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Special Issue: Hope

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A FEW THOUGHTS ON HOPE

Jeffrey L. Cooley

Abstract

This essay is an introduction to the theme of this special issue, "Hope," and includes an elaboration on the situation that inspired the theme and a few brief reflections on the topic.

Cette brève réflexion introduit le thème de ce numéro spécial, « Espoir », et décrit la situation qui a inspiré ce thème et propose quelques idées sur ce sujet.

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A FEW THOUGHTS ON HOPE

Jeffrey L. Cooley

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The motivation for inviting the studies gathered here was born in the first great plague of the new millennium.[1] They are the manifestation of a desire to *craft hope* within our guild of scholars by the very means of that guild. Permit me to explain, if you will, some of my thoughts on the genesis of this collection, which is derived from the joint 2021 and 2022 sessions of the Assyriology and the Bible and the Prophetic Texts and Their Ancient Contexts sections of the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature.

In that dark time, my wife and I endeavored, like so many other parents, to normalize our nuclear family's isolation. On the list of novelties

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[1] This introduction benefited from the recommendations and insights from this issue's coeditors, Rannfrid Lasine Thelle and Jennifer Singletary. I thank them for their indulgence and acknowledge that my comments may or may not reflect their diligent considerations. In addition, Rann and I are profoundly thankful to Jen for her managerial leadership in putting this issue together. Finally, the three us wish to express our deep thanks to the editors of AABNER, in particular Izaak J. de Hulster and Valérie Nicolet, for accepting this collection and for guiding us through the publication process, and Michael Helfield for his careful copyediting.

were family walks (you can easily walk to the river from our house, apparently), a movie-watching schedule that introduced our boys to films that brought my wife and/or myself happiness in our youth (aka "covideos"), and online streaming church services coupled with street-side communion (a barely sustainable ecclesiastical situation). I taught myself to play the cornet to the household's joyous entertainment (I'm quite sure). Such activities dovetailed with new modalities of work and schooling. And always looming above and below us were our worries that our loved ones might get devoured by the viral monster that ultimately consumed millions worldwide.

As we deliberately constructed household practices intended to chime tones of calm—and hope—a realization emerged, one that, if I had thought of it before, had not made much of an impact: hope was not solely (or merely) an emotion, pie-eyed at worst, empirically grounded at best. Hope was not just a centripetal feeling or primal ambition that propelled us to move, it was also inclusive of the moving itself and the process of crafting it. It *was* the succession of deliberate acts that sought to fashion order in the chaos, presence in spite of absence, gain against loss, knowledge within ignorance, and courage from fear. Hope for us was a series of deliberate motions that craned our necks ever forward toward the horizon. We could not know what was over its ill-defined edge, but we could deliberately perform life liturgies that marked and framed our experience as we traveled together toward it. Perhaps there was no felicitous solution or resolution on the other side of the horizon (so many *were* lost and bereaved!), but we would be, somehow, better in our journey as a result of our litanies of exercises. At least we would not be worse for it.

I imagine my own experience is hardly unique, though maybe my realization emerged far more sluggishly than that of others; I can be dull-witted. Still, I think it is manifest that most do understand hope as an intangible, a fleeting wisp that can be described but not seen, touched, or performed. Illustratively, an academic acquaintance of mine recently recounted a brief exchange that her child ("M") had with a friend and that friend's mother on the realization that churches consistently feature crosses in their exterior architectural embellishments:

M's friend: "Why are there crosses on churches?"

M's friend's mother: "Well, the cross is where Jesus died, and so for some people, it represents hope."

M: "But hope is invisible! They should have put a gust of wind, like a fan or something, instead!"

We might be inclined to describe the thoughts here as those of a delightfully clever child who simply wishes to carefully (architecturally?) distinguish between a concrete thing and an abstraction. But M implicitly submits, as well, that hope, properly understood, is a propelling power ("a gust of wind, like a fan"), even if it cannot be observed directly. M offers a bodyless, structureless hope that bears the capacity to make something move.

Now, most of this volume's contributions wrestle with the words of such writers as Ezekiel, the Second Isaiah, and Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan, writers who were compelled, of course, by cultural conventions to express their hope poetically. So, it seems apt (or at least less arbitrary) to push off from M's perspicacious observations and drift toward a couple of our own poets to visit their thoughts, too, on hope. The great nineteenth-century American poet Emily Dickinson wrote:

> "Hope" is the thing with feathers—
> That perches in the soul—
> And sings the tune without the words—
> And never stops—at all—
>
> And sweetest—in the Gale—is heard—
> And sore must be the storm—
> That could abash the little Bird
> That kept so many warm—
>
> I've heard it in the chillest land
> And on the strangest Sea—
> Yet—never—in Extremity,
> It asked a crumb—of me.[2]

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[2] Dickinson 1960, 116 (#254). Note, Dickinson has at least three poems that focus on hope: this one (#254), which Thomas Johnson places around 1861, and

Like M above, Dickinson identifies hope as something that is perceived (it "sings") but is hardly tangible. It is so light and wispy that it flies and only impacts an individual by entering the incorporeal part of the person; it "perches in the soul" (not *on* it, so that burdensome weight might not be felt). For Dickinson, hope itself is so materially insubstantial that it cannot be wearied by ill or unwelcome climate ("chillest land," "strangest Sea"). It moves its objects not by force. Instead, the chirps of this flitty little birdie are a siren's call that "is heard" even above the deafening din of "the Gale." Dickinson's hope remains ethereal—it itself need not even receive nourishment ("never ... It asked a crumb—of me").[3]

In her work "Sisyphus" (hardly a hopeful title!), contemporary poet and our Classics colleague A. E. Stallings describes hope, primarily, as a thing of thought connected to—but still distinguished from—concrete action; she begins:

> It is good to work
> the dumb, obsessive
> muscles. Exertion draws
> the mind from hope
> to a more tangible object.
> To live
>
> is to relive.
> This can only work
> when there is an object
> to push, cursive and recursive,
> up the hill, when you hope
> this draws

two others, #1392 and #1547 (1960, 587, 645), which he estimates to have been composed in 1877 and 1882, respectively.

[3] Dickinson's later poem (#1547) is far less sanguine about the emotion of hope, similarly framing it in terms of something that might consume: "Hope is a subtle Glutton— // he feeds upon the Fair—" (1960, 465).

to no close as day withdraws,
but will replay in dreams. You live
in hope
of dream-work,
its regressive,
infinite object.[4]

Though Stallings tethers work (or toil) and its iterative processes with hope, it is hardly a harmonious hitch knot. Initially, hope appears to be something *from* which the embodied person (at least briefly) can be rescued by the echoing, material tasks of living. Hope *unresolves* like the life lived. Still, hope swaddles living ("You live / in hope"—in contrast to Dickinson's hope that merely "perches *in* the soul") and compels one to carry on for yet a "dream-work" that seems at first, in its regression and infinity, ultimately unachievable (or at least not completable). But Stallings goes on:

Awake, abject,
the conscious mind draws
into a ball; the Elusive
tongues it like the pit of an olive.
The quirk
of hope

in recurrent nightmares is the hope
at last to be the object
of the murderer's handiwork,
when he draws
the knife to relieve
the stutter, to make passive

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[4] Stallings 2004, 4.

the massive
machinery of hope,
the broken record of alive.
Why object?
The luck of all the draws
is the weight of stone.[5]

The lucid consideration of one's tedious task, for Stallings, itself fossilizes to the tangible, even richly tasteable, though one should not mistake it for nourishment since it is "like the pit of an olive," not the olive itself. Hope, no longer in ambivalent "dream-work," instead resides in "recurrent nightmares," an "object // of the murderer's handiwork." The word "object" seems here to offer the reader its multiple meanings at once. It is the overarching *telos* of the crime, but also the precise target of the homicide: hope is to be slayed by the chore, and the chore seems to exist for that sole and sullen purpose. And yet hope, too, hinders the turn to vocational malevolence. Hope *objects* to the end of work's iterations. "Why"? Hope engenders a burden, "the weight of stone" whose gravitational pull demands pushing. Finally, Stallings synthesizes:

> *Work*
>
> *without hope draws nectar in a sieve*
>
> *and hope without an object cannot live.*

"*Work*," thus italicized and wide-versified, is now perched like Sisyphus's stone at the hill's summit, and Stallings's subtle spectacle is far clearer from that height: hopeless toil leaves only a sticky, sappy mess that is a mere residue of its sweet potential. The flip is that hope needs "an object," and here too the word's semantic riches illuminate: "object" as goal and "object" as resistance. Objective and obstacle. Without the pair, hope is a ghost.

These are but brief expressions, of course. I am more accustomed to reading ancient rather than recent poems, and I have little doubt

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[5] Stallings 2004, 5.

that I have missed or mistaken something of Dickinson's and Stallings's nuances; their works of profound insight offer admittedly arbitrarily chosen foils for my reflection. They do not consider hope's actual substantiveness itself but rather its relation to substance, though Stallings certainly gestures toward it.

I confess that although I was already on the path academically for some time, the pandemic wrenched this scholar from the intangible and placed him quite firmly and finally on the body side of the mind–body problem. The virus—though entirely imperceptible on its own without electron microscopy and PCR tests— is after all corporeal, affected corpora, and effected corpses. But hope, too, is physical! As Stallings signals in "Sisyphus," since it can be obviated by orienting *without*, hope fundamentally exists *within.* Indeed, hope is, in fact, a material, biochemical constellation within our brains that can compel our cognition. This anatomical hope draws its ambitious rough drafts of reality in our thoughts and dreams. The line from mind to plan to execution is corporeal at each point. Hope is every point on that line. In the case of the pandemic, the line's lead viewed the virus, while a flock of vaccines pinched the line's end.

And thus this collection of articles. I wanted to craft hope—inclusive of conception, planning, execution, and end product—within the context of my co-leadership of the Assyriology and the Bible section of the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. It was grounded in my domestic experience of the pandemic and seemed appropriate to the meetings in 2021 (San Antonio) and 2022 (Denver). In particular, the former, which was both in-person and remotely offered, featured such abject agonic oddities: a major congress diffuse of bodies; interfacing with concealed faces; and imparting empirical knowledge by means of validated but virtual imposters. All of this while the world, inclusive of the conference's partakers, continued to battle with the death and discord adroitly dealt by COVID's ever evolutions.

My co-chair, Rannfrid Lasine Thelle, together with the section's steering committee,[6] was amenable to the topic, and, serendipitously, the

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[6] Those involved in the Assyriology and the Bible steering committee in 2021 included Peter Machinist, JoAnn Scurlock, Shalom Holz, and Gina Konstantopoulos.

Prophetic Texts and Their Ancient Contexts section, led by Christopher Hays and Hanna Tervanotko, and liaised by Jennifer Singletary, was agreeable to cooperation.[7] We invited our colleagues to submit contributions that addressed hope as an emotion, a worldview, and/or a cultic or political action from diverse perspectives. Their contributions were inclusive of the biblical world and ancient Mesopotamia, as well as other and later ancient contexts, including ancient Greece and early Judaism. While not all of the papers presented at the meetings could be included here (mostly because the presenters had committed them to other venues), those that *are* included make up a fine representation of our sessions. They have been thoroughly and thoughtfully refereed in line with AABNER's standard reviewing practices.

Needless to say, in light of my considerations above I understand the following scholarly works themselves to be embodiments of hope and hope's processes. Still (and finally), I recognize that there are likely readers who are dismissive of my personal sentiments or are cynical regarding the issue's very topic. In response to such readers, I offer this morose morsel from the character Rosencrantz, who explains to his compatriot Guildenstern (in Tom Stoppard's 1967 play) that

> "The only thing that makes it bearable is the irrational belief that somebody interesting will come on in a minute ..."[8]

To be sure, applied to the topic at hand, such readers are welcome to label hope an "irrational belief." But Rosencrantz's perspective highlights the notion that the thing that sustains, that fixes our gazes on the horizon, can simply be curiosity's ambition. This, too, is a hope that can be enacted by our guild, a guild that is constituted—even brimming—with interesting people who have interesting ideas. So minimally, it is my sincere hope that readers will learn something in what *comes on* in the succeeding pages and will find something interesting in them.

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[7] Those involved in the Prophetic Texts and Their Ancient Contexts steering committee in 2020–2021 were Jennifer Singletary, Jonathan Stökl, Julie Deluty, C. L. Crouch, Ehud Ben Zvi, Martti Nissinen, and Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer.

[8] Stoppard 1967, 33 (Act 1).

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LAMENT AND HOPE IN *LUDLUL BĒL NĒMEQI*

Anthony P. SooHoo, SJ

Abstract

Ludlul bēl nēmeqi has been described as wisdom literature and has been compared to the theodicy in the book of Job. Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan, the protagonist, voices his despair for his misfortune and praises Marduk for his restoration. This article addresses how hope is communicated to the imagined audience in *Ludlul* in response to the capriciousness of the deity. Moreover, lament, which is addressed to an emotional community, is construed as an act of hope and an expression of resilience, engendering empathy and solidarity in both human and divine audiences. The composition reflects the concerns and interests of cultic specialists, whose expertise and learning made them important figures during the Kassite period, even as it also hints at the cooperation and competition between the *āšipu* and the *kalû* in the Assyrian royal court of the first millennium BCE. Although hope is a cross-cultural phenomenon, it activates sociocultural values, beliefs, and practices, fostering resilience while ancient Mesopotamians confronted the uncertainty and suffering that are part of reality.

Ludlul bēl nēmeqi a été décrit comme une littérature de sagesse et a été comparé à la théodicée du Livre de Job. Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan, le protagoniste, exprime son désespoir face à son malheur et loue Marduk pour son rétablissement. Cette étude aborde la manière dont l'espoir est communiqué au public imaginé dans *Ludlul* en réponse au caractère capricieux de la divinité. En outre, la lamentation, qui s'adresse à une communauté émotionnelle, est interprétée comme un acte d'espoir et l'expression de la résilience, engendrant l'empathie et la solidarité dans les auditoires humains et divins. La composition reflète les préoccupations et les intérêts des spécialistes du culte, dont l'expertise et l'érudition ont fait d'eux des personnages importants de la période kassite, tout en laissant entrevoir la coopération et la concurrence entre les *āšipu* et les *kalû* au sein de la cour royale assyrienne du premier millénaire avant notre ère. Bien que l'espoir soit un phénomène interculturel, il active les valeurs, les croyances et les pratiques socioculturelles, favorisant la résilience alors que les anciens Mésopotamiens étaient confrontés à l'incertitude et à la souffrance qui font partie de la réalité.

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LAMENT AND HOPE IN *LUDLUL BĒL NĒMEQI*

Anthony P. SooHoo, SJ

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Introduction

The word "hope," from Old English *hopa* and its verbal form *hopian,* is attested as early as the tenth century CE (Klein 2003, 352). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary,*[1] its meaning includes a sense of expectation, with or without the implication of desire, as well as trust or confidence, to varying degrees, that something will occur. Finally, hope is distinguished from optimism because the latter includes an evaluation of certitude and a perception of control (Bruininks and Malle 2005). Thus, one can be hopeful in a dire situation where there is no assurance of a successful outcome or any sense of agency, whereas optimism involves greater certitude and perceived control.

Undoubtedly, Christian theological views have influenced hope's different shades of meaning. Among ancient Greek writers, there was ambivalence regarding ἐλπίς (*elpis*) because false hope, due to insufficient

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[1] https://www.oed.com/dictionary/hope_n1?tab=factsheet#1253664   (accessed May 21, 2023).

knowledge or unreal expectations, could mislead, while hope itself, which creates confidence, could result in courage.[2] Hesiod's version of the story of Pandora embodies this ambiguity because only hope stays in her jar after every misfortune is released into the world (*Opera et dies*, 53–105). It is unclear why hope remains: is it so that it could be accessible to humans, or is it meant to be kept from them? Early and medieval Christian writers, on the other hand, viewed hope as a theological virtue, intimately connected with faith and love, which comes from God and is ordered toward the good.[3] While hope has a rational dimension, it is also associated with the passions and has an emotional aspect. Ancient

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[2] For the Greek philosophical conceptions of hope, see Gravlee 2020. Plato has both negative and positive assessments of hope. On the one hand, he recounts a myth of how the divinities bestow upon human beings confidence, fear, and gullible hope, which are called "mindless advisers" (*Timaeus* 69b). On the other hand, Socrates calls hopes "pleasures of anticipation" in his debate with Protarch, and Plato suggests a link between hope and human agency since thoughts about what we enjoy, which are future-oriented, are distinct from what actually will happen (*Philebus* 39e3). In the *Apologia* and the *Phaedo*, Socrates insists that hope for the afterlife is rational (*Phaedo* 66e–67c; *Apologia* 29a–b). Aristotle connects hopefulness with confidence as well as fear, depending on a person's sense of the future, whether it is full of possibility or closed, and this moves one to decide and act, especially in those who are high-minded or "great-souled" (*megalopsychia*) (*Nichomachean Ethics* 3.6–3.8; *Rhetoric* 2.5, 2.12).

[3] For the Pauline understanding of hope, see Webber and Kok 2020, and for Thomas Aquinas's reformulation of Aristotle's concept of hope, see Pinsent 2020. For Paul and Augustine of Hippo, hope anticipates what has not been realized (Rom 8:24). While hope may require a "leap of faith," it also can lead to perseverance and genuineness (δοκιμή, *dokimē*) (Rom 4:18; 5:3–5). For Augustine, hope is distinct from but intimately connected with faith and love. Hope, which is directed toward the good of the person who has it, is future-oriented, while faith can also be related to the past (*Enchiridion de Fide, Spe, et Caritate* II.7; XXX.114). Aquinas argues that hope is both a passion and a theological virtue. As such, it has a teleological aspect since it is concerned with a person's ultimate happiness, which is found in union with God. Since hope involves knowledge of the possible, it leads to rational agency, but ignorance and drunkenness may also result in false hope. As a theological virtue, hope is a habit of the will that is perfected by God's grace (*Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 40; II–II, qq. 17–22).

Mesopotamians understood hope differently because their notions of divine and human nature did not share the same assumptions and conceptual framework as those of the Greek and Christian thinkers and because they did not deal with the topic systematically.

Modern research on hope falls into two main camps. Some treat hope, which is accompanied by a change in mental state, as an emotion in response to goal outcomes and as a coping process (Lazarus 1999). Other approaches, such as C. S. Snyder's (1989, 2002) hope theory, highlight its cognitive processes (agency thinking and pathways thinking) and goal-oriented nature. More recent scholarship has not only emphasized hope's rational qualities in achieving desired outcomes but also its affective nature as a strong motivator in the face of uncertainty (Cairns 2022, 44). Finally, while the relationship between hope and resilience—the various strategies people employ to "bounce back" from negative situations and adapt to new circumstances—continues to be debated, the two are closely related because both involve motivation, aspiration, and actualization (agency).[4]

Certainly, hope is connected to the emotional, rational, and physical since the human person is more complex than Cartesian dualism suggests. Moreover, hope has both an individual and a social dimension because it draws upon and is comprehensible only in light of common values and beliefs. Finally, hope has a temporal aspect because it often expresses a desire and confidence for something not yet attained. We employ diverse images and metaphorical language to characterize hope because it is amorphous and unruly. Since despair and suffering are part of the human condition, it is reasonable to assume that ancient societies and cultures devised a common response to this reality. Like emotions, hope is a contested category, culturally conditioned, and varying over time. This makes it doubly challenging to study in the ancient world because there are no informants who can clarify and be questioned. As a result, we must resort to analogical thinking and an approximate translation of terms and concepts. Yet, we should not let the perfect be the enemy of the good since we can still discern conceptual boundaries,

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[4] Ryff and Singer 2003; Bonanno 2004; Southwick et al. 2014.

fuzzy though they may be, that allow us to recognize differences and similarities across cultures, both ancient and modern.

Ludlul bēl nēmeqi is a well-attested work, which has been reconstructed as having five tablets with 120 lines each, usually couplets, in Standard Babylonian.[5] Its manuscripts come from the first millennium BCE, but it was probably composed earlier during the Kassite period, based on internal evidence such as the names mentioned and similarities with medical and exorcistic compositions from that era. Since the ruler Nazimarutaš is mentioned in the text, the earliest possible dating is the thirteenth century BCE, but that does not preclude later reworking of the composition or archaism involving the appropriation of this Kassite king as a literary figure to connect the poem with "the stream of tradition." For example, Tzvi Abusch and Sara Milstein (2021) have argued that the hymnic prologue (I 1–42) is a later addition influenced by the *šuila*-prayers and that it reflects a development in the understanding of Marduk's supremacy, which subsumes even that of the personal gods, the city god, and the human king (cf. I 15–16, 25–28; Abusch 2020, 224).[6] However, the existence of a Ugaritic composition

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[5] Based on the evidence from the commentary on *Ludlul*, Oshima (2014, 6) was the first to argue that the poem consisted of five tablets.

[6] For Abusch and Milstein, the earlier version of *Ludlul* without the hymnic prologue, therefore, is comparable to the so-called "Dialogue between a Man and His God" (AO 4462), dated to the Old Babylonian period. Although both compositions have similar content and themes, the style is quite different since, in *Ludlul*, Marduk never speaks directly and his agency is mediated through ominous signs and cultic figures, while the Dialogue includes the god's affirming response to the speaker's argument for the reversal of his fate (cf. Foster 2005, 150, ll. 58–67). While Abusch's diachronic explanation has merit, given the limited number of texts he cites as evidence and the difficulty in precisely dating compositions and their complex editorial histories, it cannot be ruled out that the differences may reflect the diversity of theological views about Marduk in any given period. For example, "The Literary Prayer to Marduk," which has a similar dualistic portrayal of the god, is in the Old Babylonian script but may be a Middle Babylonian text with archaizing tendencies (Foster 2005, 611 n. 1). Finally, in any formal analysis, there is disagreement. Abusch and Milstein include I 1–42 in the hymnic prologue based on content, whereas this study treats the *inclusio* with the two precatives (*ludlul* and *lušalmid*) in I 1 and I 39–40 as its boundaries.

