987, 204.

[9] For a full inventory of texts mentioning Arbela, see MacGinnis 2014.

[10] SAA 3 8:5, 18, 20–21 r. 5; see Livingstone 1989, 20, 22.

[11] SAA 1 135; see Parpola 1987, 111–12.

[12] SAA 1 136; see Parpola 1987, 112.

that of Ištar, but in another letter[13] he reports that the wall behind the image of Ištar has caved in and the master builder has recommended the wall to be removed. Amar-ili is responding to instructions he has received from the king to place a symbol (*simtu*) behind the image of Ištar and to report back if the wall is leaning. Taken together with a third letter[14] by Amar-ili where he reports about clearing away a collapsed palace wall, the evidence may be taken as an indication that the buildings in Arbela including the temple of Ištar had been neglected and were in need of repair.

During the reign of Esarhaddon, the temple was expanded and richly decorated using valuable metals. Esarhaddon describes the work in his royal inscriptions:
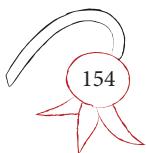
> [(As for) Egašankalamma, the temple of the goddess Ištar], which is in Arbela, I overlaid (it) with silver (and) gold and made (it) shine like daylight. I had […] made of bronze and installed locks on its gates. I built […] … inside it and surrounded its exterior […]. After the goddess Ištar, my lady, made my kingship greater than that of the kings, my ancestors, [… I] expanded its features.[15]

Further details are given in another inscription by Esarhaddon:

> (Esarhaddon …) who plated Egašankalamma, the temple of the goddess Ištar of Arbela, his lady, with silver (*zaḫalû*) and made (it) shine like daylight – I had lions, screaming *anzû*-birds, *laḫmu*-monsters, (and) *kurību*-genii fashioned from silver and copper and set (them) up in its entry doors.[16]

Several features of the temple and its decoration can be deduced from these passages. The temple had valuable overlays of silver and gold and plating in a silver alloy (*zahalû*). Its entry doors were flanked by lions, monsters and genii made of silver and copper and its gates were equipped with locks. Unfortunately, the passage describing the

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[13] SAA 1 138; see Parpola 1987, 113.

[14] SAA 1 137; see Parpola 1987, 112–13.

[15] RINAP 4 54 r. 16-20; see Leichty 2011, 117.

[16] RINAP 4 77: 8–11; see Leichty 2011, 155.

building itself is very badly preserved but refers to the building of an inner structure of the temple and to surrounding its exterior, possibly by a wall.

The valuable metals used in the decoration of the temple were not left unnoticed by criminals. This we can read in the letters of Aššur-hamatu'a who worked in Arbela under the orders of the king. The letters have been assigned to the reign of Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal but a more precise dating is not possible. Several thefts had occurred in the temple before Aššur-hamatu'a was appointed but the temple personnel had covered up the crimes. Now, Aššur-hamatu'a reports, Nabû-epuš, lamentation priest of Ea, has been caught steeling a golden ornament from the offering table in front of Ištar. The precise nature of the ornament is not known, but it was something that could be peeled off, as the verb used in the letter is "to skin, to peel off."[17]

Statues of the king in the temple are referred to in two letters by Aššur-hamatu'a. He reports that the work on the statues of the king for the temple of Ištar of Arbela has been done.[18] In another letter[19] Aššur-hamatu'a reports that "the royal images stood on the right and left sides of Ištar," referring either to past practice in general, or to a certain cultic event.

The inscriptions of Assurbanipal, like those of his father Esarhaddon, refer to the bright, daylight-like shine of the temple and add one feature, namely the standards erected in front of the temple: "I made the house of Ištar, my lady, bright as day with silver, gold, and copper. I adorned the standards of the gate of the temple of Ištar with gold and set them up."[20]

The standards are shown on a wall relief (AO 19914) from the North Palace of Assurbanipal in Nineveh. The relief depicts a city with a triple-wall situated by a river. The city is clearly identified as Arbela by the caption "URU.*arba-ìl*" written between the lower and the middle wall. A religious ceremony is depicted in front of a temple that can be

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[17] SAA 13 138: 6–11; see Cole and Machinist 1998, 110.
[18] SAA 13 141: 6–8; see Cole and Machinist 1998, 112.
[19] SAA 13 140; see Cole and Machinist 1998, 111.
[20] SAACT 10 19: 6–7; see Novotny 2014, 99.

recognized as the temple of Ištar by the two round-topped standards of Ištar standing by its façade. Unfortunately, this sole pictorial representation of the Egašankalamma temple is too standardized to give any reliable data concerning the temple's architecture.