(RS 25.460) with similar themes, imagery, and language, also dated to the thirteenth century BCE but probably written down in the late Old Babylonian period or afterward, demonstrates that the theological reflection on human suffering addressed in *Ludlul* was already being discussed among scholars in an earlier era and was also an issue of interest to other scribal elites outside of Mesopotamia.[7] The shape and format of *Ludlul*'s tablets indicate that some (about one-third) were copies for and by students. Moreover, the colophons of tablets of *Ludlul* from Sultantepe, dated to the late eighth to seventh century BCE and belonging to Qurdi-Nergal and his family, are poorly written and mention numerous *šamallu* (*seḫrūtu*), "(junior) apprentice scribes" (Lenzi 2023, 39). Thus, the composition was part of the scribal curriculum, and the *mukallimtu*-type commentary (K.3291) copied in the Neo-Assyrian period demonstrates this text's enduring cultural importance.[8]

In the twelfth century BCE, Assyrian kings imported Babylonian scholarly knowledge and scribes engaged in a process of standardization, preserving texts but also transforming them as they copied, commented upon, and adapted "the stream of tradition" in their sociocultural milieux and for their own ideological purposes (Veldhuis 2012). *Ludlul*'s style and content shaped and encoded the perspectives of the ritual specialists attached to the royal court.[9] It contained their speculation and advertised their scholarly secret knowledge and skills, allowing them to gain social capital.[10] The style—the rare words and

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[7] While RS 25.460 (= *Ugaritica* 5, no. 162) is roughly contemporaneous with *Ludlul*, it has linguistic and orthographic features that suggest a dating to the seventeenth century or later. Nevertheless, the relationship between the two compositions is unclear, and there is no undisputed proof yet that the Ugaritic text is a direct precursor of *Ludlul* (Y. Cohen 2013, 172; Oshima and Anthonioz 2023, 36).

[8] Annus and Lenzi 2010, xvi–xviii; Lenzi 2023, 346–49.

[9] In literary works, form and content often work together to convey meaning (Greenstein 2016, 459).

[10] Lenzi employs and adapts Pierre Bourdieu's idea of capital in his discussion of the secret knowledge of Mesopotamian cult specialists: "Distinction, prestige, and power can only be acquired, however, if the broader society knows something about a group's secret knowledge, if only that the group claims to possess it. In

specialized terminology, paronomasia, lists, parallelism, and interpretation of Sumerograms—is evidence of this erudite milieu. Moreover, the symbiotic relationship between the aural and visual registers of cuneiform allowed meaning to be generated and communicated.[11]

In *Ludlul*, the protagonist's personal experience of lamenting in the face of divine abandonment and suffering teaches others how to hope in an emotional community, revealing important Mesopotamian norms, values, and beliefs that underlie and legitimize its social structures.[12] Lament activates hope and the constellation of emotions related to it, as it seeks to repair ruptures in both human and divine relationships. In doing so, it appeals to distinct types of authority to offer reasons for hope and fosters resilience when confronting the messiness and disappointments of reality. This article argues that *Ludlul*'s style and content communicate the theological perspective and interests of an emotional community that included the cultic specialists like the *āšipu*, *kalû*, and *bārû*, who were cooperating and competing in the Assyrian royal court and for whom this text was so culturally important. While it has been demonstrated that the poem was "composed in the cultural milieu that saw the compilation of the Diagnostic Handbook and the systematization of the *āšipūtu*" (Beaulieu 2007, 13), in the next two sections I will argue that the following theological concepts from *kalûtu* literature, enumerated by Uri Gabbay (2014b, 10, 21–29) in his study of Emesal prayers, also appear in *Ludlul* and offer the audience reasons for hope: the dual aspects of the divine *persona* linked to a binary

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other words, for secret knowledge to become symbolic capital for its possessors it must be advertised: while largely concealing its actual content, the existence of secret knowledge must be revealed through various discursive means" (2013, 18).

[11] Greenstein 2016, 470; Noegel 2021, 321–22.

[12] According to Barbara Rosenwein, emotional communities, modeled after textual communities, are "groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value—or devalue—the same or related emotions" (2006, 2, 24–29). Multiple emotional communities can exist at any given time, and cultural actors can move between them. They consist of people who "have a common stake, interests, values, and goals." Like Bourdieu's (1977, 86) "habitus," they have internalized norms that determine how people think, act, and feel in the various social networks they inhabit.

system of divination that understands the deity's manifestation in two stages; a concept of guilt/negligence; lament leading to the pacification of the deity's heart; and the portrayal of the enemy as the agent of divine anger.[13] Since lament is such a prominent feature, in the article's final part I will identify other features in *Ludlul* that hint at the *kalû*'s inferior status and yet reflect the gradual integration of *kalûtu* into Assyrian scholarly circles in the first millennium BCE.

Reasons for Hope

Ludlul's hymnic prologue expresses the deity's dual *persona* using contrasts such as night and day, violent storm and pleasant breeze, the brute force of Marduk's hand and the gentleness of his palm, his frowning and attentiveness, his overbearing punishment and maternal aspect, his beating and healing, his imputing guilt and absolving of it, and his imposing demons and expelling them with incantations (I 1–28). The preponderance of merisms (style) communicates the theological message (content) regarding the deity's nature (Noegel 2016, 615). Furthermore, the composition employs similar imagery from *kalûtu* literature and also shares many characteristics with "The Literary Prayer to Marduk," whose colophon identifies it as an *unnīnu*/*unninnu*, "lament, supplication."[14] These include the deity's manifestation compared to the dawn

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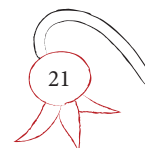
[13] The balaĝ, eršema, eršaḫuĝa, and šuila are the four genres of Emesal prayers performed by the gala/*kalû* priest to appease the god's heart and are often accompanied by musical instruments.

[14] For a description and examples of the diverse types of imagery in the Emesal prayers, see Gabbay 2014b, 29–33. The only type not explicitly mentioned in *Ludlul* is the description of divine concealment with reference to the god's body. However, Marduk's anger is characterized by the disappearance, departure, or inattention of the person's protective god and goddess in I 15–16, 45–46 and II 4–5, 112–13. The colophon of "The Literary Prayer to Marduk" has: IṢ(?) [...] *ilum* ^dAMAR.UTU(^d*Marduk*) // *rišīšu r*[*ē*]*mu nakruṭuana* ÌR-*ka*(*waradka*) // *unninni ša* ^dAMAR.UTU(^d*Marduk*) // *mušna*[*mmir*] *gimir šamê*, "[...] the god Marduk // Have mercy on him; show pity to your servant. // The lament to Marduk // The one who makes bright all the heavens" (Oshima 2011, 170–71).

while his absence is likened to the obscuring of the sun or moon (e.g., I 2–4; I 119–120; II 120; IV 71); the god's destructive power described as natural phenomena (e.g., storm or flood in I 5–7); and animal imagery characterizing the sufferer or the deity's disposition (e.g., protagonist as moaning dove in I 107; Marduk as overbearing wild bull and motherly cow in I 17–20).

This conception of divine nature results in the unpredictability of reality because the god can change moods abruptly, resulting in the individual's harm or prosperity.[15] Marduk is free to act in determining destinies, and no other deity can know his ways even though he comprehends theirs:

> I 29 The Lord, he sees (*ibarri*) everything in the heart of the gods (ŠÀ-*bi* DINGIR.MEŠ),
> I 30 But no one a[mong] the gods know his way.
> I 31 Marduk, he sees (*ibarri*) everything in the heart of the gods (ŠÀ-*bi* DINGIR.MEŠ),
> I 32 But no god can learn his counsel (*ṭēnšu*).
>
> I 33 As heavy as is his hand (*ana kī kabtat* ŠU-*su*), his heart (ŠÀ-*ba-šú*) is merciful.
> I 34 As murderous as are his weapons (GIŠ.TUKUL.MEŠ-*šú*), his intention (*kabattašu* = "his liver, mood") is life-sustaining.
> I 35 Without his consent (*lā* ŠÀ-*ba-šú* = "without his heart"), who could assuage his striking?
> I 36 Apart from his intention (*kabtatišu*), who could stay his hands (ŠU.2-*su*)?[16]

Marduk is supreme because he, not the personal gods, assigns destinies, a role he already assumes in *Enūma eliš* II 153–62 (Lambert 2013, 73). The ambiguous language contributes to Marduk's dual *persona*.

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[15] A similar understanding is found in the Babylonian "Literary Prayer to Marduk," which characterizes the god as unique and as one who punishes but who is also benevolent and merciful, expressing the hope that he indeed hears supplicants' entreaties (cf. Oshima 2011, 159–61, esp. ll. 9–12, 25–36).

[16] This article follows the numbering of the lines for *Ludlul* in Lenzi 2023, unless otherwise indicated. Differences in translation will also be noted and explained.

Since *kabtu* can mean either "honored, venerable" or "heavy" and *qātu* can denote "care, control, power," *Ludlul* I 33 can also be read as: "As honored / venerable as is his hand, his heart is merciful" (Noegel 2016, 618).[17] Furthermore, there is homonymic paronomasia involving *kabattu*, "liver," which hints at Marduk's changeable mood because of the polyvalence of *kabtu* to which it is implicitly compared.[18] Finally, the contrast between the differently shaped Sumerograms, ŠU-*su* (𒋗 with predominantly horizontal lines) for *qāssu*, "his hand," and ŠÀ-*ba-šú* (𒊮𒁀 with vertical lines) for *libbašu*, "his heart," demonstrates how form reinforces content, namely, that the god's disposition (his heart) determines how his hand is directed toward the individual.[19] These themes, also found in *kalûtu* literature, reappear at the composition's end, when the protagonist recounts how he brightened the gods' mood (*kabattašun*) and made their hearts (*libbašun*) rejoice in V 60–61 and with the wish that his personal god and goddess might honor him (*likabbissu* in V 115, 117).

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[17] The association of *kabtu* with Marduk is not accidental since it appears in theophoric names such as Kabti-ilāni-Marduk ("Marduk, the [Most] Honored of the Gods"), the famous Babylonian scribe who claims to have recorded the *Epic of Erra* after a dream (V 42–44). In "A Prayer to Marduk and Personal Gods" (IVR^2, 59/2), which has several similarities with *Ludlul* in content and language and which the supplicant identifies as an *unnīnu/unninnu* ("lament, supplication" in ll. 45″, 46″, and 49″), the petitioner likewise requests to be entrusted to Marduk's favorable hands: *ana* ᵈAMAR.UTU(ᵈ*Marduk*) *rēmēni ana* SIG₅-*tim*(*damiqtim*) *ana* ŠU.MIN(*qātīn*) SIG₅.MEŠ(*damqātim*) *piqdanni*, "To merciful Marduk, to the goodness, to the favorable hands, entrust me!" (Oshima 2011, 290–91).

[18] Homonymic paronomasia involves words that sound alike but that are derived from different roots (Noegel 2021, 261–62). For example, line 18 of "Sargon, King of Battle" has wordplay involving *kiššatu*, "universe, totality," and *kiššūtu*, "authority, exercise of power, strength": [LUGAL.G]I-*en* LUGAL (*šar*) ŠÚ (*kiššati*) *šum-<šu> ni-iz-kùr u-ur-ri-da-nu ni-ma-aḫ-ḫa-ra ki-iš-šu-ti ú-ul qar-ra-da-nu*, "We swore by the name [Sar]gon, king of the universe; we went down (and) we are facing exercise of power (but) we are not heroes."

[19] Scribes considered the shape of signs in their choice of orthography. In the King's Prism of Sennacherib, KUR.U₂, read as *šadû*, "mountain," appears in i 10 while underneath in the following line U₂.KUR, for the syllabograms *ú-šat* in the verb *ú-šat-li-ma-an-ni-ma*, "he granted to me," is used (Noegel 2021, 54).

One wonders whether the confluence of Sumerograms in I 29–36 is intentional, since they all are ways of rendering Marduk's name. In I 29 and I 31, Marduk sees (*ibarri*) everything in the heart of the gods, which alludes to *Enūma eliš* VII 35, where Marduk is known as ᵈŠÀ.ZU, explained as "the one who knew the heart of the gods, who saw (*ibarrû*) the reins," since the first Sumerogram ŠÀ is equated with *libbu*, "heart," and ZU renders *idû*, "to know."[20] In the manuscripts from Kalḫu, Nineveh, and Sippar (MS_Kal I.Q; MS_Nin I.L; MS_Sip I.F), I 29 and I 31 have ᵈMEŠ instead of just DINGIR (found in MS_Bab I.B), which recalls ᵈMES, a spelling of Marduk's name attested in the Kassite period, like ᵈŠÀ.ZU.[21] In I 34, GIŠ.TUKUL (*kakku*) can also be read as GIŠ.KU, which differs from ᵈKU, a spelling for Marduk's name from the first millennium, by the placement of just one horizontal stroke (cf. GIŠ: 𒄑; DINGIR: 𒀭). Once again, the scribal author demonstrates his virtuosity by peppering the passage about Marduk with various learned writings of the deity's name and by playing with the signs in its orthography. *Ludlul*'s scholarly erudition has both a visual and aural-oral dimension, since, in a passage about Marduk's knowledge, a reader familiar with the polysemy of cuneiform signs would recognize how the text reveals and hides the deity's name and identity.

Terminology involving manticism also appears throughout the passage, indicating the overlap in scholarly knowledge and practice. The binary divinatory system corresponds to the dual nature of the divinity. The verb *barû* is employed in divination and designates the discipline and the specialists who interpret omens (*bārûtu, bārû*). While the "hand (ŠU) of DN," which appears in medical diagnostic texts as well as terrestrial omens, is a feature on the liver that can indicate a bad omen,

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[20] A similar learned etymology is found in an epithet in an incantation invoking ᵈŠÀ.ZU (IP 6: BMS 13b): [ÉN *b*]*e-lum* ᵈ*šà-zu mu-de-e* Š[À-*bi* DINGIR.MEŠ?] AN-*e u* KI-*ti*, "[Incantation]: The lord, Šazu, the one who knows the hea[rts of the gods] of the heavens and the earth" (Oshima 2011, 366–67, l. 1).

[21] For the orthographies for Marduk's name, see Sommerfeld 1982, 7–9. For MES and MEŠ, see Noegel 2021, 271 n. 390.

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Marduk's heart (ŠÀ) can be full of mercy.[22] Similarly, just as the weapon (GIŠ.TUKUL = *kakku*) can be Marduk's instrument of punishment, it can also be a sign in *omina* for the loss or return of divine favor.[23] The gods communicate one's destiny through polyvalent signs, both cuneiform and natural, motivating an individual to alter their behavior in order to regain divine favor.

Humans, also with free will, can act, intentionally or otherwise, in ways that please or anger the gods. When Marduk punishes, he does so justly because his wisdom allows him to know the heart of gods and humans. There is reason for hope, however, because while the god can impose his plan (*ṭēmu*) as he pleases, it is still discernible, and he can be persuaded to change his mood (*kabattašu*). Since the signs in *omina* are cryptic and yet imbued with divine authority, the specialists who interpret them have an important and influential social role because their pronouncements have an "aura of factuality," to borrow a phrase from Clifford Geertz (1966), elevating them from the subjective to the supernatural.

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[22] The "hand of Marduk" (*qāt Marduk*) also refers to a type of disease affecting the chest or causing a headache and paralysis (Scurlock and Andersen 2005, 459–60; Heeßel 2007a, 120–30; 2018, 135–48; Oshima 2014, 175).

[23] On a tablet (K.6292: 21′–24′) entitled *Multābiltu* in the extispicy series from the first millennium BCE, "the hand of Marduk" (ŠU ᵈAMAR.UTU) is a portent in the liver that signals the loss of divine favor (Koch 2005, 157). Another feature observed in extispicy is called GIŠ.TUKUL = *kakku*, "the weapon," which, depending on its configuration, could augur a propitious or unfortunate fate as this omen from the Kassite period (CBS 13517: rev 34–35 = Lutz 1918, 90, 92–93) demonstrates:

> 34 *i-na* UGU MÀŠ GIŠ.TUKUL *iš-tu* ZAG *a-na* GÙB *te-bi* MUR *lā ta-líl*
> 35 GIŠ.TUKUL ᵈEN.LÍL GAR GÙB SAGŠU MUR *ša-miṭ as-ku-pa-at* ŠU.SI MUR MURUB$_4$ ZAG DU$_8$-*at*

> 34 On top of the "increase," the weapon (GIŠ.TUKUL) rises from right to left; the lung is not stiff (?);
> 35 The "weapon (GIŠ.TUKUL) of Enlil" is present; the left (side) of the "turban" of the lung is worn away / sunken (?); the "threshold" of the middle "finger" of the lung is split on the right.

Nonetheless, the gods assign a fate that is conditional and not absolute, so that their intervention consists of two phases in which signs (*omina*) revealing intent are followed by divine manifestation, which can have positive or negative consequences.[24] The end of Tablet I and the beginning of Tablet II subtly raise the problem of suffering that is inherent in this understanding, which is not exclusive to *kalûtu* literature, by recounting how the protagonist's hopes are dashed. His speech is identified as lamentation for the first time (*gerrānu* in I 105 and *qubīya* in I 108) in Tablet I, which concludes with the densest language and imagery describing his emotions and hope:

> I 119 *tušāma ina urri iššira damiqtum*
> I 120 *arḫu innammaru inammira* ᵈUTU-*ši* (ᵈ*šamšī*)

> I 119 Perhaps good fortune will be favorable (lit., "come straight") to me at daybreak,
> I 120 When the new moon / first of the month begins to shine, perhaps my sun will shine on me.

Namāru/*nawāru*, "to shine," is found in "The Literary Prayer to Marduk" to enjoin the god to intervene for the supplicant: "Brighten for him" (*nummiršūma*) (Lambert 1959–1960, 59, l. 156).[25] A similar

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[24] Rochberg 1982, 1999, 2004, 2010; Gabbay 2014b, 22–23. In *kalûtu* literature, the first phase involves a divine utterance (Emesal: e-ne-èg̃) declaring the intent to appear and what will happen. The second is the manifestation itself, which depends on the god's disposition toward the individual. While the divine utterance through signs is variable, the manifestation is inevitable.

[25] For line 156, Lambert has: *nu-um-m*[*ir-šú* x x (x)] *pi-qid-su i-liš ba-ni-šú*, "Cause [him] to beam [...], entrust him to the god who fashioned him." Oshima, based on the different copies, reads the line as: *nu-um-mir-šu-ma šal-meš pi-qid-su i-liš ba-ni-šú*, "Enlighten him and as a whole entrust him to the (personal) god who created him" (2011, 154, 166–67). Noegel (2016, 632 n. 132), on the other hand, restores a different word after the imperative, but he does not give any reason for his choice and his translation: *nummiršu* [*ešâtišu*], "lightens (a man's) troubles." The subsequent line in "The Literary Prayer to Marduk" makes clear the connection between the deity's illuminating presence and the rebirth of the sufferer: *bulliṭ* ÌR(*arad*)-*ka linaʾid qurdīka*, "Let your servant live (lit., give birth to your servant) so that he might praise your heroic acts" (Oshima 2011, 166–67, l. 157).

request using the same verb occurs in an incantation invoking Marduk: "Illumine my confusion; clear up my troubles" (*ešâtīya nummer ˈdalḫāˈtīya zukki*) (Oshima 2011, 348–49, ll. 20–21).[26] Moreover, through his epithets, "the one who illumines the night" (*munammir mūši*) and "the one who illumines the darkness" (*munammir iklēt*), Marduk is associated with the moon god, Sîn.[27]

There is assonance in I 120 because *innammaru* and *inammira*, which precede the Sumerogram ᵈUTU, are similar to Marduk's name, which is usually written as ᵈAMAR.UTU and pronounced Marutu(k) in Akkadian.[28] Through bilingual paronomasia, the speaker's plaintive words, which hide elements of the god's name in the two verbs, express his longing for the return of Marduk's favor.[29] The speech parallels the

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[26] Similar language is found in a prayer to Šamaš in K.3927, which has instead *eklētīya nummir dalḫātīya zukki*, "Illumine my darkness; clear up my troubles" (Haupt 1881, 75, rev 3; Borger 1967, 9: 93).

[27] CT 24, pl. 50, BM 47406, l. 8; Linssen 2004, 220, 229, l. 315; Noegel 2016, 632 n. 133.

[28] For the pronunciation of Marduk, see Sommerfeld 1982, 8–9; Lambert 2013, 161–63. The phonetic writing in the Old Babylonian lexical list, *Diri* VII, suggests that the correct pronunciation is probably *mar-ru-tu-u₄* because *ù* is given as a value for UD but not ug/uk in *Proto-Ea* from Nippur. In the Late Babylonian period, the form of the deity's name was Marūduk, which is confirmed by the foreign transliterations (Heb., Mərôḏāḵ; Gk., Μαρωδαχ). Donald Wiseman describes I 120 as "sound play" (1980, 107). Scott Noegel identifies it as homoeopropheron, the repetition of the initial sounds of words. Another example is from Nusku's speech rousing the sleepy Enlil in *Atra-ḫasīs* I 93: *bēlī bīnū būnuka*, "My lord, the sons are your nobility." This literary device also occurs in *Gilgameš* I 18, 86 and I 192, 195 as well as the *Hymn to Shamash* (ll. 178–81) (Noegel 2016, 632 n. 132; 2021, 242–43).

[29] Wordplay involving homonyms and near-homonyms across languages is known as "bilingual paronomasia" (Noegel 2021, 270–71). In *Enūma eliš* I 101–2, the Sumerian writing of Marduk's name AMAR.UTU is reinterpreted in Akkadian using the noun *māru* and the logogram UTU for *šamšu*:

> I 101 *ma-ri-ú-tu ma-ri-ú-tu*
> Mari-utu, Mari-utu,

> I 102 *ma-ri* ᵈUTU-*ši* ᵈUTU-*ši šá* DINGIR.DINGIR
> The son, the sun(-god), the sun(-god) of the gods!

imagery of the new moon, which is the least visible lunar phase. Just as the obscured moon's appearance becomes fuller during the month, the speaker hopes that Marduk, compared to the sun emerging at dawn, will become more benevolently disposed. The metaphorical language involving the gradual appearance of astronomical bodies emphasizes not the instantaneous change of fortune but the gradual process of its change. At this point in the narrative, however, Marduk's presence remains hidden from the protagonist (and the audience). Moreover, the final lines of Tablet II subvert the expression of hope because *namāru* is employed again, showing how the protagonist's situation has worsened when he recounts the brightening of the countenance and mood of his adversaries (cf. *immerū* in II 117 and *innammaru inammira* in I 120) (Lenzi 2023, 132). Nonetheless, the wordplay and metaphorical language foreshadows Marduk's eventual intervention, which is revealed through the same scribal erudition in V 69–74.