Cultic Activities of Egašankalamma

There are some references to the cultic activity in the temple of Egašankalamma, and one text, *The Rites of Egašankalamma*, is directly related to it.[21] This text is not primarily a description of a ritual, but a mystical-mythical commentary of its meaning, equating the ritual actions with deities, for instance: "The bread which one prepares is Ea, whom he vanquished."[22] Many times, the connection between the myth and the ritual is unclear to the modern reader. Importantly, the rites performed in Egašankalamma are prescribed to be enacted like those in Nippur, which connects the worship in the temple of Arbela with Babylonian cultic traditions. This can be seen also in the prominent role given to Bel/Marduk throughout the text.

Royal inscriptions, in addition to the notes concerning the rebuilding and decoration of the temple, include scattered references to rituals performed in the temple of Ištar in Arbela. In a famous passage, Assurbanipal tells how he, while attending "the festival of the Venerable Lady" (*isinni šarrati kabitti*) in Arbela in the month of Ab (V), heard about the assault of Teumman, king of Elam. Shocked by this news, he prostrates himself under the feet of the goddess and prays to her, receiving an oracle of salvation from her. This prophetic oracle, beginning with the words "Fear not!," is followed by a dream seen by a visionary (*šabrû*) with equally encouraging content.[23]

The triumph celebrating Assurbanipal's victory over Teumman was held in Arbela. The religious ceremony depicted on the relief from Assurbanipal's North Palace in Nineveh (AO 19914, discussed above)

[21] SAA 3 38; see Livingstone 1989, 95–98.
[22] SAA 3 38:23; Livingstone 1989, 96.
[23] RINAP 5 3 v. 16–72; see Novotny and Jeffers 2018, 68–70.
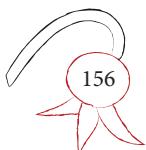
shows king Assurbanipal at the gate of the temple of Ištar of Arbela in front of an altar and an offering table holding an upright bow and pouring a libation over the decapitated head of Teumman.[24]

An administrative text from the time of Sennacherib mentions a due for a *qarītu* banquet in Arbela,[25] and a letter from the Neo-Assyrian period (not dated) reports that Ištar of Arbela has gone up to a *qarītu* celebrated in Arbela. The letter-writer Marduk-[…] is concerned about a horse that he would like the reluctant chief victuallier to take to Arbela with some sacrificial bread to be delivered to the banquet.[26]

A prominent cultic sequence between the city of Arbela and the nearby town Milqia is attested in inscriptions of several Neo-Assyrian kings. Shalmaneser III speaks of having celebrated a "festival of the lady of Arbela" after a victorious campaign against Urartu:

> Enthusiastically he/I entered Ega[šankalamm]a, the festival of the Lady of Arbela [… *he/I arranged*] in [Mi]lqia. The king joyfully [*performed*] a lion *hunt* in Baltil. He felled […, ente]red into the presence of the goddess Ištar with all his booty.[27]

Due to the damaged state of the text, the sequence of events is not altogether clear, but it seems like the first part of the festival took place in Egašankalamma, from where the ritual action moved to Milqia, a town near Arbela, where there was the "Palace of the Steppe" accompanied by the an *akītu*-house of Ištar.[28] After the celebrations in Arbela and its surroundings, the festival moved to Baltil, the innermost part of the city of Assur, where the king entered ceremonially into the presence of Ištar. Milqia is attested also in letters from the time of Sargon II[29] and

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[24] For Assurbanipal's triumph ceremony and the relief depicting it, see May 2012, 471–73; Nadali 2013, 86–89.

[25] BT 117; see Parker 1963, 95.

[26] SAA 13 147; see Cole and Machinist 1998, 118.

[27] RIMA 3 A.0.102.17:59–60 = SAA 3 17 r. 27–30; see Grayson 1996, 87 and Livingstone 1989, 47. Cf. *KAR* 98 referring to a similar celebration mentioning Milqia but not Egašankalamma; see MacGinnis 2019.

[28] For recent studies on the Neo-Assyrian *akītu* festival, see Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 416–27; Barcina 2017.

[29] SAA 1 125, 146, and 147; see Parpola 1987, 101, 118–19.

in the inscriptions of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. Even two proph-
ecies from the time of Esarhaddon are likely to refer to the "Palace of
the Steppe."[30] Milqia appears as a ceremonial extension of the main
temple of the goddess in Arbela. This is where Ištar sojourned when
the king was on a military campaign, receiving him after the victorious
war. In Milqia, the goddess seems to have been called by the name
Šatru, and her stay in the "Palace of the Steppe" symbolized the world
of chaos caused by the turmoils of war.

The royal inscriptions and correspondence as well as prophecies
pronounced to Assyrian kings make Egašankalamma and its satellite
shrine Milqia appear as the venue of royal festivals, especially after
military victories. This corresponds well to the character of Ištar of
Arbela as "the goddess of warfare, the lady of battle" (*ilat qabli bēlet
tāḫāzi*),[31] but poetic and prophetic texts let her appear also as the
creator-mother or wet nurse of the king. Assurbanipal calls himself the
"product of Emašmaš and Egašankalamma,"[32] and when he is praying
to Nabû in Emašmaš, the temple of Ištar in Nineveh, the god says:

> That gracious mouth of yours that keeps praying to Urkittu.
> Your body, created by me, keeps praying to me…[33] in Emašmaš.
> Your fate, designed by me, keeps praying to me: "Bring safety into
> Egašankalamma!"
> Your soul keeps praying to me: "Grant Assurbanipal a long life!"[34]

This poetry not only juxtaposes the two major temples of Ištar as
the ones with which the kings had a special relationship. The long
life of the king is equated with the endurance and safety (*tuqnu*) of
Egašankalamma.[35] This is a recurrent topic also in prophetic oracles,
in which the safety and stability (*tuqqunu*) of the king's reign is often

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[30] SAA 9 1.9; 9 5; see Parpola 1997, 9–10, 34.

[31] RINAP 5 3 v. 36; Novotny and Jeffers 2018, 69.

[32] SAA 3 3:10; Livingstone 1989, 12.

[33] The meaning of *a-na i-tu-us-si* is unclear.

[34] SAA 3 13:13–15; Livingstone 1989, 33.

[35] Cf. the fragmentary document of a votive gift of an unknown king for
Egašankalamma (SAA 12 89:7, see Kataja and Whiting 1995, 110): "[for the
preservation of] my [life], the lengthening of my days, the longevity of my
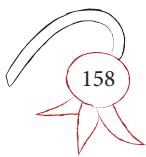
pronounced by prophets of Ištar of Arbela, who appears as a mother or wet nurse of the king.[36] Ištar is not typically known as a mother goddess, but in prophecies and mystical texts this is indeed her role. The two Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela appear as nurses of Marduk,[37] and since the king can be called "the Marduk of the people,"[38] the goddesses fulfill the same role with regard to the human king. Simo Parpola has plausibly argued that the motherly language used of the goddess has a point of reference in real life: the royal infants since Esarhaddon were brought up as royal infants in the temples of Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela who, through their female devotees, indeed acted as their wet-nurses (Parpola 1997, xxxix–xl). This practice may have been due to the close relationship of Queen Naqia, Esarhaddon's mother, with these temples.