The end of the narrative shows how convincing and effective the protagonist's experience has been as a didactic and rhetorical strategy, since Babylon's citizens praise the greatness of Marduk after witnessing his redemption:[30]

V 69 The <citizens> of Babylon saw (*īmurūma*) how he (Marduk) revived [hi]s [servant?],

V 70 Every one of their mouths extolled [his] greatness, saying:[31]

Another example comes from the *Epic of Erra* I 150–52, since Akkadian *mēsu*, recalling the Sumerogram MES, which means "young man," anticipates *eṭlu* appearing later in the sentence. Finally, line 92 of *The Poor Man of Nippur* has: NU.BÀN.DA *ana šúm-ʾu-ud ma-ka-li-šú* ŠUM-*uḫ* UDU.AS₄.[LUM], "The overseer slaughtered a *pasil*[*lu*]-sheep to in[cre]ase his meal." Here, bilingual paronomasia involves the Akkadian infinitive *šumʾud*, "to increase," and the Sumerograms ŠUM (= *ṭabāḫu*, "to slaughter") and UDU (= *immeru*, "sheep").

[30] A similar theme is found in line 67″ of "A Prayer to Marduk and Personal Gods" (IVR², 59/2): UN.MEŠ(*nišū*) URU-MU(*ālīya*) *lišēpâ qurdīka*, "May the people of my city proclaim your heroism" (Oshima 2011, 290–91).

[31] For V 70, Oshima reads: *pa-a-tu* DÙ(*kal*)-*ši-na ú-šá-pa-a nar-bé-e*-[*šú-nu*], "(the people from) the whole districts (of the city) proclaimed [their] greatness" (2014, 110–111). Like Lambert, he interprets *pa-a-tu* as a form of *pāṭu*, "boundary,

V 71 "Who thought he would again see the light of his sun?
(lit., "Who would have spoken of the seeing of his sun [*amār*
ᵈUTU-*ši-šú*]?")

V 72 Who imagined he would again stroll along his street? (lit., "In whose
heart did the passing through of his street happen?")

V 73 Who but Marduk (ᵈAMAR.UTU) could restore him from death?

V 74 Which goddess but Zarpānītu could give him his life?"

Once again, Marduk's name (ᵈAMAR.UTU) is connected with seeing the sun and, thus, divine justice, through another instance of bilingual paronomasia involving *amāru* and the Sumerogram ᵈUTU in line 71.[32] This theme also occurs in IV p, when the protagonist reiterates the composition's didactic purpose, but instead of the earlier precatives (*ludlul* in I 1; *lušalmidma* and *litbal* in I 39–40) he uses *līmur*, which is from *amāru*, as he encourages the one who is negligent of Esaĝil to see his example (lit., "to see from my hand"). The shift to the visual emphasizes the concrete change in the protagonist's situation, demonstrating to his audience the possibility of hope fulfilled. Although there might be uncertainty regarding when the gods might alter their attitude, the audience is encouraged to trust that the religious system is indeed dependable.

At the end of Tablet I, the protagonist expresses a cyclical conception of fate, described as *adannu*, "allotted time," in II 1, in which the gods determine anew one's destiny at the beginning of each day, month, or

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district," and restores the third person masculine plural pronominal suffix on the final word of the line, referring to both Marduk and Zarpānītu (Lambert 1960, 58–59).

[32] Found also in the list of Marduk's names in *Enūma eliš* (VI 121 – VII 142), this technique of scholarly "speculative interpretation," possible because of the Sumero-Akkadian bilingual environment and the homophony of cuneiform signs, allowed scribes to explore the latent meaning encoded in the writing of sacred names. The various parts of a name could be associated with Akkadian words to generate sophisticated learned interpretations to express conceptions of divinity, to praise and glorify gods, and to communicate ideological-political viewpoints (Bennett 2021, 53–58).

year.[33] However, an oversimplistic version of this theological position, which could conceive of the god's will in a somewhat deterministic fashion, is rejected because the next tablet begins by noting that a year has passed, that "evil was everywhere," that the protagonist's "bad luck was increasing," and that he "could not find prosperity" (II 1–3). His situation deteriorates, since Tablet II focuses on his bodily disintegration, leaving him helpless and on the brink of death but innocent of wrongdoing (II 115–20).[34] While Tablet I concludes with an expression of hope, Tablet II ends with death and darkness for the protagonist and those closely associated with him (II 119–20). Again, paronomasia may signal this reversal since the final word in II 120 is *īrim*, which comes

[33] For *adannu*, see Heeßel 2010, 163–75; Oshima 2014, 221; Lenzi 2023, 112, 231. The word appears again in II 111 when the protagonist recounts how the *barû* is unable to give the duration (*adanna*) of his sickness, confirming that it refers to the period of time before or after the gods determine an individual's destiny. The cyclical conception of fate appears in Iddin-Dagan A, 20–33, 169–80, where the new moon and near year are associated with the determination of destinies:

> When standing in the heavens she [Inana] is the good wild cow of An, on earth she instills respect; she is the lady of all the lands ... She takes her seat on the great dais with An; she determines the fates in her Land with Enlil. Monthly, at the new moon, the gods of the Land gather around her so that the divine powers are perfected. The great Anuna gods, having bowed before them, stand there with prayers and supplications and utter prayers on behalf of all the lands. My lady decrees judgments in due order for the Land ... When the black-headed people have assembled in the palace, the house that advises the Land, the neck-stock of all the foreign countries, the house of the river of ordeal, a dais is set up for Ninegala. The divine king stays there with her. At the New Year, on the day of the rites, in order for her to determine the fate of all the countries, so that during the day (?) the faithful servants can be inspected, so that on the day of the disappearance of the moon the divine powers can be perfected, a bed is set up for my lady. (Black et al. 2010, 263, 267)

Similarly, during the *akītu* festival, the gods gather in assembly with Marduk as their king and determine destinies anew (Steinkeller 2017). Furthermore, Janice Polonsky (2006) has argued that at childbirth the sun god gathers with the divine assembly at sunrise to determine an individual's destiny.

[34] The only time others recognize the sufferer's innocence occurs in his hyperbolic statement, made at the brink of the grave, in II 116: "My entire land said about me, 'How wronged he is!'"

from *arāmu*, "to cover."[35] Only the position of the last two consonants of this root differs from *amāru*, "to see" (ʿrm vs. ʿmr), which appears in I 120. While the protagonist voices hope at the close of Tablet I, he conveys his resignation that the sun is hidden even from those close to him by the time Tablet II concludes.

In a later passage, the protagonist paints an even grimmer picture because he describes himself as one "who descended to the netherworld" and "turned into a ghost" (V 32–33).[36] After he passes through the Utu-e-a Gate, associated with dawn and a return from the grave, his restoration is imagined as rebirth accompanied by the determining of his destiny (V 40–53).[37] Unless the protagonist emphasizes the dire reality of his suffering, he would offer only false hope. Thus, only at the protagonist's nadir does Marduk, who "is able to restore from the grave" (V 75), intervene, making the reversal all the more amazing.[38]

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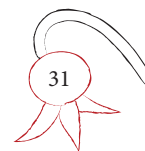
[35] Instead of *īrim*, Lenzi (2023, 133, 216–17), however, argues that MS II.I_Nin, rev 23' and MS II.N_Huz, rev 48, which both end with *i*-LAGAB, should be interpreted as *īkil*, from the verb *ekēlu*, "to be(come) dark." He argues that the manuscript from Aššur (MS II.L_Aš, rev ii' 4') was written by a young scribal apprentice, that it has the spelling i-ri-im due to a mistaken reading of the sign KIL for RIM, and that the former should be considered a true semantic variant. On the other hand, if the interpretation involving the paronomasia is correct, it would suggest that LAGAB should be read as *-rim* instead of *-kil*. A possible compromise solution may be that the scribe chose the ambiguous LAGAB, which could allow for both readings, but it still does not solve the grammatical issue regarding the subject of *īrim*.

[36] The Mesopotamian conception is that the self survives physical death, an idea that is expressed in the account of the creation of human beings from the mixing of clay with the blood of the immortal god in *Atra-ḫasīs* I 208–17 (Scurlock 2016, 77–78). In *Ludlul*, the grave refers to this wretched and uncertain *post-mortem* state of existence and is described as the ending of life, being sent down to the netherworld, departing as a ghost, being meat for an *asakku* demon, or being a corpse (V 31–36).

[37] The Sumerian phrase ki-ᵈutu-è-a designates the mythological location of the rising sun, which is also where destinies are determined at birth and at the beginning of each new day (Polonsky 2000, 89–99; 2006, 297–311).

[38] A similar idea is expressed in "The Prayer to Marduk," whose incipit is *bēlum apkal igigî adallala siqarka*, "O Lord, the sage of the Igigi-gods, I shall praise your

Moreover, the text here portrays the protagonist as a liminal figure, like the *kalû*, who is able to move from death to new life through divine favor.[39]

Even though the protagonist has little doubt that Marduk can save him, it is the timing that is uncertain. Only the god can decide when he will intervene, but when he does, he acts decisively. As the protagonist is about to be engulfed by the deathly forces of chaos, on the

name," and which is dated to the first millennium BCE but which was probably composed in the Kassite period. Its introduction is similar to that of *Ludlul* and has features found in the genres called *zamāru*, "song," or *šēru*, "chant." However, line 40" identifies the composition as an *unninnu*, like *Ludlul*. In this prayer, the supplicant praises Marduk for restoring his life from the grave, which is characterized as sleep:

> 1' You are the one who brings back speech at the great gate of destiny,
> 2' The one who brings back the one who slumbers (i.e., the dead) from the inside of the grave,
> 3' The one who enlightens the female mourners whose lamentations are bitter,
> 4' Lift him up, who moaned like a crow (GIM BURU$_5$?)!
> . . .
> 9' Raise the one who slumbers in the midst of Erkalla from the presence of Ereškigal,
> 10' Me, whom they pushed to the edge of death,
> 11' Like (to) the sleeper of the Great Abode in his sleep,
> 12' You have returned goodness to him (the sleeper) whose rationality was shaken. (Oshima 2011, 246–47)

Several themes in this prayer are similar to those in *Ludlul*: (1) the association of restoration from the grave with the determining of a new destiny at the gate (cf. V 40–53); (2) the supplicant's muteness in the face of slander (cf. I 69–72); (3) mourning rites performed prematurely for the supplicant (cf. II 114–15); (4) the supplicant's moaning compared to that of a bird (cf. I 107). In this literary prayer, the supplicant's moaning is likened to a crow (GIM BURU$_5$?), but Oshima notes that the reading is uncertain since the signs seem to be RI BUR in line 4' (Oshima 2011, 262). He suggests that the scribe miscopied RI BUR for BURU$_5$, *āribu*, "crow, eagle." Normally, one would expect *summu*, "dove, pigeon," which is found in the onomatopoeic sentence in *Ludlul* I 107 (*kīma summi adammuma gimir ūmīya*, "Like a dove I would moan all my days"), expressing the sufferer's sorry state.

[39] For the *kalû* as a liminal figure who bridges the human and divine spheres and who can cross from the realm of the living to the netherworld, see Shehata 2009, 88–93; Gabbay 2014b, 78–79.

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verge of losing his very humanity since he has become ghost-like and demon-like, Bēl/Marduk rescues him. The gradual development of the plot, with its unfulfilled hope and then sudden divine intervention at the last possible moment, is part of the rhetorical strategy that highlights Marduk's power and celebrates his deeds. It urges patience and reminds the audience to never give up hope because there is always the possibility of reversal as long as there is life. It also contextualizes the inability of the specialists in helping the protagonist since their "failure" is not a glitch in the religious system but an inherent part of the binary nature of divination, corresponding to the dual nature of the divine *persona* (Lenzi 2023, 222–40, 279–99).[40] Signs are polyvalent and can be confusing because the divine will is conditional, yet, paradoxically, a person's destiny is also definitively determined (e.g., a king is destined to rule, but his success or failure is contingent on the divine disposition at any given moment).

The protagonist's authoritative personal experience serves as an object lesson in hope for those who might be unaware or negligent. In *Ludlul*, there are only oblique references to the deity in the middle section (i.e., "His hand was so heavy" in III 1-4), which contains the protagonist's lament (I 43 – III 8), but after the process of healing and reintegration has been initiated with the dreams, Marduk's name appears repeatedly in the text.[41] Reprising the *kabtu*-theme, the beginning of Tablet III describes Marduk's heavy hand against the sufferer:

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[40] Yoram Cohen (2013, 173) makes a similar argument and contends that the protagonist is expressing his disappointment that the god has not manifested himself or sent any signs through divination. Daniel Schwemer (2010, 492–98), on the other hand, suggests that bewitchment is the reason for the specialists' failure, resulting in the sufferer's inability to determine the cause of the loss of divine favor and to act accordingly to remedy the situation. For the different types of ritual failure and strategies to deal with them, see Ambos 2007.

[41] After the hymnic prologue, the first time the deity's name is mentioned is when Ur-Nintinugga of Babylon announces that "Marduk sent me" (III 43). From then onward, the god's name is invoked several times, recounting his merciful intervention, in the final tablet (V 13, 15, 16, 28, 34, 52, 73, 75, 82, 104). Even though the deity is not explicitly named in the middle section (I 43 – III 8), the context makes it clear that Marduk is behind the protagonist's suffering.

III 1 His hand (ŠU-*su*) was so heavy *(kabtat)* I could not bear it.
III 2 My dread of him was [ov]erwhelming, I / it. . .
III 3 His furious [pun]ishment was [. . .] flood,
III 4 Whose advance was [aggres]sive², it [. . .].

If Alan Lenzi's placement of line p from K.3291, assigned to Section C at the end of Tablet IV, is correct, the hand (ŠU = *qātu*) theme reappears but it emphasizes the protagonist's role as teacher:

IV p Let the one who was negligent *(egû)* of Esaĝil learn from my example (*ina* ŠU-*ia līmur*, "see by my hand").[42]

Divine anger is expressed using the image of the deity's hand striking the individual and is compared to a flood, resulting in the protagonist's fear, while wisdom is available from the hand of the one who perseveres and is resilient.[43] Singling out those who are negligent *(egû)* toward Esaĝil, Marduk's temple in Babylon, he invites the audience to learn from his example of enduring suffering, patiently waiting, and remaining faithful to his duties and responsibilities.[44]

Both *Ludlul* and *kalûtu* literature have a similar understanding of human guilt and negligence. In II 10–22, the protagonist compares his situation to that of someone who has not been attentive to his or her obligations to the gods. However, he rejects the idea that a person's outward appearance or success is an indication of divine favor because even in his suffering he has done everything required of him and more

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[42] K.3291 is part of a single-column tablet from Nineveh containing a commentary on *Ludlul*, which serves as a textual witness. Lenzi (2023, 87) follows Oshima (2014, 105), who identifies the line as belonging to Section C.6″ at the end of Tablet IV. Similarly, in eBL's edition of *Ludlul*, Aino Hätinen (2023) places the line (called j+6) toward the end of Tablet IV.

[43] In an incantation invoking Marduk (KAR 242: rev 15'–21'), Šazu is implored to hold the hand (of the supplicant) in (his) difficulties (ᵈSÀ.ZU *ina dannāti qātka lişbat*) (Oshima 2011, 414, l. 6).

[44] Similarly, at the end of *Enūma eliš*, a leading figure is encouraged to expound upon Marduk's fifty names and a father is urged to teach them to his son because, "if one is not negligent *(lā iggīma)* to Marduk," his or her land will flourish and the person will prosper (VII 149–50).

(II 23–32). Although he has been rejected by society, he continues to care for his land and people while showing proper respect for royal authority.[45] One might deserve divine punishment even if an act is unintentional or if the person is unaware of the offense. Prosperity can lead to pride and neglect of the gods, whereas suffering can engender respect for them and awareness of the limits of human knowledge and effort. Since the protagonist moves from a notional understanding of the human–divine relationship to one grounded in actual experience (II 48), he can teach with authority.[46] Moreover, due to his tragic experience, he finds solace in maintaining religious and cultural norms as well as in the cultic specialists who activate them through their rituals, because they provide orientation amid the unpredictability of the divine will.

Ludlul highlights the initial inability of certain cult specialists in diagnosing and helping the protagonist, situating the lamentation that occurs in response.[47] This failure, however, does not lead to a rejection of the religious system but a reaffirmation of Marduk's sovereignty. Three times, the text mentions the diviner (*bārû*), the inquirer (*šāʾilu*), the exorcist (*āšipu/mašma(š)šu*) (I 52; II 6–9, 108–11). Appearing after the hymnic prologue, the first instance is part of the parallel structure of Tablet I involving the theme with *ūmu* in I 41 and I 105 and the loss of

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[45] Oshima sees *Ludlul* as an expression of pro-Marduk theology in a polemic against the pan-Mesopotamian religious policy of the Kassite kings (2014, 70–71), but II 27–32 contradicts his argument since the protagonist delights in the king's prayer and fanfare, praises the king in the same way as he does the gods, and teaches people to fear the palace.

[46] The beginning of II 48 is poorly preserved. Wolfram von Soden (1990, 123 n. 48a) and Benjamin Foster (2005, 399) suggest *uš-ta-a*[*d-din'*], "I have ponde[red] these things." Oshima (2014, 88–89) proposes *uš-ta-ra'* for "I am accustomed (lit., "instructed") to these things" while Lenzi (2023, 72–73, 123) leaves it untranslated. Nonetheless, the final part of the sentence has *qerebšina lā altand*[*a*], "I have not learned/understood their meaning."

[47] The motif of the failure of the specialists occurs in other *kalûtu* literature. Lenzi mentions a bilingual eršaḫuĝa (IVR 22, no. 2: 6'–19'), a sapiential composition from Ugarit (RS 25.460 = *Ugaritica* 5, no. 162: 1'–8'), and Sumerian laments (2023, 290–91 n. 16).

features associated with personhood paired with effects of that diminishment in I 42–48 and I 106–18:

	I 1–40	Hymnic prologue bounded by precatives in ll. 1 and 39–40
A	I 41	From the day (*ūmi*) Bel punished me. . .
B	I 42–48	Personal consequences of divine abandonment: dignity (*bāltī*), masculine features (*dūtī*), characteristic manner (*simtī*), protection (*tarāni*) removed
C	I 49–104	Social consequences of divine abandonment
A'	I 105	The day (*ūmu*) was sighing, the night lamentation . . .
B'	I 106–18	Personal consequences of divine abandonment: tears (five times), darkened countenance (*pānīya*), pale flesh (*sīrīya*), trembling heart (*libbīya*), confusion, and discord
	I 119–20	Protagonist's expression of hope: perhaps good fortune will return

The center of the tablet, which focuses on the social consequences of the protagonist's abandonment by the gods, begins with his recounting of how he receives unfavorable omens daily and how neither the *bārû* nor *šāʾilu* are able to determine his fated path (*alaktī ul parsat*) (I 51–52), which leads to his emotional, psychological, and physical distress expressed in tears, pallor, trembling, and confusion.[48] Lament is his only recourse.

The second time the failure of the specialists is mentioned is in an *inclusio* consisting of the beginning and end of Tablet II, which is again accompanied by the theme of divine abandonment:

|		
A	II 1–5	Change in time leading to increase of protagonist's misery (ll. 1–3) and abandonment by personal god and goddess (*ilu* and *ištaru* in ll. 4–5)
B	II 6–9	Failure of specialists (*bāru*, *šāʾilu*, and *āšipu*)
C	II 10–48	Protagonist's insistence that he is innocent
C'	II 49–107	Protagonist's guilt/negligence indicated by misfortune and maladies attacking specific parts of his body

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[48] *Alaktī ul parsat* (I.52) is translated as "My condition cannot / could not be determined (by means of divination)," by Schwemer (2010, 494), which is similar to Lenzi's figurative reading: "My situation could not be decided" (2023, 67, 104–5).

B′ II 108–11 Failure of specialists (*mašma(š)šu* and *bāru* in ll. 108–9 and
                      āšipu and *bāru* in ll. 110–11)
A′ II 112–20 Abandonment by personal god and goddess (*ilu* and *ištaru* in
                      ll. 112–13) and protagonist at point of death (ll. 114–20)

While the quatrain in II 6–9 begins with the *bāru* and ends with the *āšipu*, that in II 108–11 varies because it starts by using different writings for "exorcist" (*mašma(š)šu* and *āšipu*) in each doublet, which concludes with the *bāru*. It, however, lacks the *šāʾilu* in the earlier quatrain. The theme involving the failure of the specialists surrounds the main theological problem of the poem, expressed in the protagonist's insistence on his innocence and the evidence of his guilt or negligence, namely, the maladies inscribed on his body, which act, like omens, as visible signs of divine displeasure (cf. Lenzi 2023, 241–78). Since only the gods know whether a person is truly culpable, the specialists are ineffective until the deities have changed their disposition and revealed their decision. While Tablet I ends with lamenting, this section highlights the protagonist's blamelessness and proper behavior despite the god's disfavor, which reframes his suffering.[49]

The three dreams, occurring when the sufferer is near death (III 5–8), follow the two-stage process of theophanies in *kalûtu* literature because Marduk states his intent before he manifests his power and restores the protagonist.[50] These mantic experiences are unprovoked, underscoring

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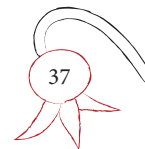
[49] Abusch and Milstein (2021, 127) include all of Tablet II as part of the extensive lament (I 43 – III 8) in *Ludlul*'s middle section.

[50] There are different interpretations of the dreams' figures. Beate Pongratz-Leisten (2010, 150–54) interprets them as messengers of four authoritative figures, Bēltīya, Laluralimma, Ištar, and Marduk, preparing the way for the reconciliation between the protagonist and the deity and conveying the hopeful message that suffering is transitory. Lenzi (2012, 60–62), on the other hand, argues that the male and female figures signal the return of the individual's protective deities, while the *ramku* priest and the *āšipu* priest represent the experts who were part of the ritual system that has failed the sufferer. His reading contends "that the lamentation and doubt that may have arisen due to ritual failure would have done so among ritual participants and not the ritual specialists themselves. *Ludlul* would have assured the ritual participants that there was hope even when the experts failed. This hope, although extraordinary when it came, should not be understood as undermining

their supernatural origin and confirming their authenticity and reliability. The narrative gradually progresses from the announcement of the return of divine favor to the protagonist's purification by the *ramku* priest to assurance in the well-known "fear not" formula to the initiation of the healing process by Marduk's bandage at the hands of the *āšipu* priest.[51] The process involving the four figures mirrors the plot development, signaling the reversal of misfortune and return of Marduk's benevolence.