Egašankalamma as an Economical Centre

An entirely different aspect of the function of the temple of Ištar is documented in non-royal legal texts, which demonstrate the temple's significant economical agency. Transactions of the temple are attested throughout the Neo-Assyrian period. The documents do not mention the name of the temple but refer to its property and credit as "silver of Ištar of Arbela" or the "first fruits (*rēšāti*) of Ištar of Arbela" as in the following example from the time of Esarhaddon (date 676-III-11):

> Two talents of copper, first fruits of Ištar of Arbela (*rēšāti ša Issār ša Arbail*),
> belonging to Mannu-ki-Arbail (*ša Mannu-kī-Arbail*),
> at the disposal of Šamaš-ahhe-šallim (*ina pān Šamaš-aḫḫē-šallim*).
> He shall pay in Ab (V). If he does not pay, it will incrase by a third.[39]

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kingship, and the destruction of my enemies, […] and in Egašankalamma until distant days I […]."

[36] See, e.g., SAA 9 1.2; 1.10; 2.5; 5; see Parpola 1997, 5, 10, 17, 34.

[37] SAA 3 39:19–22; Livingstone 1989, 99.

[38] SAA 10 112 r. 31; 1993: Parpola 1993, 93.

[39] SAA 6 214: 1–r. 1; Kwasman and Parpola 1991, 172.

The temple of Ištar of Arbela appears often in litigation clauses of legal documents as the place where penalty fees are paid if the contract is broken: the guilty party shall place a specified amount of silver and/or gold "in the lap of Ištar residing in Arbela." These penalties are ordered in addition to the manifold compensation to the other party of the contract; for example:

> Whoever in the future, at any time, lodges a complaint and breaks the contract, whether Balaṭu-ereš or his sons or his grandsons, and seeks a lawsuit or litigation against Mušallim-Issar, shall place 10 minas of silver and one mina of gold [in] the lap of Ištar residing in Arbela, [and shall return the mon]ey tenfold to its owners. He shall cont[est] in his lawsuit and not succeed.[40]
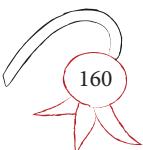
It is difficult to know how often these clauses actually came into force and how much the temple actually profited from them. The huge penalties handed out to the one who breaks the contract could also be interpreted as a serious deterrent, the purpose of which was rather to minimize the need of enforcing the litigation clauses.

In one document from the time of Sargon II a merchant of Ištar of Arbela is directly lending silver.[41] In most cases, like the one quoted above (SAA 6 214), the goddess (that is, the temple) appears as a third party in a document that mentions both the debtor and the creditor. The triangle of the debtor, creditor, and the goddess (that is, the temple) must be based on a long-standing practice of lending, in which the temple of Ištar of Arbela has a well-established agency. The role of the temple in these transactions is not altogether clear, however.[42] Is the temple here a financial institution comparable to a bank or a pawn-shop, giving credit to customers?[43] If this is the case, what is the role of the person who appears as the one to whom the money is said

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[40] SAA 6 7: 9–r. 4; Kwasman and Parpola 1991, 8.

[41] BT 101; see Parker 1963, 89–90.

[42] For previous studies, see Menzel 1981, 11–21; Postgate 1983; and Radner 1999, 83–85.

[43] For the role of the temple as comparable to safe-deposit where the wealthy could store their capital, see Postgate 1983, 158.

to belong? If he is the actual creditor, it is very difficult to explain why the money is called "first fruits" of Ištar, implying that its actual owner is the temple.[44] Perhaps the actual creditor is the temple and the person mentioned in the document is, rather, a broker or a temple official acting on behalf of the temple.

In addition to the above-mentioned document mentioning a merchant (*tamkāru*) of Ištar of Arbela as the creditor of a loan, the persons acting in the documents mentioning the "first fruits" of Ištar of Arbela are usually not temple officials or affiliated to the temple in any function, but persons who sometimes seem to be very active in different businesses. One of them, Mannu-ki-Arbail, is a well-known military officer from Nineveh, who is known from a considerable number of transactions and does not seem to have any particular affilitation with the temple Ištar in Arbela.[45] The same can be said of the cohort commander Kiṣir-Aššur or of Silim-Aššur, known later as vizier,[46] and the other creditors. Therefore, it is not clear how and why these creditors should be acting on behalf of the temple.[47] Perhaps they could have been functioning as cedents who act as a middlemen between the debtor and the temple, but it is difficult to see why the temple was using such brokers in its operations and how it would have profited from such a practice. The fact that not all transactions at our disposal mentioning the "first fruits" of Ištar of Arbela derive from the Nineveh archives suggests that the banking business of the temple of Arbela was not restricted to city of Arbela, and the temple had to have representatives in other cities acting on its behalf.

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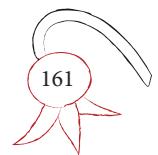
[44] Radner (1999, 84) stresses that according to the general format of the Neo-Assyrian loan documents the creditor is the person that the money is said to belong to and the phrase "first fruits of DN" is solely a definition of the purpose ("Bestimmumgszweck") of the silver.

[45] See Baker 2001, 685–86 (sub Mannu-kī-Arbail 6).

[46] For Kiṣir-Aššur and Silim-Aššur, see Baker 2000, 622 (sub Kiṣir-Aššur 24); Mattila 2002b, 1109 (sub Silim-Aššur 4).

[47] The situation is different at Assur where the creditors of loans referring to silver of Aššur all belong to the temple personnel; see Radner 1999, 84.

Another (perhaps better) explanation is that the person appearing as the creditor has actually loaned his own money to the debtor who owes the "first fruits" to the temple of Ištar in Arbela. If this is true, then the debtor has not been able to fulfill his obligations to the temple with his own capital but had to borrow it from the creditor. One can only speculate, of course, for what reasons an Assyrian citizen would have had obligations to the temple. The term "first fruits" (*rēšāti*) refers to offerings, thus rendering the sum of money a compensation for the offering of the first agricultural products of the harvest season, but it may also have developed into a term denoting a certain type of debt without being a payment of specific offerings. Not all debts are called *rēšāti*, but simply "silver of Ištar of Arbela." Even in these documents, the creditor and the debtor are named and the temple appears as the third party. However the types of transactions and the role of the temple in them should be interpreted, legal documents make the temple of Ištar appear as a wealthy institution and a significant economical agent even outside the city of Arbela.[48]

The Personnel of Egašankalamma

As to the temple community and its members, the information is rather scattered, mentioning only a few individuals explicitly affiliated with the temple. The temple steward Aplaya, that is, the temple's Human Resources official, writes to Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal on problems caused by some exempted temple slaves.[49] Of the merchants of the temple, who must have played an important role in the temple's business, only one anonymous *tamkāru* is mentioned in the sources. Of the craftsmen of the temple, a weaver (*ušpāru*) called Bel-issiya is attested already in the time of Adad-nirari III,[50] and further evidence

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[48] The lack of a recent overview of the economy of Assyria makes it difficult to place the activities of the temple in a larger economical context. For the lack of such an overview and some previous literature, see Radner 2017, 228.

[49] SAA 13 143; Cole and Machinist 1998, 116.

[50] CTN 2 91:32; Postgate 1973, 118–19; cf. the letter concerning temple weavers who are behind their quota (SAA 13 145; Cole and Machinist 1998, 117).

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comes from the time of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, when the weavers of Arbela were active in the city of Kurbail.[51] We also know that the temple had scribes (*ṭupšarru*), and two of them are known by their names: Kandalanu, a temple scribe who, according to the colophon, wrote the Khorsabad King List in the time of Tiglath-Pileser III;[52] and Issar-nadin-apli, the foreman of the collegium of ten scribes of Arbela, whose correspondence with the king concerns astrological observations in the time of Assurbanipal.[53] These pieces of information connect the temple with scribal and astrological activities.

Perhaps the best known part of the personnel of Egašankalamma consists of its female members. There is evidence of both male and female votaries (LÚ/MÍ.MAŠ, however this word might be pronounced, and LÚ/MÍ.SUḪUR.LÁ = *kezru/kezertu*) dedicated to Adad in Kurbail and Ištar of Arbela from the time of Adad-nirari III,[54] and further female votaries are well known from later times. The position of a votary of the temple is somewhat unclear. In the documents from Esarhaddon, the votaries are all female, and they are mentioned either in the context of marriage or divorce or as the property of the temple – not, however, that of Ištar of Arbela. Three Arbela-based votaresses are wives or daughters of a high-ranking Assyrian citizen, all of Egyptian origin. One of the women is not a votary of Ištar but, according to the marriage contract, is to be given as such in case the husband divorces her.[55] One woman is a young votaress growing up in the temple and married off by her brother,[56] while in third case, the marriage contract indicates she *is* a votaress even during the marriage.[57] Evidently, a woman could have the status of a votary whether or not she was married, and this status brought them institutional protection against arbitrary decisions of

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[51] SAA 16 84 r. 5–11 (Luukko and Van Buylaere 2002, 79); SAA 13 186 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 158).