No temporal indication is provided for the first vision, which happens while the protagonist is in a liminal state, as he is both dreaming and awake (III 8), but the rest all occur at night. The protagonist's liminality parallels the ambiguity of the first and third figures, which are described anthropomorphically but also with divine features. The dreams encourage the sufferer and his audience, reinforcing the idea that divine communication is possible because the gods, though mysterious, are not so completely different from humans as to be inapproachable. In contrast, the experience with the human priests is reassuringly straightforward. The unnamed *ramku* priest sent by Laluralimma, the *āšipu* priest, has a purificatory function.[52] Ur-Nintinugga, meaning

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the normal ritual system, as it indicates that even in an extraordinary circumstance of divine intervention the official system would be employed" (2012, 62).

[51] For other examples of the "fear not" formula, see Nissinen 2019.

[52] BM 32574 (CCP 1.3: rev 5 // STC 1 216–17 = CCP 7.2.u93: rev 1′–2′) interprets the name Laluralimma as "Sweet is the lap of Enlil" (Oshima 2014, 279 n. 519; Lenzi 2015b; De Ridder 2023, 183–84). An individual with the same name is attested in Kassite Babylonia for an officer from Nippur, and contemporary documents indicate that he did not hold cultic office. While Laluralimma's correspondence with a certain Martuku (who seems to have been confused with ᵈAMAR.UTU whose name was pronounced as Marutu or Marutuk as early as the Old Babylonian period) may hint at why the former appears in *Ludlul*, the evidence creates problems for dating him to the reign of Nazimurutaš or later (De Ridder 2023, 186–91). Finally, Laluralimma appears in the list of characters from scribally self-reflective literature in the so-called *Name Book* (VR 44 = K.4426 + Rm 617), which probably originated in the Middle Babylonian period and is preserved in copies from the Neo-Assyrian period (Cooley 2022, 232). While the reason for the placement of Ur-Nintinugga on the list is clear because it is grouped

"The servant of Nintinugga," plays a therapeutic role, which is not surprising since his name's theophoric element refers to a goddess of healing and the netherworld, known as *Bēlet muballiṭat mītī* ("The lady who makes the dead to live"), who is associated with the application of bandages.[53] The narrative identifies him as a *mašma(š)šu* priest from Babylon, Marduk's city, before he announces that the god has sent him (III 40–43).[54]

Finally, the increasing physical proximity between the protagonist and the various figures parallels the gradual restoration of the human–divine relationship. The approach of the deity is a typical feature in Mesopotamian oneiromancy for describing the central event during

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with two other names whose Akkadian equivalents begin with ᵐLÚ, the scribe's logic for the location of Laluralimma's name is not readily apparent:

9 ᵐur-ᵈnin-tin-ug₅-ga	ᵐLÚ-ᵈgu-la
10 ᵐhu-me-me	ᵐLÚ-ᵈgu-la
11 ᵐaš-gan-ᵈᵘdu₇	ᵐLÚ-ᵈpap-sukkal

Furthermore, the Akkadian name associated with both Ur-Nintinugga and Humeme is ᵐLÚ-ᵈgu-la, "Man of Gula." All the names prior to Ur-Nintinugga have ᵈAMAR.UTU as the theophoric element in the Akkadian equivalent.

[53] Nintinugga is also associated with Gula, the goddess of medicine and healing (Edzard 1998–2001, 506; Beaulieu 2007, 9). The name Ur-Nintinugga appears in a colophon on a tablet that deals with the treatment of an illness called "seizure-of-the-mountain fever" (BM 64526 = CBT 6/2, 127) (Stadhouders 2018, 168). This scribe is said have copied the text from an original authored by Ur-Nanna, who is a scholar (*ummānu*) and *mašma(š)šu* from Babylon, whom Lambert (1962, 76 n. 16) dates to the Old Babylonian instead of the Kassite period.

[54] However, a letter from the Kassite period associates an individual named Ur-Nintinugga with Nippur, while a *kudurru* from Babylon (BBSt 3) identifies him as a diviner (*bārû*) and dates him to the reign of Meli-Shippak II (Meli-Šiḫu). These differences suggest that either there were multiple individuals with the name Ur-Nintinugga or that *Ludlul*'s reference to the same person is a later addition (De Ridder 2023: 184–85). *Ludlul* III 39 mentions someone performing divination at night, which may connect him with the Ur-Nintinugga mentioned on the *kudurru*. *Ludlul* III 42, which identifies Ur-Nintinugga as a *mašma(š)šu*-priest, may refer to another individual or may have been a scribal creation for literary purposes (i.e., to mention as many specialists as possible in the restoration process).

the divine encounter and communication (Zgoll 2014, 301–2).[55] In the first dream in *Ludul*, the male figure, clad in *melammu*, "radiance," and *puluḫtu*, "fear," stands towering over the awestruck sufferer (III 12–13), while, in the third vision, the young woman, beautiful and divine in appearance, enters and sits down beside him (III 30–34). The former provokes fear and awe, while the latter offers deliverance and encourages. This enigmatic encounter with the male and female figures with divine characteristics marks the shift in Marduk's disposition from anger to mercy, from confused signs to a change in destiny. Subsequently, the human specialists perform ritual acts such as lustration, an incantation for life, rubbing the protagonist's body, divination, and applying a bandage—the text lists the expertise of the gamut of cultic professionals involved in the protagonist's restoration and thus reaffirms their important role in mediating with the divine world.[56] The emphasis on physical touch also signals the reversal of divine and human alienation. Moreover, since the first time the sufferer's name is mentioned is in the final dream, Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's identity is restored in addition to his health and social standing.

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[55] Other examples include Ninĝirsu approaching the head of the sleeping E-anatum to announce Ĝirsu's victory over Umma as well as the same city god stepping toward Gudea's head and touching him, after the king has lain down in the temple precinct as part of the incubation process (RIME 1.9.3.1: vi 25–32; RIME 3/1.1.7.CylA: ix 5–6). Similarly, in his royal annals, Ashurbanipal reports that a dream interpreter has a vision in which Ištar appears to the Assyrian king, embracing and protecting him before she goes off to battle Teumman (RINAP 5/1, Ashurbanipal 4: v 1″–28″). In the dreams, the deity stands (Sum.: gub; Akk.: *izuzzu*) over or by the protagonist. Likewise, in *Ludlul* III 13, the mysterious first figure, a towering young man, stands over (*ittaziz elīya*) the sufferer.

[56] The *mašma(š)šu/āšipu* priest who brings the bandage (*ṣi[mda]*) (III 41–46) recalls the prologue, where Marduk's bandages calm and revive the (doomed) fate (*pašḫū ṣindūšu uballaṭū namtara*, I 22) and the god releases him from liability and guilt (*ina ūm iširtīšu uptaṭṭarū eʾiltu u annu*, I 24). The theme involving the bandage and three of the four verbs from I 22–24 reappear in V 1–2, when the protagonist attributes his restoration to Marduk: "My [lord cal]med me ([*up*]*aššiḫanni*). // My [lord] bandaged me (*uṣammidanni*). // My [lord] released me (*upaṭṭiranni*) (from affliction), // My [lord] revived me (*uballiṭanni*)." *Ṣimdu/ ṣindu* is etymologically related to the fourth verb, *uṣammidanni*.

As part of the narrative's rhetorical strategy, the visions appeal to the supernatural and to the authority of tradition in their presentation of the sufferer's experience as paradigmatic and prescriptive. The audience is provided hope and reminded that the religious system does indeed work. However, there is never a clear and detailed account of how the god heals. The healing scene instead commences abruptly with a divine message revealed to "my (the sufferer's) people" (III 47–50). Moreover, the healing is imagined as a public event, announced to others by another favorable sign, a snake (MUŠ = ṣerru in III 49), which reinforces the subjective experience with divine authority.[57]

A change in narrative style signals a new reality, since the laconic account of the protagonist's healing is contrasted with the thoroughness of the description of his body. Most of the language at the end of Tablet III, recounting Marduk's actions, is figurative and evocative, using similes to describe the process, which includes a list of the various parts of the body healed (III 68ff.), paralleling the physical ailments afflicting the sufferer in Tablet II. This style, which recalls the lexical lists, activates the audience's imagination and invites it to fill in the gaps of knowledge and ponder possibilities.[58] It makes accessible the mysterious nature of the deity by speaking about the unknown using common, relatable images. Moreover, the list of the parts of the body projects a

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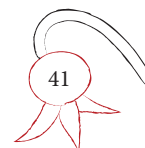
[57] Snakes appear in *namburbi* rituals and divinatory texts (Tablets 22–26 of *Šumma ālu ina mēlê šakin* contain about 500 omens involving snakes) to indicate an inauspicious fate (cf. Heeßel 2007b, 33–67). There may also be paronomasia because the Akkadian for "snake" (*ṣerru/ṣēru*) is homophonous with a word meaning "adversary, enemy" (*ṣerru*) (CAD Ṣ, 137–38, 148–50). Marduk's changed disposition is signaled by the snake (or adversary) that perhaps slithers away, as is proposed by Foster's (2005, 403) translation, following Von Soden's (1990, 128 n. 48b) restoration of *i*[*t-taš-lal*] at the end of III 49 (Lenzi 2023, 142). Another possibility is that the snake represents Ningišzida, who, as a chthonic deity, is associated with Gilgameš.

[58] The salient feature of metaphors is that they express "abstract concepts in more tangible forms to make them more accessible cognitively. Metaphors may thus provide insights into unknown or nonphysical subjects or things, perhaps extending or creating knowledge and enabling its communication" (Coolidge and Overmann 2012, 209).

sense of comprehensiveness and scholarly competence. It emphasizes Marduk's power over all the forces of chaos that cause disease and his ability to heal the whole self as well as the role of the specialists whose secret knowledge is required for the process.

As a result of this reversal, the narrator encourages a more universal appreciation of the god: "As many [peo]ple as there are, praise Marduk!" (V 82). The change in style to third person narratorial speech parallels the shift from the protagonist's subjective experience to a more objective perspective. It is not just the sufferer's personal experience that is authoritative. The confirmation of his testimony by others demonstrates that it is dependable. That divine intervention, even in the direst of circumstances, is possible and recognizable by others is a reason for hope. This appeal to personal experience presupposes an emotional community that is receptive to the sufferer's message because it shares similar sociocultural values and beliefs about the divine. Hope is socially constructed and experienced in the context of community.

Lament as Act of Hope

Throughout the narrative, the protagonist's lamentation models for the audience the appropriate attitude and behavior to have and to show amid profound suffering. Lament has been identified as one of the most important modes of human–divine interaction in ancient Mesopotamia (Delnero 2020, 32). The phenomenon of lamenting needs to be distinguished from the ancient compositions called "lament." Often, there is a difference between emic conceptions of genres and the etic categories that are employed by modern scholars. Moreover, ancient designations frequently had "fuzzy" boundaries, and categories overlapped. For instance, *Ludlul* employs *unnīnu*/*unninnu* (III 53), *gerrānu* (I 105), and *qubû* (I 108) to describe the protagonist's lamentation, but it also uses *tanittu*, "praise" in V 120 to characterize the work, whose prologue begins with a glorification of Marduk. Several other compositions similar to *Ludlul*, involving the praise of Marduk and in which the speaker's lamenting is recorded, are called *unnīnu*/*unninnu* or its variant, *utnēnu*/

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utninnu.[59] Takayoshi Oshima (2011, 219) also thinks that the "Prayer to Marduk," whose incipit is *bēlum apkal igigî adallala siqarka* and that is designated as an *unninnu* in line 40″, is the Akkadian *šuʾillakku* with the same name attested in the ritual instruction for the Late Babylonian *akītu* festival in Esaĝil for the month of Kislīmu.[60] Compositions designated by the ancient genre *unnīnu*/*unninnu* are also identified as bilingual Sumero-Akkadian eršaḫuĝa.[61] However, according to the *kalûtu* catalogue from Nineveh (IVR², 53+), the eršaḫuĝa, whose focus is on the individual, is not associated with *kalûtu*, whereas balaĝs, eršemas, ritual eršemas, and šuilas, usually involving lamenting over a city or temple, belong in this category (Gabbay 2014b, 5, 9).[62] On the other

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[59] The protagonist in the "Dialogue between a Man and His God" (AO 4462) describes his speech as *unnēn ardīka* in line 68 (Lambert 1987, 194–95). "A Prayer to Marduk and Personal Gods" (IVR², 59/2) is identified as an *unnīnu* in lines 45″, 46″, and 49″ (Oshima 2011, 288–89). An incantation-prayer to Marduk (KAR 26 obv 11 – rev 6) is designated as both *unnīnu* and *teslītu* in line 23 (Oshima 2011, 404–5). Finally, a lament to Marduk by Nabû-šuma-ukīn (BM 40475) is called an *utninnu* in line 80 (Oshima 2011, 322–23).

[60] The ritual was published in Çağirgan and Lambert 1991–1993 and line 77 of Obv II mentions the *šuʾillakku* entitled *bēlum* ABGAL(*apkal*) ᵈ*igigî* (96).

[61] For example, Stefan Maul's bilingual Eršaḫuĝa 31 begins with me-e umun-mu-ra šìr("SAR")-re-eš ga-an-na-an-dug₄ // *anāku ana bēlīya ṣirḫa luqbīšu*, "Let me lament a dirge to my lord" (1988, 184–185, ll. 1–2). In lines 16–17, the speaker specifies his supplication as *unnīnu* (ŠÀ.NE.ŠA₄): ˹gú-zu nigin-na-ni-íb šà-ne-ša₄˺-˹mu˺ šʿu te-gˈá-[abˌ // [ ] [*ki¸ šādka suḫ<ḫi>ramma unnīnīya liˈqeˈ*, "Turn your neck toward me (Akk.: and) accept my lament." Other bilingual texts that are identified as both *eršaḫuĝa* and *unnīnu* include Maul's Eršaḫuĝa 40a–42: 8'; Eršaḫuĝa 59: obv 4'–5'; Eršaḫuĝa 77: obv 1–2; IVR² 29** n. 5: obv 11'–12'; IVR² 10 = K.2811: rev 5–6 (Maul 1988, 218, 222, 239, 242, 268–69, 307–8, 309–10).

[62] Gabbay delimits the category of "Emesal prayers" to all genres belonging to the gala/*kalû* that come from the Old Babylonian period and the first millennium BCE. *Kalûtu*, in contrast, is a subset of Emesal prayers. I propose another subdivision, *kalûtu*-like literature, which was composed in Akkadian but was modeled after Sumerian texts (e.g., eršaḫuĝa or šuila). This category would include the compositions designated as *unnīnu*/*unninnu*, like *Ludlul*, as well as those identified as the Akkadian *šuʾillakku* and would have been performed by the *āšipu*, *kalû*, or an individual.

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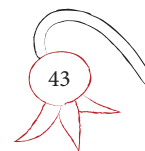
hand, the *kalû* was primarily responsible for performing balaĝs, erše-mas, eršaḫuĝa, and šuilas even though the king could also recite the eršaḫuĝa in his presence (Gabbay 2014b, 10). Although evidence has not yet been discovered as definitive proof, the content of the *eršaḫuĝa* suggests that it could have been performed by or in the presence of individuals (Gabbay 2014b, 63, n. 2).[63] As a genre, the *unnīnu/unninnu* was a complex and multidimensional composition, which incorporated and adapted other types of texts, which drew from both Sumerian and Akkadian sources, and which changed over time. Lamenting as a multifaceted ritual activity involved different languages, genres, and a range of individuals, including the *āšipu* and the *kalû*, since they recited the Sumerian Emesal šuila and the Akkadian *šuʾillakku*.

Lamenting has multiple functions that make it an act of hope.[64] First, lamenting, often accompanied by tears in *Ludlul*, expresses emotions associated with suffering. It forms a bridge so that interior experiences of pain, grief, or loss can be manifested in an acceptable public manner. In the context of lamenting, tears, which presuppose an emotional bond of empathy, let others know that something is wrong and are a cry for help. Instead of demystifying lamenting and treating it as divine manipulation, we ought to understand it as a sociocultural, religious strategy—an appropriate way of relating to the gods, other humans, and the world that reflects positive adaptation and fosters resilience.[65] It reflects the ancient understanding of the cosmos and is a coping strategy in response to humanity's plight in it.[66] Thus, hope is part of a worldview

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[63] If the protagonist's *unnīnu* in *Ludlul* is, in fact, also an eršaḫuĝa, this might explain why the *kalû* is not mentioned in the text.

[64] Understanding what rituals do requires addressing why people engage in ritual in the first place. Just as there are various motives for the latter, rituals can have multiple functions that may not always be consistent from the etic perspective. Thus, it is necessary to distinguish a ritual's intentions from its effects and functions. (Grimes 2014, 297–302).

[65] Cf. Löhnert 2011; Bosworth 2019, 1–37. Löhnert treats lamenting as manipulation, whereas Bosworth sees it as a positive adaptation.

[66] An incantation whose incipit is *šiptu qarrādu* ᵈ*Marduk ša ezēssu abūbu* (BMS 11) recognizes humanity's vulnerability when it describes a situation similar to what *Ludlul*'s protagonist faces: "Speaking (by a prayer) but not being heard

shared by emotional communities, involving not just feelings and expectations but a cognitive and practical orientation regarding reality, which reveals the Mesopotamian sense of self in an "enchanted" world.[67]

The audience for Mesopotamian lament is twofold. On the one hand, it is directed to the divine because it appeals to their affect and sense of justice.[68] Only after his healing does the protagonist burn fragrant incense (*qutrinna ṭābūti*) before the gods; present offerings, gifts, and heaped-up donations (*erba ṭaʾti igisê etandūte*); sacrifice fattened bulls (*lê marê*) and prime sheep (*šapṭi*); and libate *kurunnu* beer and pure wine (*karāna ellu*) (V 55–58).[69] Moreover, he anoints with sesame oil, ghee, and abundant grain the door jamb, bolt, and bar of the cella's doors; libates beer made from red-gold grain; and sprinkles fragrant conifer oil on them (V 62–66).[70] The purpose of the libation and the

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makes me sleepless // Invoking but not being answered humiliates me" (ll. 3–4). Afterward, there is a reflection on the human condition:

8 Mankind, as many as they were called by the name (i.e., exist),
9 Who (among them) could understand his own sin?

10 Who could not be remiss? Which one could not transgress?
11 [Who c]ould understand the god's behaviour?

12 Let me be careful so that I will commit no transgression.
13 Always let me seek the shrines of he[al]th.

14 Thus, they (mankind) were commanded always to bear curses by the gods,
15 The hand of the gods is for men to bear. (Oshima 2011, 349)

Since human beings were created to serve, they must submit to the gods' decisions when destinies are determined. Humanity's only recourse is to lament when divine favor is lost and suffering results therefrom.

[67] Max Weber characterizes the premodern world as "a great enchanted garden" (1971, 270; *Entzauberung*) that becomes demystified by the advent of scientific reasoning. The ancient Mesopotamians were no less reasonable than modern human beings. They just reasoned differently about the world and the way it functioned.

[68] *Ludlul* has a more nuanced conception of the human–divine relationship than the more transactional one found in *Atra-ḫasīs* or *Enūma eliš*, where humans are merely a labor force, supplying the gods' needs so that they can have rest.

[69] Oshima (2014, 330–31) identifies the *erbu*, *ṭāʾtu*, and *igisû* as *ex-votos* and notes a similar pattern of offerings in "The Literary Prayer to Marduk."

[70] Evidence that these rituals are connected with the pacification of the god's heart comes from "The Literary Prayer to Marduk," which has similar offerings
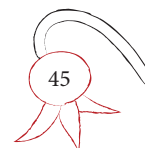
meal is to brighten the gods' mood (*kabattašun ušpardi*) and make their heart rejoice (*libbašun ušāliṣ*) (V 60–61) after his lamenting and tears have drawn their attention to his plight (I 105–16). Moreover, in "The *Unninnu*-prayer of Nābû-šuma-ukīn" (BM 40474), from the Neo-Babylonian period, lamenting and weeping indicate genuine helplessness because Marduk knows and sees through the "scheming" (*nikiltu*) of the wicked but has mercy on the powerless and lowly whose only recourse is the deity.[71] In *Ludlul*, prayer and lament, despite being a struggle (*kīma ṣaltum puḫpuḫḫû suppûya*, I 116), maintain and reaffirm the relationship between the petitioner and the divine, which is necessary for human flourishing. Through tears and supplication, lamenting expresses fidelity toward and dependence on one's deity.

The gods, however, are not the only audience, since lamenting is a social act observable by others. It conveys to the public the sufferer's sense of alienation but is also a critique of this abandonment by his community, colleagues, and kin. In Tablet I, he describes the consequences of his abandonment by the gods and the subsequent social death he experiences as he is rejected by different groups of people (I 41–90).[72] The sufferer inhabits a topsy-turvy world, where the gods help

and whose incipit, *bēlum šēzuzu linūḫ libbu*[*k*], "O Lord, fierce one, may [your] heart be calmed," clearly states its purpose (cf. Oshima 2011, 158–59, ll. 1–4).

[71] The genre designated as *unninnu* is attested already in the Old Babylonian period, as BM 78278 (an exemplar of "The Literary Prayer to Marduk") demonstrates (Oshima 2011, 138). Similarly, the beginning of Nābû-šuma-ukīn's prayer highlights the god's dual aspect since "(only) Marduk among the gods frustrates the deeds of the wicked" and "makes the wind carry off the schemes (*niklāti*) of humankind" (Lenzi 2024, ll. 1–2) but "has mercy on the weak (and) the powerlessness" (ll. 13). Instead, Irving Finkel (1999, 331; Oshima 2011, 324) has *šāru*, "wind," as the subject of either a D-stem of *šapālu* or an Š-stem of *abālu*. The schemer is distinguished from the authentic supplicant, described as "abandoned," "tired," or "lowly" (*nāsû, anḫu, dunnamû*) in lines 22 and 31, by his weeping. Despite being imprisoned and overwhelmed by this scheming, the supplicant turns to Marduk to seek help (ll. 31–79).

[72] Since personhood in ancient Mesopotamia includes an individual's relationships and roles, death is more than just a physical phenomenon and involves a disruption of these human–divine social networks (Králová 2015; Borgstrom 2017).

his calumniators while death comes to those who are merciful to him. Enacting divine punishment, other human beings, normally benevolent and supportive, are transformed into the agents of divine wrath, another theme found in the *kalûtu* literature.[73] Unable to defend himself or rely on his abilities, he is constantly undermined, excluded, and treated as if he were an outsider (I 95–104). In despair and alone, he cries out in protest:

I 98   *ul arši ālik idī gāmelu ul āmur*
I 98   I had no one walking at my side, I did not see anyone who shows
        mercy.

Lamenting addresses both individual and social concerns. Just as suffering is never a private matter but a social phenomenon, lament spurs reflection about human relations and what needs to be changed.[74] In this case, the protagonist complains about the lack of solidarity and the disruption of social order accompanying his suffering. By highlighting what should not be, his lament is prescriptive because it is a plea for empathy and justice.

This points to a second function of lamenting as an act of hope. It expresses a desire for a better future: one laments about what one wants changed. The social reintegration of the protagonist is recounted laconically. Tablet IV briefly mentions Marduk's treatment of the sufferer's persecutors (IV 5–17). The protagonist's rescue is framed as an act of re-creation when Marduk thwarts the forces of disorder, which are

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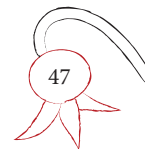
[73] For the enemy as the means of divine destruction in the Emesal prayers, see Gabbay 2014b, 26. Noegel (2016, 621–34) argues that *Ludlul*'s ambiguous language contributes to this characterization of Marduk as the one who unleashes demonic forces against the sufferer when he recounts the king's rejection and the plotting of the seven courtiers, portrayed like the *Sebittu* in I 55–69.

[74] A similar sentiment is expressed at the end of "The *Unninnu*-prayer of Nābû-šuma-ukīn," a lament whose recitation is meant to release the suffering of the supplicant and, thus, glorify Marduk. Its other purpose is raising social awareness: "The work of the weary, exhausted, Nābû-šuma-ukīn, son of Nebuchadnezzar, [king of Babylon(?)]. May they (i.e., the people and the land) come to understand (lit., see) all these afflictions!" (Lenzi 2024, rev 37–38).

represented by the image of the pit and the Ḫubur River. This renewed intimacy between the individual and his deity, emphasized by the clasping of their hands (IV 9), also results in vengeance against the sufferer's tormentors. When divine anger is directed against the sufferer, Marduk afflicts the latter, who goes about with head bowed down in shame, but when divine favor is restored, the god now raises his head (IV 11), strikes his enemies, and turns their own weapons against them. Just as the protagonist is convinced that the gods can change their disposition, even though the timing is uncertain, he now reminds the audience to place its hope in divine justice, which, though incomprehensible to human beings, will ultimately prevail. Lamenting, often accompanied by tears, enhances his credibility and authoritativeness, making the poem's protagonist a model for navigating suffering.[75]

Although the protagonist laments his abandonment by family, betrayal by friends, and machination by colleagues, implicit in his lamenting is his confidence and trust that the deity does indeed hear his complaint and can change his destiny. As an act of hope, it also occurs in the context of an emotional community. The concept of divine justice presupposes shared cultural values, norms, and expectations that can be activated and reinforced by lament. Nonetheless, as a form of social protest, lament needs to be circumspect, since its purpose is to engender empathy from the deity and the community for the sufferer rather than increase alienation by assigning blame.[76] The one who laments is hopeful that others, both divine and human, will recognize that he or she has been treated unjustly and will be moved to mercy, compassion, and solidarity with the sufferer instead of rejection and abandonment. Lament is not just a personal appeal but is addressed to our common humanity and aspirations. Finally, since laments are composed after the fact, they have a didactic and sapiential quality, encouraging the posi-

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[75] Tears, which involve the sharing of emotion and can engender trust by an expression of vulnerability, have an impact on credibility. See Calhoun et al. 1981, 17–21; Bollingmo et al. 2008, 29–40; Hackett et al. 2008, 323–34; Vingerhoets 2013, 123.

[76] Just as false tears can lead to distrust or anger, insincere or unjustified lamenting can result in further estrangement (Bosworth 2019, 31–35).

tive adaptation necessary for resilience by reminding communities that life's crises are passing and renewal is possible.[77] They model hope in the face of uncertainty.

Ludlul's Emotional Community

While much of *Ludlul*'s content and style have features reflecting the concerns of both the *kalû* and *āšipu* due to the overlapping of their disciplines, the following evidence more specifically points to the influence of *kalûtu*. First, there is an analogous structure between *Ludlul* and the Emesal prayers, since the latter conclude with a series of precatives in the heart pacification unit, which contains a litany of deities.[78] Likewise, the end of *Ludlul* switches to the narrator's speech with precatives, expressing the desire for Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's release from sin, for his being honored by the gods and king, and for his rest and "happiness of heart" (V 105–19). These are all consequences of the pacification of Marduk's angry heart. While *Ludlul* does not have a litany of deities, Marduk's consort, Zarpānītu, is mentioned several times toward the end of Tablet V (ll. 29, 53, 74, 76, 104) as well as other divine beings (*šēdu*, *lamassu*, and *angubbû* in V 59). Finally, the last line of many balaĝs have a prayer referring to the brickwork (še-eb) of a temple.[79]

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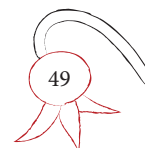
[77] Resilience in communities involves, among other things, strong social networks and support structures, a positive outlook, a sense of purpose, flexibility, and adaptability (Buikstra et al. 2010). By articulating common ideals, values, and beliefs, *Ludlul* promotes resilience and social bonds based on empathy, as the protagonist offers his own experience as an example of the appropriate way to behave in moments of crisis.

[78] The only exception is the eršemas, which lack the heart pacification unit (Gabbay 2014b, 33–35).

[79] There is disagreement over the meaning of the balaĝ's final line (šùd-dè še-eb TN(-ta) ki NE-en-gi₄-gi₄). Mark Cohen interprets it as a prayer for the restoration of the temple: "A supplication that the brickwork of the ... temple should be restored" (1998, 29). Anne Löhnert, on the other hand, proposes that it should be understood as a subscript referring to the deity's return to his cella: "This prayer— for the one returning the god from the brickwork of TN into his place" (2009,

Similarly, in *Ludlul* V 59–61 the protagonist brightens the mood and causes the heart of "the brickwork of Esaǧil" (*libit Esagil*) to rejoice.

Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's comportment also corresponds to the ritual actions performed by the *kalû*. Although he is not described playing any instruments associated with *kalûtu*, his lamenting (*gerrānu*, *qubîya*) is compared to singing (*zammāriš*, I 108), which may allude to the *kalû*'s musical responsibilities.[80] Moreover, the final two broken lines mention Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan praising Marduk, and they employ the noun *zamāru* to describe this song:

V 119 [. . .] *zamār*[*u*. . .] *Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan*
V 120 *idlula dalī*[*līka . . . t*]*anittaka ṭābat*

V 119 [. . .] the son[g. . .] Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan,
V 120 He sang [your] [prai[ses. . .], your [p]raise is sweet.[81]

Furthermore, earlier he offers prayers and supplications (*suppû* and *teslītu* in I 115–16, II 23, V 54; *šigû* prayer in IV 14'–15'; *tēmēqu* in V 54), which are part of *kalûtu*. The *šigû*, originally an exclamation,

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25–29). Gabbay connects the line with the pacification of the deity's heart: "May the prayer cause the heart not to turn (away) from the brickwork of TN" or "May the prayer (coming) from the brickwork of TN turn the heart" (2014b, 35).

[80] Gabbay (2014b, 81) illustrates the musical aspect of the *kalû*'s work by citing the following passage from a balaǧ, whose Akkadian translation shows that singing (*zamāru*) was part of this specialist's ritual repertoire:

The gala sings a song for him ([*kalû zam*]*āru izammu*[*ru*]),
The gala sings a song of lordship for him,
The [gala] (sings) a song with the balaǧ for (him),
He (plays) the holy ùb and the holy li-li-ìs (for him),
He (plays) the šem, me-zé, and holy balaǧ (for him).

[81] Oshima reconstructs the lines as: [...] × *za-ma-a-r*[*uʾ* (×)] × ᵐ*šub-ši-meš-ra-a-*ᵈ*šakkán* // *id-lu-la dà-lí-*[*lí-ka ... t*]*a-nit-ta-ka ṭa-bat*, "[...] a praise song [(.)]. Šubši-mešrâ-Šakkan // (has) extolled [your (Marduk's)] glo[ry ...] your [p]raise is gratifying" (2014, 112–13). Hätinen (2023) has: [*nišūʾ* (...) *i*]*naʾ zamā*[*ri š*]*a šubši-mešrê-šakkan* || *idlulā dalīlī*[*šuʾ*] // [...] *tanittaka ṭābat*, "[The people ...] through the song of Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan, they praised [him], // [O Marduk, pr]aising you is sweet." Although the final sign is reconstructed, all three interpretations agree that the noun should be *zamāru* and that it refers to the protagonist (cf. Lenzi 2023, 183).

neutralized potential offenses against the gods (CAD Š/2, 413–14).[82] *Tēmēqu*, which is a cognate of the noun *nēmequ*, "wisdom," refers to a prayer that persuades the deities and that is often accompanied by gestures of humility or the raising of the arms and hands, like the šuila (CAD T, 334–35). While the Emesal šuila involves the *kalû*, the *āšipu* also performed the Akkadian *šuʾillakku* in the first millennium.[83] In a Hellenistic bilingual text, *teslītu* appears in the context of pacifying the heart of a god.[84] In ritual texts, the balag̃ is designated as *taqribtu/ takribtu* (ÉR), which is often paired with *teslītu* and is used with the verb *zamāru*, "to sing," to denote the performance of both the *kalû* and *āšipu* (Gabbay 2014b, 6, 155–56).[85]

Actions associated with the *kalû* include prostration (*šukênu*) before or after the performance of Emesal prayers and beating the chest while

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[82] The *šigû* of the first millennium BCE were often associated with the king (Van der Toorn 1985, 119). However, the instructions in the rituals indicate that the *kalû* directed the king in the recitation. Moreover, when the king was not present, the prayers were said by the *kalû* over the fringe of the king's cloak as a substitute (Gabbay 2014b, 173–74 n. 173).

[83] The chief exorcist, Marduk-šakin-šumi, reports to the Assyrian king that he has performed three *šuʾillakku* by the riverbank but that the *āšipu* must avoid performing this type of prayer on inauspicious days (SAA 10 240: 5, 20–22).

[84] SBH 58, no. 30: rev 13–14 has: [x x x SI]SKUR.SISKUR.RA.TA ŠÀ.BI BÍ.IN.SED. DÈ = *ina* x x-*t*]*um u teslītim libbašu unâḫ*, "By [the intercession] and prayer, he (or: I) will calm his heart" (Maul 1988, 166, 168). Using slightly different terminology, a bilingual Sumero-Akkadian ritual (AO 6461) expresses the same sentiment: BAR.ZU ḪÉ.EN.ŠED₇.DA.ZU.ŠÈ UN DA.MA.AL A.RA.ZU DÈ.RA.AB.B[A] = *ana šupšuḫ kabattika* UN.MEŠ*(nišē) dadmē teslīt liqbûk*[*a*], "May the people of (all) inhabited regions address their invocation to you to appease your mind!" (RAcc 109: rev 7–8; Linssen 2004, 197–98, ll. 7–8).

[85] Gabbay (2014b, 6–7) argues that ÉR should be read as *takribtu*, coming from *karābu*, "prayer," instead of *qerēbu*, "to approach, to present (an offering or sacrifice)." A Middle Assyrian lexical list (MAOG 03/3, 47–55) supports his interpretation since the spelling *ka-ra-bu* appears in *Diri* II: obv i 5. Nonetheless, what an ÉR designates is not clear since it could be just a balag̃ or a balag̃ with its accompanying eršema. Moreover, in *Diri* II: obv i 1–10, AMAR×ŠE.AMAR×ŠE is equated with *teslītu*, *tēmēqu*, *suppû*, and *karābu*, which suggests that they were perceived as one category.

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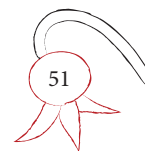
crying out, "Alas!" (*ūʾa*) (Gabbay 2014b, 172–73). In *Ludlul* II 14, the protagonist mentions that he is treated negatively, as if he were "one who did not humble himself" and who "was not seen bowing down" (*appi lā enû šukenni lā amru*) when, in fact, he had been attentive to the divine. Although there is no explicit mention of laceration or chest-beating in the poem, the protagonist states that Marduk lifts his cries of "Alas!" and "Woe!" (*ūʾa ayya*) like the fog, turning them away like an evil curse (III 78–79). Moreover, he characterizes Marduk's wrath as a barbed beating that pierces the body (*zaqtā niṭâtūšu usaḫḫalā zumra*, I 21), but this does not indicate any type of self-laceration.[86]

The setting of the protagonist's prayers and offerings also has similarities with that of the Emesal prayers. After his healing, Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan goes to Esaĝil and passes through various gates, making entreaties (*suppê*) and supplications (*tēmēqi*) before each of them (V 54). Only then does he make sacrifices and libations, and offer incense in front of Marduk's cella.[87] In addition to the recitation or singing of Emesal prayers, the *kalû* likewise executes *niqû* offerings, libations, and cultic acts involving cedar incense or purification as well as participates in funerary activities (Gabbay 2014b, 70–71, 79). Moreover, this choreography corresponds to the performance of Emesal prayers in static situations in the temple area in the first millennium BCE. At this time, balaĝs and their related eršemas, connected with the regular daily and monthly cult and performed before the seated image of the god who was served a meal in the temple, became disassociated with annual cult processions, especially the *akītu* festival. Instead, a new genre, the

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[86] Later, in II 100–1, he describes being beaten by his tormentors' whip "full of thorns" and being pricked by the goad "covered with spikes." Gabbay (2014b, 173) believes that self-laceration may have been part of the rituals for the gala in the third millennium BCE, but there is no evidence for it in the first millennium.

[87] The door jamb, bolt, and bar ([*sippu ši*]*garri mēdil dalāti*) in V 62 are all features of the cella. Cf. AO 6460 = RAcc 119:10, *sip-pi*.MEŠ *ša* KÁ*(bāb)* É*(bit) papāḫa* ᴳᴵˢIG.MEŠ*(dalāti) u* KÁ.MEŠ*(bābāni)*, "the door jamb of the cella gate, the doors, and the gates" (CAD S, 302b; Linssen 2004, 245, 247, line 10) and CBS9 = PBS 15 79 i 59, GIŠ *me-di-lu dalāti ... ša bāb papāḫi ḫurāṣa ḫuṣṣâ ušalbiš*, "I/he covered the bar of the door ... the gate of the cella, with shining gold" (Legrain 1923, 273; CAD M/2, 3a).

šuʾillakku, developed and was employed during processions and circumambulations. Balaĝs and eršemas for Marduk and Nabû are not attested in the Old Babylonian period but appear in the first millennium, reflecting their cult's increased prominence. These new compositions adapted older material, changing names and epithets to fit Marduk and Babylon (Gabbay 2014b, 287–88).

Finally, the timing of Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's lamenting and praying corresponds with the *kalû*'s role as a mediator between the human and divine realms. The singing of Emesal lamentations in the first millennium BCE occurs with events associated with the deity's disappearance from the temple. These include the renovation of temples, the excavation or maintenance of watercourses, the repair of statues and the *mīs pî* ritual, eclipses, processions, and the preparation of cultic instruments such as the *lilissu* drum as well as the daily cult performed on fixed days of every month (Löhnert 2008, 427). Similarly, Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan laments when he experiences the god's absence and expresses his hope that Marduk's attitude might change with the dawn and the new moon (I 119–20). After he is restored, he prays before the Utu-e-a Gate (V 40–41, 46), associated with sunrise and the determining of destinies.

While this evidence does not conclusively demonstrate that Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan was meant to be portrayed as a *kalû*, the absence of any explicit critique of this type of cult specialist is notable in *Ludlul* and requires explanation. Although features of *kalûtu* are described in the narrative, the word itself never appears. This is not unique to *Ludlul*, since the *kalû* and *kalûtu* are missing in the sapiential composition from Ugarit (*Ugaritica* 5, no. 162: 1'–8'), which has an Old Babylonian antecedent in a bilingual Sumero-Akkadian eršaḫuĝa to Marduk (IVR 22, no. 2: 6'–19') and in a therapeutic text (BAM 316: iii 12'–16').[88] The

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[88] Among the experts (*ummânū*) who are unable to comprehend the divine intentions, *Ugaritica* 5 mentions the diviner (*bārû*) (ll. 3' and 6') and the interpreter (*šāʾilu*) (l. 6') (Y. Cohen 2013, 166–67). Likewise, IVR 22 cites only the *bārû* (l. 9'), *šāʾilu* (l. 11'), and *āšipu* (l. 15') (Lenzi 2023, 290–91). BAM 316 refers to the *bārû* and *šāʾilu* in line 12' (Abusch 1987, 27–28). Finally, Oshima (2014, 190–91, l. 26) cites a letter-prayer of Sîn-iddinam recounting how no physician (*azu*) can heal the illness that has befallen the king.

motif also appears in an incantation against witchcraft (KAR 26: obv 11 – rev 6):

13 Without you [Marduk], Šamaš, the judge, will place neither perfect "loops" nor well-placed lungs inside of sheep (i.e., Šamaš will give no favorable signs through divination).

14 Without you, no diviner will set his hands aright.
Without you, no exorcist will stretch his hands over sick people.

15 Without you, no exorcist, ecstatic-priest, or snake charmer will walk in the street.

16 Without you, no one will be saved in (his) consternation and adversity.
Without you, neither orphan nor widow will be protected.[89]

Marduk's agency is necessary in the work of the diviner (^{LÚ}ḪAL = *bārû*), exorcist (^{LÚ}KA.PIRÌG = *āšipu*), and other specialists (*eššebû*, MUŠ.LAḪ$_4$ = *mušlaḫḫu*) because he determines destinies and is, thus, responsible for the well-being of all people. While the *kalû* worked in conjunction with the *āšipu*, the former had a secondary role in the therapeutic process since *kalûtu* did not rely directly on divine agency but was based on the human ability to attract the deity's attention and persuade the god to act. The *āšipu*'s work, on the other hand, depended on the deity's disposition toward the individual. If the god or goddess was angry, the judgment would be negative and the ritual would fail until the divine heart was appeased.

While Lenzi's argument that one of *Ludlul*'s purposes is to serve as damage control for cult specialists may be true (2012; 2023, 281), I would also add that the text reflects the competition and collaboration among these scholars. Evidence for this rivalry and cooperation among Assyrian scholars is found in letters and in their personal libraries.[90] Through the erudite speculation in *Ludlul*, manifesting itself not

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89 Oshima 2011, 404–5.

90 Lenzi 2008a, 71; 2015c, 176–78; Parpola 1983, 8–10; 1993, xxi–xxiv; Stol 1991, 62. The personal libraries contain texts from fields outside of the specialized discipline of their owners. Moreover, royal scholars worked in close cooperation and were organized into professional teams to protect the king and prevent him from straying from the path decreed by the gods.

only in the different theological viewpoints and practices expressed, but also in the paronomasia, which is based on homonymy and the polysemy of cuneiform signs, the narrative *persona* of Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan is portrayed as someone intimately familiar with this scholarly milieu, giving him the social capital, legitimacy, and prestige that comes with this secret knowledge (*nēmequ*). While he himself might not be a *kalû*, through tearful lamenting his behavior is held up as exemplary, and he teaches those who are negligent how to navigate and persevere through suffering. Finally, like the *kalû*, he is a liminal figure, whose experience of suffering, described as dying and becoming a ghost (V 30–41), and being restored from the netherworld by Marduk, attests to the god's dual *persona* and power to save.

The concerns of the cult specialists might explain why the protagonist is identified by the rare name Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan, while all the other characters (i.e., Laluralimma and Ur-Nintinugga) are associated with Marduk.[91] The occurrences of his name are concentrated at the end of the poem, like that of Marduk, often in the context of scholarly speculation and homonymic paronomasia.[92] Appearing three times in the poem (III 44; V 111, 119), the theonym is usually written in the Babylonian and Assyrian manuscripts (MS A$_{Bab}$, rev ii' 11', 19'; MS V.F$_{Aš}$, rev 16a') with

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[91] Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan is attested as a "governor of the land" (^{LÚ}GAR KUR) in a legal document from Ur in the sixteenth year of the Kassite ruler Nazimurutaš (Gurney 1986, 190). A text from Nippur (PBS II/2 20 31) records the distribution of grain in Nazimurutaš's fourth year to Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's messenger, while his name appears in another composition (K.9952) (Lambert 1960, 296; 1995, 33; Oshima 2014, 465–69). Consequently, Jacob de Ridder (2023, 182–83) concludes that Šubši-mešre-Šakkan is based on a historical figure. Nevertheless, the literary *persona* from the poem must be distinguished from the individual attested in these administrative documents, and the former provides information about the worldview and concerns of the ancient scholars for whom this composition was so important (Lenzi 2023, 7–9).

[92] After the prologue, Marduk is never explicitly invoked, but his name remains hidden in the text until Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan is mentioned for the first time in III 43–44.

the Sumerogram ᵈGÌR.[93] As a literary character, Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan is portrayed as an influential, learned, and well-off citizen of Babylon situated in the royal court (cf. I 50–104; II 23–32). His initial prosperity and success are signaled by his name, which means "Create wealth, O Šakkan," but which also hints at his travails since Šakkan is associated with the netherworld and Gilgameš, whose experience of death and suffering leads to greater wisdom.[94] Furthermore, *mešru*, the second element of the name, is often paired with *dumqu*, "favor," which is what drives the plot, since its withdrawal leads to the protagonist's suffering and loss of identity (cf. I 41–48, especially *šēd dumqi* in I 45) (Lenzi 2023, 342–44).

The name of *Ludlul*'s protagonist may also be linked to the secret lore of the cultic specialists (*ummânu*) through the flood story in the *Epic of Gilgameš* and the tradition of the sages (*apkallu*) through learned speculation. According to Andrew George (2009, 13), Šakkan is connected with Ea and may even be identified with him through their mutual association with groundwater and the deified Mt. Šaršar (Jebel al-Bishri).[95] The *kalûtu* literature, like *āšipūtu*, is attributed to Ea, and

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[93] One Babylonian manuscript (MS V.B$_{Bab}$) has a fragmentary sign, perhaps -*m*[*a*], at the end of the name (Mayer 2014, 280; Lenzi 2023, 183).