[52] SBLWAW 19 5 iv 33–35; Glassner 2004, 144–45.

[53] SAA 10 139–142; Parpola 1993, 109–11.

[54] CTN 2 17 r. 30–34; Postgate 1973, 48–49.

[55] SAA 14 443; Mattila 2002a, 282.

[56] StAT 2 184; Donbaz and Parpola 2001, 131.

[57] StAT 2 164; Donbaz and Parpola 2001, 119.

their (Egyptian) husbands or brothers. The sources do not reveal more about their agency or their relation to the temple community.

In two further cases, the female votaries are acting as prophets.[58] These are the only cases where the votaries have some kind of an agency, and having a prophetic agency does not come as a surprise in the case of Egašankalamma. Prophetic activity in Arbela is documented by oracle texts and, directly and indirectly, in letters.[59] Seven out of fifteen Neo-Assyrian prophets known by their personal names are said to come from Arbela, which doubtless indicates their affiliation with the temple of Ištar (see Nissinen 2001, 179–80). Three of them are women: Ahat-abiša, Dunnaša-amur and Sinqiša-amur (the two last-mentioned names may actually belong to one and the same person), and one anonymous female prophet from Arbela is mentioned in a letter. One or two prophets are of uncertain gender (Bayâ, probably a genderwise ambiguous person; Ištar-la-tašiyaṭ, probably male[60]), and the remaining two are men (La-dagil-ili, Tašmetu-ereš).

Prophetic activity is arguably the feature that is typical of Egašankalamma more than any other Assyrian temple. Ištar of Arbela is the goddess whose words most Assyrian prophets transmit even outside the city of Arbela. Even Ištar of Nineveh, under the name Mullissu, appears as the divine speaker of prophetic oracles, but no prophets are known to be based in her temple in Nineveh or elsewhere. It was especially the prophetic function that gave Egašankalamma a nationwide significance, and this was actively promoted by Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, who seem to have had a special devotion to this temple.

Conclusion

The available evidence presents Egašankalamma as one of the foremost of Neo-Assyrian temples of Ištar. It was perhaps less prestigious than Emašmaš, the temple of Ištar in Nineveh, which was the capital city of

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[58] SAA 9 1.7 (Parpola 1997, 9); SAA 13 148 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 119).

[59] Oracles: SAA 9 (Parpola 1997); letters: SAA 10 284 (Parpola 1993, 220–21); SAA 13 139; 144; 148 (Cole and Machinist 1998, 111, 116–17, 119).

[60] For the uncertain gender of these persons, see Nissinen 2013, 42.
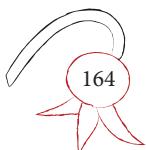
Assyria since Sennacherib, but its significance was well comparable to temples of Ištar in other major Assyrian cities, such as, for instance, the temple of the Lady of Kidmuri in Calah. In all appearances, the temple was a strong economical actor in Assyria, having a nation-wide economical catchment area. The same can be said of its religious significance. Egašankalamma, together with its satellite shrine, the "Palace of the Steppe" in Milqia, was the venue of royal festivals after military conquests, but it probably even served as the place where royal infants were brought up in late Neo-Assyrian times. According to the sources available to us, especially the kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, as well as their (grand) mother, Queen Naqia, had a particularly close personal relationship to the temple. Perhaps at least partly for this reason, Egašankalamma was the cradle of Assyrian prophecy, which made Ištar of Arbela the foremost divine messenger

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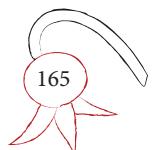
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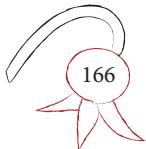
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