[94] For Šakkan, see Lambert 2013, 513–23. In line 20 of the version of "The Death of Gilgameš" from Nippur, the hero sets out audience gifts for ᵈSU.MU.GÁN⸢!⸣ (ms: DAG), which is another Sumerian writing for the god's name (ETCSL edition 2001). An incantation to ᵈGÌR (K.2537 = AMT 52 1) also portrays him as a god of the underworld since his heart is bound to the *ṣēru* and his hands are filled with the dust of death (Ebeling 1931, 27; eBL edition, ll. 10–11, https://www.ebl.lmu.de/fragmentarium/K.2537 [accessed June 10, 2024]). Finally, in the *Epic of Gilgameš* VII 202, Enkidu recounts that, in the House of Dust, he sees Šakkan seated with Etana and Ereškigal along with the scribe of the netherworld, Bēlet-ṣēri (George 2003, 644–45).

[95] In Litke's (1998, 138) edition of An = *Anum* III, line 198 equates Šakkan (Akk. Sumuqan) with Ea, the god of wisdom associated with the Apsû, but he has misread e$_2$-a for u$_2$-a. In the most recent edition of the god list, the editors Andrew George and Manfred Krebernick point out this mistake and correct it (Lambert and Winters 2023, 148–49). Nonetheless, in An = *Anum* III: 197–99, Šakkan is equated with the following:

colophons from Ashurbanipal's "temple library" tablets identify it as "the wisdom of Ea ... appropriate for the appeasement of the hearts of the great gods."[96] Thus, the protagonist's name hints at the role of the cultic specialists, whose wisdom comes from Ea, which creates not just wealth but also divine favor.

In the prologue, Marduk is identified as "the lord of wisdom" (*bēl nēmeqi* in I 1), which is an epithet also given to Ea, who fathered him in the Apsû, according to *Enūma eliš* I 81–84.[97] This close relationship between these two deities associated with wisdom might also be a reason for Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's theonym, since Martu (Akk.: *Amurrû*) is syncretized with Sumuqan in the god lists:[98]

197 [d.min]ú-kú	<MIN>	
198 [d.min]ú-a	<MIN>	
199 [d.min]a	<MIN>	

Lambert (2013, 520–21) interprets ú-a by the equivalences *rîtu* ("pasture") and *mašqītu* ("watering place") and understands a as *reḫû* ("to pour out, to procreate"), but it could also be read just as *mû*, "water." A Late Babylonian commentary from Kutha has the association [d]40: *mu-ú*, also identifying Ea with water (Akk.: *mû*; Sum.: a) (Cooley 2022, 236 n. 60). Furthermore, in An = *Anum* II: 158, Ea is also equated with IDIM (*nagbu*, "groundwater") (Lambert and Winters 2023, 116). Finally, Enki/Ea's connection with the western uplands of Syria also link him with Šakkan since both are associated with Jebel al-Bishri (cf. Ea as [d]šár.[šá-ar-MIN]šár in An = *Anum* II: 163 and Šakkan of the Suteans as [d]šár.šár in An = *Anu ša amēli*: 104), which is known for its freshwater springs and which is identified as [d]šár.šár in the god lists (George 2009, 13–14). Although there may not be a direct identification of Šakkan with Ea in the god lists, a sophisticated reader would have noticed the connection between these two deities through their association with groundwater and the west. This Syrian depiction of Ea as a divine herdsman differs from his traditional Babylonian portrayal.

[96] Lambert 1962, 64; Gabbay 2014a, 128–29. Moreover, Enki is the one who fashions the gala-tur and the kurĝara from the dirt under his fingernail and sends them to the netherworld to free Inana (*Descent of Inana*, 217–25).

[97] For instance, RINAP 4, Esarhaddon 48: 4: [d]*Ea eršu* (EN)*bēl nēmeqi bānû nabnīt pātiq kullat mimma šumšu*, "the god Ea, the wise, lord of wisdom, creator of (all) creatures, the one who fashions everything, whatever its name."

[98] Litke 1998, 217, 236; Lambert and Winters 2023, 222–23, 250.

An = *Anu* VI: 230	ᵈKU.SUD.NUN.KU.TU = ᵈmar-tu
An = *Anu ša amēli*: 102	ᵈmar-tu = ᵈsumuqan *šá su-ti-i*

The spelling of Martu's name is similar to ᵈAMAR.UTU, the Sumerian rendering of Marduk's. Moreover, the first sign in Martu's name involves the Sumerogram MAR, which is equivalent to the Akkadian *marru*, "spade," the symbol for Marduk. MÁR, a homophone of MAR, also has the value AMAR, while TU has a homophone (TÚ), which can be read UTU. Thus, these equivalences would result in AMAR.UTU, the Sumerian spelling of Marduk's name. Furthermore, the first part of ᵈKU.SUD.NUN.KU.TU might have reminded the scribe of ᵈKU, which is a spelling of Marduk's name in the first millennium.[99] Finally, An (= *Anum* III 197) equates Šakkan with ú-kú, and the fourth line in a fragment from Ashurbanipal's library (K.7722+9244) likewise identifies the god as ᵈnin-ú-kú (Lambert 2013, 519–20). Thus, Šakkan is called "lord of the beasts" (ú-kú = *umāmu*), which may associate him with Aššur reimagined as Marduk since that word is used to describe Tiamat's monstrous brood.[100] Like the paronomasia involving the designation of the gates in *Ludlul* V 42–53, the scribes may have been engaging in some type of scholarly speculative etymology or playful association of signs in Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's name to foreshadow his fate (cf. Lenzi

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[99] For examples of ᵈKU as the spelling of Marduk's name, see Sommerfeld 1982, 7; Borger 2010, 425.

[100] Interestingly, *umāmu* is also used to describe Tiāmat's monsters in Sennacherib's inscription recounting the building of the *akītu* house on whose bronze gate is depicted the battle between Aššur, riding with ᵈMartu (Akk.: *Amurrû*) in a chariot, and the forces of chaos (*umāmānu ša Tiāmat* in RINAP 3/2, Sennacherib 160: 14). In An = *Anum* II, 292–93, Martu/*Amurrû* assumes an analogous role for Enki since the former is identified as "the great *ensi* of the Apsû" (ᵈen₅.gal.abzu) and Enki's "supreme ensi" (ᵈen₅.si.maḫ) (George 2009, 13). In the formulation by Sennacherib's scribes, Enki, who was Marduk's father, has been replaced by Aššur, and Martu was made his chariot-driver. As a result of Šakkan's identity as "lord of the beasts" (ᵈnin-ú-kú), the literary persona of Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan might have assumed new meaning after Sennacherib's scribes reimagined Marduk's role as the one who defeated Tiāmat's monsters and attributed it to Aššur after the destruction of Babylon.

2015a).[101] While Lenzi is correct in arguing that the story would read differently if the protagonist's name had Marduk as the theonym, the choice of Šakkan may have been more inclusive because Ea was considered the source of wisdom for both the *kalû* and *āšipu*.[102] While they had different roles, both are necessary in Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's healing and restoration.

Both the incantation against witchcraft (KAR 26) and *Ludlul* highlight the connection between Marduk and *āšipūtu* and other disciplines except *kalûtu*. This reflects the *āšipu*'s growing prominence, beginning perhaps in the Old Babylonian period and continuing in the Kassite period, with its transmission and "systematization" of "the stream of tradition" from Babylonia to Assyria, as well as during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I, when Babylon's principal deity assumed a more exalted and universal status as creator and king of the gods.[103] The *āšipu*'s rise in status paralleled Marduk's ascent during the second millennium BCE.

By the first millennium, the *āšipu* and *kalû* were the two main cultic specialists. Like the former, the *kalû* often acquired knowledge outside his field of expertise. In *Ludlul*, divination, medicine, astronomy are well represented in the author's references to terminology and procedures from these disciplines. Nonetheless, the *kalû*'s status was considered inferior to the *āšipu*'s in both Babylonia and Assyria (Radner 2009,

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[101] Another example of this sophisticated scholarly speculation based on writing by a Babylonian *kalû*, also involving the name of Šakkan/*Sumuqan*, associated with Ea, may occur in two tablets from Nineveh (81-2-4, 202 = CT 38, 25 and K.2848 = 3R, 52, 3) (Gabbay 2014a, 125).

[102] Lenzi (2023, 341–42) argues that if *Ludlul*'s protagonist had a theophoric name with Marduk, then the audience's empathy for the character would be different and he might be perceived as disingenuous or derelict, and as a result the poem would lose its poignancy.

[103] While there was cultural and institutional continuity between the Kassite period and the Second Dynasty of Isin, there was also a shift in religious sensibilities with Marduk's elevation, which had implications regarding human kingship (Lambert 1964). In the first millennium, the Sargonid rulers harnessed and adapted this ideology to express and reinforce their imperial ambitions, especially in dealing with their troublesome Babylonian neighbors.

222–23). This might explain why the *kalû* is never mentioned explicitly in *Ludlul* but aspects of *kalûtu* appear in the protagonist's story, and those in the know would have been aware of it. Beginning in the Middle Assyrian period and culminating in the Sargonid period, *kalûtu* was imported into Assyria and incorporated into the cult as it became more involved in Babylonian political affairs (Gabbay 2014a, 140). While *Ludlul*'s inclusion in the more advanced stages of scribal education, devoted to *āšipūtu*, in the Neo-Babylonian curriculum highlights the *āšipu*'s higher status, care must be taken to avoid anachronism since this specialist's gradual rise involved cooperation and competition with the *kalû*, which had already started occurring in earlier periods (suggested by the *kalû*'s absence in *Ugaritica* 5 and other Old Babylonian rituals) and continuing into the first millennium, as this article's reading between the lines of the poem suggests.[104] Its incorporation of features of *kalûtu* and portrayal of the lamenting protagonist recognizes the *kalû*'s vital role in conjunction with the *āšipu* in his process of healing and restoration by Marduk.

In particular, Babylonian cultic experts who had been brought to the Assyrian court during the Sargonid dynasty's attempt to deal with Babylonia might have found solace and hope in Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's plight since they, too, had lost status and influence. While Sargon II resorted to pro-Babylonian policies to win the support of the elites and priests of his southern neighbors, some Assyrians, including members of the royal family, were not as sympathetic (Frahm 2017, 183). His successor, Sennacherib, destroyed Babylon in 689 BCE. Assyrian scholars justified this act by composing a cultic commentary that portrays Marduk as a criminal who is imprisoned during the *akītu* festival (SAA 3 34, 35) and by revising *Enūma eliš* so that Aššur replaces Marduk as the supreme deity.[105] After his father's death, Esarhaddon tried to strike

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[104] For *Ludlul*'s role in the second stage of scribal education, see Gesche 2000, 172–98, 814.

[105] Aššur's name is written AN.ŠÁR on a bead from the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I, and Aššur is equated with this primordial deity during the reign of Sargon II, probably due to the phonetic similarity between their names. However, it is Sennacherib who renovates a *bīt akīti* where a statue of Aššur-Anšar is established

a balance, rebuilding Babylon while also supporting the cult of Aššur in the Assyrian capital. Moreover, his inscriptions attribute the destruction of Babylon not to Sennacherib but to the sins of the Babylonians and their abandonment by Marduk (Machinist 1984–1985, 357). Under Ashurbanipal, the statue of Marduk was finally returned to Esaǧil, but Babylon was sacked during Šamaš-šuma-ukīn's rebellion, which resulted in tablets and cultic personnel again being sent to Assyria. *Ludlul*, originally a composition from the Kassite period, which was edited sometime in the first millennium BCE to include a hymnic prologue that highlights Marduk's absolute power, presents the theological perspective of the Babylonian *kalû* and *āšipu*, who had to make sense of the uncertainty in their lives due to the tense relation between Assyria and Babylonia. Pessimistic Mesopotamian literature like *Ludlul* was a response to the Assyrian attempts to elevate the god Aššur formalized during Sennacherib's reign, whose destruction of Babylonia would have been interpreted as a consequence of Marduk's anger and abandonment.[106] Like Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan, these Babylonian experts placed their hope in Marduk, but they also had to navigate the tenuous situation in which they found themselves in the aftermath of Babylon's destruction. Additionally, they had to contend with the sociopolitical dynamics of the Assyrian royal court, which, during Esarhaddon's reign, consisted of a small contingent of scholars who yielded great power and influence and a much larger group that vied to become part of this inner circle (Jones 2023, 327–28).[107] By incorporating literary figures based on in-

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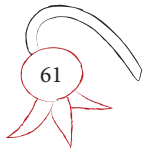
and dust from the destroyed city of Babylon is placed; the gates of this building have a depiction of Aššur-Anšar as the hero in the battle against chaos recounted in *Enūma eliš* (Tadmor 1958a, 159–60; 1958b, 82; Machinist 1984–1985, 355–56).

[106] Ann Weaver (2004) has shown how literature, including the version of the destruction of Babylon in the Babylonian inscriptions, "The Sin of Sargon," and Esarhaddon's AsBbA inscription, was employed during his reign to reimagine the role of Sennacherib and to cast Esarhaddon as a dutiful son fulfilling the plans of his pious father. The various texts are evidence for "the political-theological conversation written by and for priest and scribes" (2004, 65) during Esarhaddon's reconceptualization of political history.

[107] Lorenzo Verderame (2014, 725–26) analyzes the content of the correspondence between the king and his scholars during the reigns of Esarhaddon and

dividuals who had acquired reputations for their learnedness or who were associated with Marduk, the composition highlights the role of Babylonian specialists in the healing of the protagonist, demonstrating how indispensable these cultic experts were to the religious and political system, especially during the reign of Esarhaddon, when those who were "negligent of Esaĝil" (*Ludlul* IV p) adopted a more conciliatory policy toward Babylon and her chief deity.

Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's story, which includes his initial lamenting over the suspicion and harsh treatment he experiences from both the king and officials (I 55–84) but which ends with a rapprochement with Nazimurutaš, the Kassite ruler whom he served (V 117), would resonate, in general, with the cult specialists in the royal court but perhaps especially with the *kalû*, who began as an outsider and eventually gained social capital as his expertise became part of an emotional community:

> V 117 [*ilšu … ištart*]*ašu* (*šarrašu*) *likabbi*[*tūšu*]
> V 117 [… .and his god …] may his [goddes]s (and his king) treat [him]
>   with honor …[108]

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Ashurbanipal to demonstrate that different factions existed in the royal court. The purge in response to the plot at the end of Esarhaddon's reign resulted in the emergence of a new generation of *ummânū*, who adopted a new style of relating to the king. Christopher Jones (2023, 336, 347), on the other hand, approaches the same corpus through the use of social network analysis. His research indicates that the status of scholars in the inner circle during the reign of Ashurbanipal declined to a level similar to that of the larger out-group under Esarhaddon. This loss of influence is interpreted as a political phenomenon in which Ashurbanipal attempted to curtail the power of these elites.

[108] Oshima has a different reading for V 117: [*il*(DINGIR)-*šú li-na-ad-su* ^d*iš*]*tar* (1]5)-*šú li-kab-bit-su*, "May his (Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's) personal god praise him (Marduk)], may his personal goddess honour him" (2014, 112–13). Hätinen (2023), instead, has a break at the beginning of the line and treats the precative as singular, with *šarrašu* as its subject: [...] … || *šarrašu likabbissu*, "[...], may his king honor him" (cf. Lenzi 2023, 183). She bases her reading of the line on a Babylonian manuscript (BM 34650 = MS V.B_{Bab}, rev 11'), where a partially preserved [LUGA]L-*šú* is restored. Lenzi (2023, 183) differs, as he does not think that this manuscript or those in the Babylonian script mention the king in V 117 because the precative is singular (*li-kab-bi-su* in MS V.B_{Bab}, rev 11' and

Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan was an ideal candidate for presenting their world-view and concerns since he was a relatively blank slate not explicitly associated with any group of cultic specialists, but his name connected him to Ea and Marduk through Šakkan.[109] Just as the story would have been understood differently if his name had Marduk as the theophoric element, the failure of the specialists would have conveyed another message if Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan had been explicitly identified as an *āšipu* or *kalû*. What was most important was that he was attested during the reign of Nazimurutaš, a Kassite king remembered in the first millennium as being a patron of scholars (Young 2022, 89–91). Furthermore, Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's insistence that he continued to support the king and teach common people to fear the palace, even when he was rejected by the court (II 27–32), but was eventually honored by the king would signal his loyalty and royal recognition. There is a pun based on homophony in II 32, since the word for "common people" (*ummānu*) sounds like *ummânu/ummiānu*, which designates the royal court's most accomplished ritual experts. This would indeed be a hopeful message

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[*li-ka*]*b-bit-su* in MS V.A_{Bab}, rev ii' 17') and the subject is just the protagonist's personal goddess (*ištartašu*). However, in the manuscript from Aššur (MS V.F_{Aš}, rev 13'), he believes there are two subjects (*ištartašu* and *šarrašu*) of the restored plural *li-kab-bi-*[*tu-šú*], whereas Hätinen instead proposes *li-kab-b*[*i-is-su*] for the verb.

109 Scribes could have multiple reasons, not always obvious to modern scholars, for choosing a figure to be an ancestor or to attribute authorship for a literary work. It is unclear why Sîn-lēqi-unninni was named as the copyist of the *Epic of Gilgameš* despite the fact that a list of kings and scholars from the first millennium indicates that he was a legendary figure. Even though Sîn-lēqi-unninni was a *mašma(š)šu*, who is thought to have lived between 1300 and 1000 BCE, he was considered the esteemed ancestor of several families of *kalû* priests in Uruk in the Neo-Babylonian, Achaemenid, and Seleucid periods. Besides being known as "the *ummânu* of Gilgameš," his name, "Sîn is the one who accepts my lament," may have been why he was associated with the *kalû*, since it has the word *unninnu* (Lenzi 2008b, 140–42, l. 12; Fink 2013, 87–88). With the collapse of royal patronage in the mid and late first millennium, which shifted scribal activity from the palace and temple to the private sphere, there was a change in the status of the cultic specialists, whose work focused less on protecting kingship and more on preserving Mesopotamian culture.

for both the *kalû* and *āšipu* as well as other scribes, copying and commenting upon *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*, whose discourse both concealed and advertised the secret knowledge of these cultic specialists jockeying for prestige and power.

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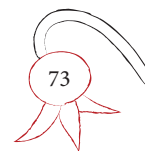
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DIVINE AMBITION FROM MARDUK TO YAHWEH: EXPLORING BELIEFS ABOUT DIVINE AMBITION THROUGH MESOPOTAMIAN INCANTATION-PRAYERS

Ryan Conrad Davis

Abstract

This article explores the incantation-prayer tradition of Mesopotamia in order to understand how gods were expected to acquire power and how the movement of gods within a pantheon could be explained from within the cuneiform culture of ancient Mesopotamia. The situation assumed in many incantation-prayers has strong parallels to the situation of Marduk in *Enūma eliš*. Incantation-prayers fold an individual's problem into a mythological moment, or type-scene, similar to *Enūma eliš*, where a god is invited to rescue an individual and thereby gain further power by gaining the allegiance of both gods and mortals. Deities were allowed to rise and fall in the pantheon because it was assumed that a great god's power made them hard to recognize; truly transcendent gods were assumed to be manifested by other gods. These beliefs about divine ambition also help contextualize Yahweh's own Cinderella story, where two small nations dreamed that their previously unrecognized god could one day rule the world.

Cet article explore la tradition des prières incantatoires en Mésopotamie afin de comprendre comment les dieux pouvaient acquérir le pouvoir et comment le mouvement des dieux au sein d'un panthéon pouvait être expliqué à l'intérieur de la culture cunéiforme de la Mésopotamie ancienne. La situation évoquée par de nombreuses prières incantatoires est très proche de celle de Mardouk dans l'*Enūma eliš*. Les prières incantatoires transforment le problème d'un individu en un moment mythologique – une scène type – semblable à l'*Enūma eliš*, où un dieu est invité à sauver un individu et à acquérir ainsi plus de pouvoir en s'assurant de l'allégeance des dieux et des mortels. Les divinités avaient la permission de s'élever et de chuter au sein du panthéon car on supposait que le pouvoir d'un grand dieu rendait difficile sa reconnaissance ; on pensait que les dieux réellement transcendants étaient manifestés par d'autres dieux. Ces croyances à propos de l'ambition divine facilitent également la contextualisation d'un récit semblable à celui de Cendrillon à propos de Yahvé, dans lequel deux petites nations rêvent que leur dieu, jusqu'alors méconnu, règnera un jour sur le monde.

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Introduction

Enūma eliš is about a god who had ambition. Marduk saw the crisis created by Tiamat's destructive wrath as a chance to increase his power among the gods, and he seized the opportunity (Lambert 2013).[1] Marduk had ambition. From the perspective of Assyrian royal propaganda, Assur had ambition. The insatiable drive of Assyrian kings to extend the borders of Assyria was considered a result of the god Assur's own ambition. Even though Assur was king of the gods, he also wanted his lordship to cover the earth and to subdue those who refused to ac-

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knowledge his dominion.[2] Assur had ambition. Yahweh was the patron deity to two small, insignificant nations, but he and his worshippers believed that he was not only the creator of heaven and earth but that he would one day rule the world (e.g., Zech 14:9). For Israel, Yahweh had ambition.

I use the term "ambition," but I might also use the term "hope." These gods hoped that their rule would be acknowledged by those in both heaven and earth, and they hoped, together with their people, that they could maintain this rule even in the face of opposition. Their hope is evident in their ambition. As scholars who have access to sources that span thousands of years, we are familiar and comfortable with the rise and fall of deities and the ever-shuffling ranks of the divine assembly, and our explanations for the shifting fortunes of the gods reflect our perspective as cultural outsiders. We read the ambition of the gods as a reflection of geopolitical realities or the product of theological revolutionaries. Because of this, we risk explaining divine ambition merely as a result of the ascendancy of the Assyrian Empire or the result of bold theological claims made by the emerging monotheists of Israel and Judah. If we only see things from our modern perspective, we ignore how those inside these cultures viewed the gods and how they accommodated their changing fortunes. In this article, I will explore how those inside ancient cultures expressed their belief in divine ambition and what strategies they used to accommodate movement within the pantheon.

The belief that the gods themselves had hope and ambition is built into one of the most common and widespread ritual texts in cuneiform culture, the incantation-prayer. Incantation-prayers were a part of the professional repertoire of the *āšipu*, a cuneiform-trained ritual specialist.[3] The *āšipu*'s rituals dealt with a wide variety of subjects, and incantation-prayers could be an important part of rituals that dealt

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[2] In Assyrian royal propaganda, the king was seen as Assur's representative tasked with bringing order to the chaos outside of Assyrian lands; for helpful discussions of this aspect of Assyrian kingship, see Maul 1999; Liverani 2017.

[3] For the classic study of incantation-prayers in general, see Mayer 1976. For a recent study of the largest subset of these prayers, see Frechette 2012. For

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with bad omens,[4] illness, witchcraft,[5] poor crop yields (see George and Taniguchi 2010), and so on.[6] Incantation-prayers are petitions addressed to specific deities, which can be personalized for an individual or a specific situation.[7] The notion of divine ambition is much larger than a single group of texts, but using incantation-prayers as a way into exploring divine ambition has its benefits. For example, because incantation-prayers were widely circulated across cuneiform culture from the second millennium BCE to the end of the first millennium BCE, incantation-prayers do not represent the worldview of a single religious or political establishment. They can provide a representative look at assumptions about divine ambition and the strategies for accommodating it.

In addition to their potential representative nature, the dual nature of incantation-prayers adds something to our understanding of how divine ambition was conceived and experienced by those in cuneiform culture. These texts participate in both the category of prayer and incantation.[8] Incantation-prayers are a subset of incantations that take the form of

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incantation-prayers from the second millennium, see Zomer 2018. For an introduction geared toward students, see Lenzi 2011.

[4] For *namburbi* rituals, see Maul 1994.

[5] For this large corpus, see Abusch and Schwemer 2011; Abusch 2015; Abusch and Schwemer 2016; Abusch et al. 2020.

[6] If we are to take KAR 44, known as the "Exorcist Manual," at face value, then the number of texts that could be included as part of the repertoire of the *āšipu* was vast. For a recent edition and translation of KAR 44, see Geller 2018. For a recent discussion of this text, see Frahm 2018.

[7] It is common for incantation-prayers to have a line that reads, "I am so-and-so, the son of so-and-so, whose personal god is so-and-so and whose personal goddess is so-and-so"; for examples and variations, see Mayer 1976, 46–56. This line was meant to be personalized for the individual who needed the ritual action.

[8] The very category of "incantation-prayer" is a modern invention; for a nice discussion of the label, see Lenzi 2011, 8–24. Following Lenzi, I use incantation-prayer as a category that includes all prayers that are marked with the Sumerian rubric $EN_2.E_2.NU.RU$ or its shortened form EN_2. There are, of course, variants of this and also other rubrics that mark incantations; for a nice description of the rubrics used in second-millennium incantations, including incantation-prayers, see Zomer 2018, §2.4.

prayers to the gods. Because incantation-prayers are prayers, divine ambition is assumed in their final section, where it is made explicit that helping the petitioner is a way to achieve the gods' ambitions of greater influence in heaven and on earth. Because incantation-prayers are also incantations, the prayer takes place in a ritual setting that is able to connect an individual's petition with a mythological type-scene, similar to the *Enūma eliš*. This ritual setting makes the gods' ambition ever present for a human petitioner. These two aspects of incantation-prayers will help us better understand divine ambition and the strategies used to accommodate it. When we understand the broader ancient Near Eastern background of divine hope and ambition, we can better contextualize the Israelites' hope that Yahweh would rise from obscurity and one day rule the world.

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Incantation-prayers as Prayers

Because incantation-prayers share the same form as prayers, they also share some of the same expectations about the gods. Like most prayers in the cuneiform tradition, incantation-prayers presuppose a mutual obligation, or a relationship of reciprocity, between the mortals who pray and the deities who hear them.[9] For the most part, these prayers have a tripartite structure that includes (1) initial praise to the deity or deities addressed; (2) a petition for help; and then (3) a promise of further praise when the petition is granted.[10] This final element, the "promise of praise," will be my initial focus. This promise of praise speaks to what the gods want to receive in their reciprocal relationship

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[9] For a discussion of reciprocity, particularly in regard to audience scenes, see Frechette 2012; Zgoll 2003a. This notion is not restricted to cuneiform cultures, nor just to prayers themselves; for a discussion of how reciprocity formed the structure of ritual activity in the both Israel and Mediterranean cultures, see Gudme 2013.

[10] For a more nuanced and detailed discussion of the structure of incantation-prayers, see Mayer 1976, 34–37; Frechette 2012, 129–31.

with humanity. Included below is the final section, or promise of praise, for the incantation-prayer known as Nabû 6:[11]

28	*lubluṭ lušlim-ma luštammar ilūtka*	May I live and may I recover, so that I may praise your godhood!
29	*narbîka lūtamâ ana nišī rapšāti*	May I tell of your great deeds to the widespread people!
30	*Esagil liḫdūka Bābili lirīška*	May Esagil rejoice over you! May Babylon exult because of you!
31	*Ezida kummaka pānukka lirtīš*	May Ezida, your shrine, rejoice in your presence!
32	*ilānū ša šamê u erṣeti likrubūka ilānū rabûtu* [*libbaka liṭibbū*]	May the gods of heaven and earth bless you!
33	*Anu Enlil u Ea lišarbû bēlūtka*	May the great gods [make your heart glad!]
		May Anu, Enlil, and Ea increase your lordship!
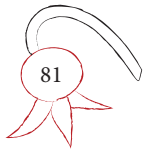
In this incantation-prayer, helping the individual is framed as an amazing deed that will set both the human and divine communities into commotion, prompting an outpouring of joy, praise, and blessing. This is more than just an increase in notoriety. In the ancient Near East in general, it is assumed that power comes from being embedded in communities, and most incantation-prayers, including this one, have two communities in view, the mortal and the divine. The celebration that takes place within the mortal and divine communities will ultimately increase a god's or goddess's lordship and power. Praise, rejoicing, and blessing increase power because these verbs refer to the creation of new relationships within the earthly and divine communities. The fact that the "promise of praise" centers on the creation of new relationships is made clear by a few incantations that include the actual praise at the end of the prayer, rather than just a promise. Tzvi Abusch (2005) has shown this to be the case for the incantation-prayer Girra 2. The final

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[11] My translation and normalization follow the composite text reconstructed in Mayer 1990. Line 32 has two variants attested in the manuscripts; this reading follows what is found in BMS 7 (K.3330+) and BM 113241.

lines of Girra 2 celebrate Girra's help, and they focus on the relationship that Girra's great deed has created with the human petitioner:[12]

attā-ma ilī attā-ma bēlī	It is you who are my god; it is you who are my lord!
attā-ma dayyānī attā-ma rēṣūya	It is you who are my judge; it is you who are my aid!
attā-ma mutirru ša gimillīya TU₆ ÉN	It is you who are my avenger!

As Abusch notes, this is more than offering praise, it is a pledge of loyalty (Abusch 2005, 9). The individual begins his prayer without a close relationship with Girra and ends it proclaiming Girra to be his god, an expression usually reserved for one's personal god. Another example is found in the incantation-prayer Ištar 2, where it ends with the declaration that:

Ištar-ma ṣīrat Ištar-ma šarrat	It is Ištar who is supreme; it is Ištar who is queen
bēltum-ma ṣīrat beltum-ma šarrat	It is the Lady who is supreme; it is the Lady who is queen
Irnini mārat Sîn qaritti māḫirī ul īši	Irnini, the daughter of Sîn, the hero, has no rivals![13]

This incantation-prayer ends with the individual proclaiming Ištar to be queen, acknowledging that Ištar's ability to help cements her status as the true queen. The last two examples that we have looked at focus on creating relationships within the mortal community.

However, just as the praise of mortals would create new relationships of allegiance that would increase the deity's power, the same was assumed for the divine community as well. The "promise of praise" in Nabû 6 connects praise, joy, and blessing with an increase in Nabû's power. This same connection is made in *Enūma eliš*, where the praise, blessing, and joy of the gods results in the elevation of Marduk's place in the cosmos. In *Enūma eliš*, Marduk's elevation to the top of the pantheon

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[12] All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own. For a critical edition, see Maqlû II 101–3 (Abusch 2015, 64, 235, 295)

[13] For editions of this prayer, see Zgoll 2003b, 48; Lenzi 2011, 278; Zernecke 2011a.

occurs in an audience scene that shares with incantation-prayers a tripartite structure: (1) the gods endow Marduk with power through praise (IV 3–18); (2) they petition him to destroy and create a constellation with his newly given power (IV 19–26); and (3) they rejoice and bless him for granting their petition (IV 27–28). This last part, which mirrors the praise or the promise of praise that is found at the end of incantation-prayers, reads: "When the gods, his fathers, saw his command, they rejoiced (and) blessed (him), 'It is Marduk who is king!'"[14] The rejoicing and the blessing that the gods offer are the same kind of rejoicing and blessing that mortals offered in the above examples; their performative declaration creates a new relationship between them and Marduk; he is now the king. This statement bears striking resemblance to the praise in Ištar 2, and it deserves noting that Marduk's great deed in *Enūma eliš* makes him the gods' "avenger" or *mutīr gimilli* (e.g., II 156; III 10; III 58, etc.), and this is the same title that is bestowed upon Girra for his great deed in Girra 2. The great deeds of the gods allow them to increase their power in both heaven and earth, and this power is actualized through the creation of new relationships of allegiance.

Both incantation-prayers and the mythological stories of the gods are constructed on the assumption that the gods have hope and ambition to increase and maintain their prestige in the divine and human communities. The display of their power will win them not just notoriety but the relationships of those who depend on their heroism, in both heaven and earth. These relationships are the loci of a god's power.

Incantation-prayers as Incantations

However, incantation-prayers are not just prayers. The fact that they begin with the rubric EN$_2$ marks them as incantations and indicates a ritual framing around these prayers that allows them to be more than

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[14] *kīma ṣīt pîšu īmurū ilānū abbūšu / iḫdû ikrubū Marduk-ma šarru* (translation from Lambert 2013, 86–87: IV 27–28).

just prayers.[15] Incantations, of which incantation-prayers can be seen as a subset, are a large and diverse collection of texts that vary in their form and function.[16] One type of incantation, known as the Marduk-Ea type, can provide for us a model for understanding incantation-prayers. These incantations explicitly fold an individual's problems into a mythological narrative.[17] This mythological narrative elevates a human problem into a situation that places it within the divine realm. One example of a Marduk-Ea type incantation found in the *Šurpu* ritual provides a helpful illustration (Reiner 1958, 30–31: V–VI 1–59). The incantation begins as a narrative, where Marduk notices "an evil curse"[18] affecting the individual for whom the ritual is performed (1–18). Marduk proceeds to Ea and admits that he has no idea what to do (19–26). Ea reassures Marduk that he does indeed know what to do and explains how to get rid of the ailment (27–59). The succeeding incantations in *Šurpu* carry out the orders of Ea. The problems of the *āšipu* and his client

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[15] The Sumerian rubric EN$_2$ and its variants (see note 8) stands for the Akkadian term *šiptu*, which is conventionally translated as "incantation." By labeling these texts as incantations, cuneiform scribes are associating these texts with one of the gods' most powerful weapons and resources. For the importance of the incantation in the divine conflict depicted in *Enūma eliš*, see note 37. The story of Adapa can be read as an etiology of how this divine resource came to be wielded by humankind. As noted by Piotr Michalowski: "By tricking Adapa into not accepting immortality Ea forces Anu to recognize the magical power of words and to provide an institutional form for the utilization of that power—*āšipūtu*" (1980, 81 [spelling adapted from original]).

[16] For a typology of a limited number of Akkadian incantations, which excludes incantation-prayers, see Schwemer 2014. Schwemer discusses a previous attempt by Adam Falkenstein (1931) for Sumerian incantations and also Benjamin Foster's (2007) attempt to use Falkenstein's typology for Akkadian incantations.

[17] A short narrative at the beginning of a magical text is known as a "historiola," and these narratives are not restricted to just the Marduk-Ea type of incantations (Schwemer 2014, 277–79). Daniel Schwemer explains that "narrative sections (historiola) occur regularly, especially … at the beginning of incantations. They create the cosmological or mythological context in which the text should be understood or present a poetic image that sets the tone for the following text" (2014, 278).

[18] *arrat lemuttim kīma gallê ana amīli ittaškan* (Reiner 1958, 30: V–VI 2).

are folded into a mythological moment, and now the actions on earth become a mirror for what has taken place in the divine realm.[19] We can read many incantation-prayers in a similar way.

Incantation-prayers are created to meet the needs of certain recurring situations, such as illness, by allowing the individual to situate his or her problems into a larger narrative; no longer is this merely a case of illness, but it becomes a mythological moment.[20] For incantation-prayers, the mythological moment that becomes the backdrop for the ritual is implicit. Rather than introducing the mythological moment with a narrator's voice, it is painted through the words of the petitioner in the incantation-prayer. As noted above, incantation-prayers set up an audience scene similar to what is described in *Enūma eliš*, where the problem brought by the individual is now the opportunity for this god to perform a great deed, which will bring them greater power in both heaven and earth.[21] The incantation aspect of incantation-prayers allows the petitioner to step inside a ritual moment that mirrors the mythological moment that is depicted in *Enūma eliš*. It is probably best

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[19] Later in *Šurpu*, the *āšipu* says: "I am the purified, clean (priest) of Ea, the messenger of Marduk" (translation from Reiner 1958, 35: V–VI 175). When this incantation is set within *Šurpu*, the *āšipu* becomes the messenger who is carrying out the orders of Marduk and Ea to release the individual from their problems. On other occasions, it is not uncommon for an *āšipu* to claim that the incantation is not his own, but the words of the gods; for examples and discussion, see Lenzi 2010b. Within the craft of the *āšipu*, not only does the *āšipu* claim to be following a divine directive or using divinely appointed words, within certain ritual environments, such as the ritual *bīt mēseri*, the *āšipu* claims *šiptu šipat ͩMarduk āšipu ṣalam ͩMarduk* ("the incantation is the incantation of Marduk; the *āšipu* is the image of Marduk" [Meier 1941, 150: 225–26; Beaulieu 2007, 18n41]). For discussion about the *āšipu*'s connection to Marduk within ritual environments and scholarly hermeneutics, see Gabbay 2018, 2022.

[20] David Frankfurter explains that "it is not simply undifferentiated power that is unleashed through historiolae, but precedence and paradigm … confronted with an unresolved situation, the ritualist formulates, out of traditional terms and characters, a precedent in which the same situation is resolved" (1995, 465–66).

[21] This builds on the work of Annette Zgoll (2003a), who demonstrates that *šuila*-prayers, a subset of incantation-prayers, are framed as an audience scene between the human petitioner and the addressed god.

to see the similarities between both incantation-prayers and *Enūma eliš* as a result of them drawing on a common type-scene, with *Enūma eliš* providing the most paradigmatic example.[22] In incantation-prayers, the individual's crisis is folded into a moment where divine actors are involved, similar to the Marduk-Ea type incantation. It is not entirely clear whether this mythological moment is expected to be set within the past, or whether it is thought to take place in the present time.[23] Either way, what happens among the gods is bound up and tied to what is taking place within the life of the individual, possibly implying that this pivotal moment has happened before and that it can happen again in the life of the individual.[24]

We have already pointed to *Enūma eliš* to understand incantation-prayers, but because these both share a common type-scene, there are closer ties between the moment narrated in incantation-prayers and the moment of Marduk's elevation among the gods. As I outline the story that is assumed in incantation-prayers, I will refer to *Enūma eliš* to flesh out this narrative.

As noted above, both incantation-prayers and Marduk's elevation share a similar tripartite structure: (1) praise; (2) petition; and (3) either

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[22] I take the idea of a type-scene, or a conventional literary or narrative scene, from Robert Alter's (2011, 55–78) work on biblical narrative.

[23] Marduk-Ea type incantations depict Marduk as insecure and still under the tutelage of Ea, which is at odds with how Marduk is typically depicted in the first millennium BCE. Although modern scholars might argue that Marduk's depiction in this incantation is merely a result of the particular historical development of this type of incantation, this would not help us understand how cuneiform scribes understood this in the first millennium. Cuneiform scribes may have assumed that a petitioner's current problem is linked to an event in the past, or Marduk's depiction might indicate that time is irrelevant in mythological stories, so that the events in the heavens can be constantly present and recurring.

[24] Frankfurter argues that "a myth by definition functions to articulate precedent for present circumstances. The mythic time in which precedents and paradigms are set is typically the past, but not necessarily … The historiola's link between times is not as important as its link between a human dimension where action is open-ended and a mythic dimension where actions are completed and tensions have been resolved" (1995, 465–66).

the promise of praise or the actual praise for a granted petition. The praise found in incantation-prayers helps paint the mythological world that is evoked within the ritual environment and ties them to a situation similar to that which obtains in *Enūma eliš*. Incantation-prayers participate in this mythological type-scene by addressing the respective deity as if they are an all-powerful deity at the top of the pantheon. They are commonly said to be the "foremost of the gods"[25] or even the "king"[26] or "queen."[27] It is commonly said that their command cannot be changed,[28] and emphasis is placed on the fact that, of all of the gods,

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[25] Kaksisa 2 = *ašarēd ilānī rabûti* ("foremost of the great gods" [Mayer 1990, 470: 1]); Nabû 6 = *ašarēd ᵈIgigi āšir ᵈAnunnaki* ("foremost of the Igigi, inspector of the Anunnaki" [Mayer 1990, 461: 8]); Ninurta 1 = *ašarēd ilānī* ("foremost of the gods" [Ebeling 1953, 26: 25; Foster 2005, 712: 15]); Sîn 3 = *ašarēd šamê u erṣetim* ("foremost of heaven and earth" [Mayer 1976, 496: 39]); Šamaš 1 = *Šamaš ašarēd ilānī* ("Šamaš, the foremost of the gods" [Mayer 1976, 509: 128]).

[26] Zappu 3 = *šar ilānī gašrūti* ("king of the mighty gods" [King 1896, 117: 5]); Sîn 3 = *šar kibrāti* ("king of the world" [Mayer 1976, 496: 38]); Ištar 31 = *[šar]rūt šamê u erṣetim iqīški Enlil* ("Enlil gave you the kingship of heaven and earth" [Zgoll 2003b, 100: 11]); Ea 1a = *šar nēmeqi* ("O wise king" [Ebeling 1953, 66: 29; translation follows Foster 2005, 643]); Enlil 1a = *šar šarrānī* ("king of kings" [Ebeling 1953, 20: 32]); Marduk 19 = *ᵈDagan bēlūtka ᵈEnlil šarrūtka (*"Dagan is your lordship, Enlil is your kingship" [Ebeling 1953, 14: 4]).

[27] Damkina 1 = *ᵈDamkina šarrat kal ilānī šaqītu* ("O Damkina, exalted queen of all the gods" [Mayer 1976, 441: 9]); *šurbâti ina ilānī* ("You are the greatest among the gods" [Mayer 1976, 441: 12]); Ištar 1 = *ᵈIštar Anâtī-ma šamê tabellī* ("O Ištar, you are Anu; you rule the heavens" [Zgoll 2003b, 192: 5]).

[28] Enlil 1b = *rabû malku ša lā [uttakkaru qibīss]u / ša amāt pîšu lā innennû* ("O Great One, Prince, whose command cannot be changed / whose word cannot be revoked" [KAR 23+25 iii 24–25; Lenzi 2019]); Gula 1a = Bēlet-ilī 1 = *ᵈGula bēltu šurbūtu ina amāt qibītīki ṣīrti ša ina Ekur šurbât / u annīki kīnim ša lā innennû* ("O Gula, exalted Lady, by the word of your august command, which is the greatest in Ekur / and your firm 'yes' which cannot be revoked" [Mayer 1976, 453: 85–86]); Marduk 5 = *tizqāru ṣīru ša lā uttakkaru [epiš/ṣīt] pîšu* ("Supreme One, August One whose word cannot be changed" [Mayer 1993, 316: 19]); Marduk 19 = *ina ṣīt amātīkunu ša lā uttakkaru* ("by your command which cannot be changed" [Oshima 2011, 388: 21]); Nabû 2 = *ina qibītīka ṣīrti ša lā uttakkaru / u annīka kīni ša lā innennû* ("by your august word which cannot be changed / and your firm 'yes' which cannot be revoked" [Abusch and Schwemer 2016, 345: 31–32 (Text 9.7)]);

the petitioner has selected this god alone to help them.[29] The persona is almost more important than the god or goddess, since some incantation-prayers merely switch the name of the god or goddess from one to another.[30] The praise of the power of the deity found in the first part of incantation-prayers finds a parallel in the beginning of the praise given to Marduk by the gods:

> You are the most honored among the great gods
> Your destiny is unequalled, your command is like Anu's.
> Marduk, you are the most honored among the great gods,
> Your destiny is unequalled, your command is like Anu's.[31]

Šamaš 5 = [*ina qib*]*ītīka rabīti ša lā uttakkaru u annīka kīni ša lā innennû* ("[by] your great [wo]rd which cannot be changed and your firm 'yes' which cannot be revoked" [Maul 1994, 392, line 12']); Tašmētu 1 = *ina qibītīki ṣīrti ša lā uttakkaru u annīki kīni ša lā innennû* ("by your august word, which cannot be changed and your firm 'yes' which cannot be revoked" [Ebeling 1953, 126, BMS 53 rev 36; Van Buylaere 2010, CTN 4 168 rev i 41–43]); Tašmētu 2 *kabitti šamê ellūti ša <lā> innennû qibīssa* 'Important one of the pure heavens, whose word cannot be revoked' (Van Buylaere 2010, CTN 4 168 obv ii 40); Gula 1b = *ina amāt qibītīki ṣīrti ša ina Ekur šu*[*rbât*] / *u annīki kīni ša lā innennû* ("by your august command which is the greatest in Ekur and your firm 'yes' which cannot be revoked" [Mayer 1976, 457, 29–30]); Ereqqu 2 = *ina qibīt ilūtīki rabīti ša lā uttakkaru / u annīki kīni ša lā innennû* ("by the word of your great divinity, which cannot be changed / and your firm 'yes' which cannot be revoked" [SpTU IV 129 v 44–45]).

[29] Gula 1a = Bēlet-ilī 1 = *ina maʾdūti kakkabī šamāmī / bēltu kâši asḫurki ibšâki uznāya* ("Among the many stars of the heavens, / O Lady, to you I turn; my attention is on you" [Mayer 1976, 452: 78–79]); Bēlet-ilī 2 (LKA 59) = *bēltī ina ilānī nabi šumūki / bēltī ina kala kakkabī šamāmē / šaqâti manzaza ina šamê šubatki ṣīrat / [ ]ki bēltu ina kala ilānī aḫḫīki / usappīki ina kal gimir šamāmē* ("My lady, your name is named among the gods. My lady, among all the stars of heaven, you are exalted in station, your dwelling is exalted in the heavens … you, O Lady, among all the gods your brothers. I pray to you among all the entire heavens" [Ebeling 1953, 136: LKA 59, 11–15; Lenzi 2017b, lines 11–15]); Enlil 1a = *ina maʾdūti kakkabī šamāmī bēlī atkalka* ("Among the many stars of the heavens, I trust in you, my lord" [Lenzi 2017a, obv 18'–19'; 2017c, obv 16–17]).

[30] Deities that have their names swapped include Ea and Marduk (see Enlil 1a in Abusch and Schwemer 2016, 2:332–340 [Text 9.6]); Bēlet-ilī and Gula (see Gula 1a = Bēlet-ilī 1 in Mayer 1976, 450–54).

[31] Translation from Lambert 2013, 87: IV 3–7.

This praise in both style and content would be at home in the praise of incantation-prayers. However, reading it in the context of *Enūma eliš* we learn that this praise is not just telling Marduk about his attributes; rather, it is a part of the actual decree of destinies that empowers Marduk to defeat Tiamat. In the same way, because incantation-prayers are marked as incantations, they are invested with divine power and they empower the gods they address to meet the problem that affects the petitioner.[32] Among the many purposes we can see for the hymnic introduction found in incantation-prayers, we must also understand this praise as something that contributes to the actual empowerment of the gods addressed.[33]

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[32] The power and importance of a god's incantation (*šiptu*) or spell (*tû*) is a prominent theme in *Enūma eliš*. Ea uses his spell (*tû*) to defeat Apsû and supplant him (I 62–69). When Tiamat endows Qingu with power, she does this by first using her spell (*tû*). She says: "I have cast the spell for you and exalted you in the host of the gods. I have delivered to you the rule of the gods" (translation from Lambert 2013, 58–59: I 153–54). This spell, together with the Tablet of Destinies, gives him rule over the gods (I 154), and it allows his word to be unalterable (I 158). When Ea and Anu attempt to stop Tiamat at the urging of Anšar, they both acknowledge that their incantation (*šiptu*) is not as powerful as hers (II 77–86; II 109–10). Marduk is only able to attack Tiamat with a spell (*tû*; IV 60–61) when he has been endowed with power through the potent word of the gods who meet Marduk and endow him with power through their praise (IV 1–34).

[33] The hymnic introductions vary in size and prominence, depending on the type of incantation-prayer; Christopher Frechette (2012, 134–35) argues that a long hymnic introduction is a hallmark of *šuila*-prayers. Both Alan Lenzi (2010a) and Anna Zernecke (2011b) review past approaches to these hymnic introductions and make compelling cases for understanding the length of the initial praise to be connected with the petitioner's relationship with the addressed deity. Joel Hunt is certainly correct that the initial praise "gives the supplicant the confidence needed to offer complaint and requests that follow with the expectation that life may become brighter" (2010, 192). In addition to these considerations, it is important to remember that the initial praises of incantation-prayers are themselves a part of incantations directed at the gods. This powerful speech empowers the divine addressee, just as the powerful speech of the gods empowered Marduk at his coronation (IV 1–34). As Lenzi notes: "From an institutional rather than from a textual perspective many ritual-prayers could also be considered divine speech

In *Enūma eliš*, the gods petition Marduk to destroy and create a con-stellation, which he does, and then they proclaim him king. We have already shown that the same situation is described in incantation-prayers: if the god is able to perform the heroic deed, then both mortals and deities will create new relationships of allegiance and elevate the power of the god.[34]

Thus, if we are going to describe the scene depicted in many incantation-prayers, we would say that the individual stands before the only god who has a chance of fixing the problem in the individual's life. The individual has come before them with a powerful incantation that is meant to empower the addressed deity and give them the ability they need to achieve their fame, recognition, and power in both heaven and earth. It is this moment that everything comes down to. Just as Marduk needed the crisis of Tiamat to be recognized and elevated, the ritual moment tells a similar story about an individual god or goddess who chooses to meet their moment.

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because the gods had delivered them to the institutional experts" (2011, 22). This institutional perspective might be a reason that three incantation-prayers (Gula 5, Marduk 26, and Ištar 28) include the statement that "the incantation is not mine; it is the incantation of DN" (for a discussion of these phrases in incantation-prayers and a different perspective, see Lenzi 2010b, 156–60). We can also note that all of *āšipūtu* was ascribed to Ea in the "Catalogue of Texts and Authors" (Lambert 1962). Thus, the incantation may have been considered the functional equivalent of divine praise, which would more closely mirror the effects of the audience scene described in *Enūma eliš*.

[34] Even though Qingu's power is given to him by Tiamat's spell and the Tablet of Destinies (I 153–60), this is still no match for Marduk's own power, which was given to him by all the other gods through their praise. This element of the story argues that true power to rule comes from those who willingly give their power to strengthen their leader. As Marduk tells Tiamat: "You have improperly appointed him to the rank of Anuship" (translation from Lambert 2013, 91: IV 82). Marduk's power given to him by those he helps is more powerful than Qingu's power given to him by Tiamat. This assumption about properly acquired authority stands in the background of many incantation-prayers, where the human petitioner is offering their praise to enhance the power of the deity.

Allowing for Change

So far, we have shown that incantation-prayers assume and build on divine ambition; they assume that, given the chance, the gods will reach for more power and prestige by doing great deeds. However, we might still wonder: How did participants in cuneiform culture explain movement within the pantheon? Or in other words, how could they explain how a god or goddess that was previously less well-known could become more important? One basic assumption of incantation-prayers that will help us answer this question is that a particular god or goddess may be more important or more powerful than anyone realizes. This is made apparent in an incantation-prayer to a personal god. The first line of this incantation-prayer reads: "My holy god, you are the creator of all people."[35] This is a curious epithet for a personal god, and since this was an incantation-prayer, this epithet was meant to be applied to every personal god that needed to be addressed.[36] For someone to believe that their personal god was really the "creator of all people," they would have to assume that their own god was more important than anyone, human or divine, might give them credit for.

We can also see this same idea in an incantation-prayer to Adad. In the incantation-prayer known as Adad 1a, Adad is heralded as "the heir of divine Duran[ki]" (Foster 2005, 636: 1) and is said to be the one "who strikes with his lightning bolts, [who blitzes] Anzû with his lightning

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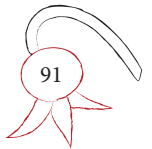
[35] *ilī ellu bān kullat nišī attu* (Jaques 2015, 73–74: Section A, line 55).

[36] This incantation-prayer was based on an earlier incantation-prayer to Sîn, which Lambert describes as "corrupt" and "a distinctly bungled cento of exorcist fragments put together as a prayer to Sin" that was then developed into a prayer to a personal god (1974, 296). Despite the history of this incantation-prayer, this line would have to make sense to the scholars who used this text. In an interesting letter, a Neo-Assyrian king questions and challenges the theological meaning of an incantation (SAA 10 295). The king cites an incantation with an incipit that includes the phrase "fall of the heavens" (translation from Parpola 2014, 235: obv 11), and asks: "What is this? The heavens exist forever" (translation from Parpola 2014, 235: obv 12). For an interpretation of the same or similar incantation, see Horowitz 2015.

bolts" (Foster 2005, 636: 6).[37] In the extant versions of this myth, however, Adad is the first one who turns down the opportunity, admitting that he cannot do it (Annus 2001, 20: I 104–14; Foster 2005, 565). In this incantation-prayer, the individual and the god Adad enter a world where Adad did defeat Anzû, and not only was his power enough to defeat Anzû but it is also strong enough to help the individual.[38]

How might they have explained how any personal god addressed by a particular incantation-prayer would become the creator of all people? Or how did they expect Adad to have defeated Anzû, when the Anzû myth says otherwise? There are all kinds of conflicting stories and traditions that were transmitted alongside one another by cuneiform scribes. But one of the assumptions that undergirds this ambiguity is the belief that the most powerful gods are difficult to know. We see this in *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*, where Marduk's dominance over the gods is likened to the god's dominance over humanity. The poet declares:

> The lord divines the gods' inmost thoughts,
> (But) no [god] understands his behavior!
> Marduk divines the gods' inmost thoughts,
> No [god] understands his mind.[39]

For the author of *Ludlul*, Marduk was above the knowledge not just of humanity but of the gods themselves. The difficulty of grasping pow-

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[37] For an edition of this prayer, see Schwemer 2001, 671–73. The composer of this incantation-prayer seems to have had the Anzû myth in mind; Foster notes that "divine Duranki" is often used in the Standard Babylonian (SB) version of the Anzû myth (Foster 2005, 636n1).

[38] It is certainly a possibility that this preserves a tradition, perhaps perpetuated by the cult of Adad, that Adad was the true hero of the Anzû myth. Whatever its origin, it was copied and transmitted by scholars in Nineveh and Assur, who were undoubtedly aware of the SB version of the Anzû myth. This incantation-prayer is not the only text to attribute the defeat of Anzû to a god other than Ninurta. Nabû (Agnethler et al. 2022), Marduk (Lambert 2013), and Assur (SAA 3, 1) are also said to have defeated Anzû.

[39] Translation from Foster 2005, 395: I 29–32. *bēlum mimma libbi ilānī ibarri / manāma [ina il]ī alaktašu ul īde / Marduk mimma libbi ilānī ibarri / ilu ayyumma ul ilammad ṭēnšu* (Annus and Lenzi 2010, 16: I 29–32; see also Oshima 2014, 80).

erful gods is also expressed in an incantation-prayer to Nergal, known as Nergal 8. Nergal is said to be "incapable of being grasped with the mind, hard even to look on."[40] This line is probably taken from *Enūma eliš* (Foster 2005, 708–9), where it refers to Marduk having body parts that were

> Incapable of being grasped with the mind, hard even to look on,
> Four were his eyes, four his ears,
> Flame shot forth as he moved his lips.
> His four ears grew large,
> And his eyes likewise took in everything,
> His figure was lofty and superior in comparison with the gods.[41]

The power of a god might make them so transcendent that it is hard to know much about them. Thus, even though a particular god is less well-known, or their supposed great deed is lesser known, it may have been assumed that this god was merely unrecognized because of their power. Not only did cuneiform scribes believe that transcendence might mask perception of the gods, they also believed that a top god could be so transcendent that the other gods become his manifestations. The incantation-prayer known as Marduk 19 describes the gods as aspects of Marduk himself:

> Sin is your divinity, Anu your sovereignty,
> Dagan is your lordship, Enlil your kingship,
> Adad is your might, wise Ea your perception,
> Nabu, holder of the tablet stylus, is your skill.
> Your leadership (in battle) is Ninurta, your might Nergal,
> Your counsel is Nus[ku], your superb minister,
> Your judgeship is Shamash, who arouses [no] dispute,
> Your eminent name is Marduk sage of the gods.[42]

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[40] *ḫasāsi lā naṭâ amāriš pašqā* (Ebeling 1953, 116: 7). This translation follows Lambert's (2013, 55: 94). For a note on the connection between Nergal 8 and *Enūma eliš*, see Foster 2005, 709.

[41] Translation from Lambert 2013, 54–56: I 94–100.

[42] Translation from Foster 2005, 692. A recent edition of the text is found in Oshima 2011, 386–96.

In this way, just as divine images, symbols, and astral manifestations are ways that people could interact with typical gods, truly transcendent gods could only be known through their manifestations through other gods.[43] This same sentiment is found in a hymn to Ninurta, where the gods are said to form parts of his body: "Your face is Shamash, your locks [Nisaba], your eyes, O Lord, are Enlil and [Ninlil], your eyeballs are Gula and Belet-il[i]."[44] It may well have been assumed that one's own gods were very important, and people were okay with letting competing and conflicting claims sit side by side, because, after all, the identity of the gods was hard to know. It may well turn out that a particular god is a manifestation of another god. This allowed for a fluid transition, and it allowed particular gods to hope that their important place in the divine pantheon and their importance to the human communities might still be recognized. Thus, a personal god might very well be the creator of all people, and Anzû may have been defeated, not by Ninurta, but by Adad; perhaps it was not Marduk who had defeated Tiamat, for it may have been Assur all along!

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[43] The relationship between a god and its cult image itself is complex. Francesca Rochberg (2009) explored the relationship between the gods and the stars, and concluded that in cuneiform texts the gods were conceived as both immanent and transcendent. As she explains it, "the moon cannot represent the totality of, but only a manifestation or image of, the god Sin, who was conceived of as transcending the limits of the physical world, yet was manifested in lunar phenomena … If there is a notional difference between the stars as divine images (likenesses) and the stars as divine embodiments, it seems not to have posed any problem within Mesopotamian theology" (Rochberg 2009, 89–90). That a god might be considered a manifestation of another god does not necessarily mean they are not still a distinct god; Spencer Allen, in his own discussion about divine multiplicity, argues that "cult statues and planets had their own distinct names, which were marked with the divine determinative in order to indicate their divine status. Celestial bodies, like their earth-bound cultic counterparts, were gods" (2015, 43). Marduk 19 and other so-called "syncretistic hymns" make a case for understanding the high god to have a similar relationship to the other gods as a typical god has with a divine image or a celestial body.

[44] Translation from Foster 2005, 713. For an edition of this hymn, see Annus 2002, 205–6.

Conclusion

In summary, I have shown that divine ambition and hope are built into the fiber of cuneiform incantation-prayers, one of the most widespread and long-lasting types of prayers in Mesopotamia. Incantation-prayers fold the moment of an individual's misfortune into a mythological moment, or a type-scene of which *Enūma eliš* is the most paradigmatic example. This moment becomes an opportunity when the deity can draw the eyes of both earthly and divine communities. Because these incantation-prayers are invested with divine power, they empower the gods to meet their moment and bring further power to themselves through relationships of allegiance with gods in heaven and mortals on earth. Because powerful gods were difficult to understand and perceive and because powerful gods could manifest themselves through other gods, it made it believable and possible to explain movement in the pantheon for those within cuneiform culture. Even if a god or goddess was the most powerful deity, both the gods and humans may be unaware unless the deity does great deeds for them. The relationships that these great deeds win allow them to extend their power in both the human and divine realms.

Understanding how divine ambition and hope are integrated into incantation-prayers helps us put Yahweh's story in its ancient Near Eastern context. That Israelites would believe that their patron deity was actually the creator of heaven and earth seems quite reasonable. A god being relatively unknown was no obstacle to greatness. That Yahweh may have been known by other names in the past, such as El Shaddai (Exod 6:3), becomes quite reasonable. Just as cuneiform scribes might have expected other gods to be manifestations of a more powerful god, it seems plausible that Israelite scribes would believe that Yahweh may have been at work under different names in times past. The fact that Yahweh would depend on his relationships of allegiance with his people for his fame and his power to spread becomes reasonable as well. Relationships with those in both heaven and earth were essential for a god's rule to expand and for a god to extend their influence over heaven and earth. For Israel, these relationships of allegiance were seen as a covenant. Thus, the Cinderella story of Yahweh's rise from a backwater

god to the universally recognized God of heaven and earth may have been a common narrative that brought hope to and fueled the ambition of many ancient Near Eastern gods and those who worshipped them.

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Abstract

This article explores the historical background to Ezekiel's famous dry bones vision and examines how that vision (Ezek 37:1–14) interacts with the theory of hope that C. R. Snyder formulated in *The Psychology of Hope* (1994). It shows Ezekiel's carefully developed program of encouraging the people to maintain their Judahite identity, oppose the Babylonian Empire's program for integrating exiles, and develop their hope of return to Judah.

Cette contribution cherche à comprendre la situation historique dans laquelle a été composée la prophétie des ossements desséchés en Ézéchiel 37, et les liens entre cette prophétie et les théories de l'espoir du psychologue américain C. R. Snyder. Nous montrons qu'Ézéchiel élabore un programme détaillé qui doit convaincre les exilés judéens à Babylone de maintenir leur identité comme habitant·e·s de Juda, afin de développer un espoir de retour en Juda. Le conflit entre le programme d'Ézéchiel et les décrets de l'Empire babylonien sont clairs, et forme l'arrière-plan historique de cette prophétie.

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"OUR HOPE IS LOST; WE ARE CUT OFF" (EZEK 37:11)

Shawn Zelig Aster

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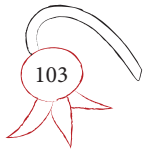
Introduction

More than almost any other prophetic text, the book of Ezekiel frequently narrates direct interactions between the prophet and his audience.[1] The prophet is part of the community of exiles "at Tel Aviv, who dwell on the Chebar canal" (3:15).[2] He is told to perform his prophetic signs "in the sight of the people" (4:12), and the "elders of Judah" appear to be frequent visitors to his house (8:1). While living among these Judahites, Ezekiel seems to maintain contact by means of letters or messengers with the Judahites who remained in Judah. In his relationship with both groups, Ezekiel is a master of dialogue: he listens to

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[2] Based on references in the Zababa-šar-uṣur archive, Laurie Pearce (2014, 77) has located this canal and the exiles' settlement at Tel Aviv in the area of Nippur. For further discussion, see Zilberg et al. 2019.

the statements made by his audience and responds to them. It would be more appropriate to call Ezekiel's audience his "interlocutors," because he listens to their statements and replies to them. This is evident in several prophecies, which respond to popular statements made by Judahites both in Judah and in Babylon.[3]

Ezekiel uses these statements of the Judahites as a jumping-off point for the argument that he seeks to make to this population. By starting with a statement made by his audience, he engages them in his response. By citing his audience, Ezekiel's responses force his interlocutors to reflect on their own statements and consider why the prophet disagrees with them.

One clear example of such a prophetic response appears in Ezekiel 11:3, which attributes to the people the statement: "We need not build homes soon; the city is the pot, and we are the meat." The statement is meant to express the people's conviction that they will not be exiled from Jerusalem. The city is compared to an earthenware pot, which frequently breaks when direct heat is applied, but the valuable food inside the pot is never endangered. Similarly, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, in the months leading up to the Babylonian destruction of the city in 587

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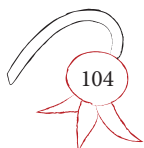
[3] Zimmerli notes the importance of these sayings for reconstructing "the situation surrounding the prophet" (1979, 36) but does not address the possibility that some of these citations of others' statements in Ezekiel may be invented by the prophet. Admittedly, some of Ezekiel's citations of statements by other nations, such as 36:20, may be invented. But there is good reason to believe that the statements by the Judahites are authentic. In a careful discussion, Moshe Greenberg (1972) shows that the citation of a statement by the Judahites that appears in Ezekiel 18:2 parallels Jeremiah 31:28. The simplest explanation is that both Ezekiel 18:2 and Jeremiah 31:28 reflect authentic statements of Judahites. With regard to other citations of Judahites' statements, I argue below that Ezekiel's subversion of their wording shows an attempt to engage directly with these statements and suggests their authenticity. Greenberg writes: "When Ezekiel cites the reactions of his audience to him and his prophecies, there is no reason to doubt their authenticity. These citations accurately reflect the prophet's knowledge of his environment. These are the opinions and feelings of those who surrounded him, and were cited only in order to oppose them, thus forming the background for his rebukes" (1972, 274).

BCE, are certain that their position is secure. Their conviction is not unreasonable, for in their attack in 597 BCE the Babylonians did indeed exile only a limited portion of the city's inhabitants. Nevertheless, Ezekiel tries to convince the people that things have changed in the ten intervening years and that in 587 Jerusalem's inhabitants are about to face exile. To convince them of this unpalatable reality, he uses language evocative of their own statements, employing the same parable of the meat and the pot but changing the referents: "Your dead whom you have placed inside the city are the meat, and it is the pot, and I will take you out of it" (Ezek 11:7). The people are correct in using the meat and the pot metaphor, but they misidentify their own role in this metaphor and fail to recognize that they will be removed from the city, symbolized by the expendable pot, while those who die in the siege will remain to molder in the destroyed city. The use of the same parable, while changing the referents, is a classic example of subversion; it is effective because it directly engages with the audience's outlook.[4]

Another example of such subversion of popular statements appears in Ezekiel 33:24. As in Ezekiel 11:7, the statement is one made by the Judahites who remained in Judah, but unlike Ezekiel 11:7 this statement postdates the Babylonian conquest of 578.[5] In legitimating their ownership of the land of Judah, the exiles, whom Ezekiel calls "the dwellers in the ruins," use a sort of *a fortiori* argument: "Abraham was only one, and yet he inherited the land. We are many, therefore to us the land is given as an inheritance."[6] In his response, Ezekiel echoes his

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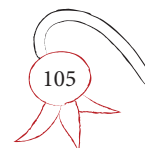
[4] See Crouch 2014, 15: "A subversive endeavor must therefore establish its relationship with the entity it intends to subvert; more specifically, however, it must do so in such a way that its audience is able to recognize this relationship."

[5] See Zimmerli (1983, 198), who argues cogently against Martin Noth's attempt to date this oracle prior to 587. Zimmerli further points out that the language of Ezekiel 33:23 proves that the oracle was composed in Babylonia.

[6] Zimmerli (1983, 198) understands the significance of "one" here as indicating "the individual separated from his family." But this understanding undermines the rhetorical effect of Ezekiel 33:24, where the statement "Abraham was one" is clearly contrasted with "we are many." Even in Isaiah 51:2, which Zimmerli cites as support, Abraham's status as "one" is contrasted with the subsequent multiplication of his progeny.

interlocutors' use of the term "inheritance" and questions their identification with Abraham: "Shall you eat with blood? Shall you expect salvation from your disgusting objects? Shall you spill blood? And still inherit the land? You have done abominations! Each of you has defiled the wife of his neighbor! Shall you inherit the land?" (Ezek 33:24–25). Here, Ezekiel engages directly with the claim of the "dwellers in the ruins" that as descendants of Abraham they can lay claim to his inheritance. Ezekiel acknowledges that the land is indeed an "inheritance" but reminds his interlocutors that Abraham only acquired the land as part of his covenant with God. The process of "inheritance" (Heb. מורשה), argues Ezekiel, must involve God as the grantor of said inheritance.[7] God assigned the land to Abraham and continues to assign the land to those who show loyalty to Him through adherence to His laws. Conversely, the remnant who still dwell in the land have shown disloyalty to God and cannot claim the "inheritance."
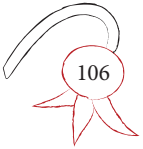
The Dry Bones Vision as a Response to the Judahites' Statement

But the most famous response of Ezekiel to a citation of the Judahites appears in Ezekiel 37:1–14, where the entire dry bones vision is formulated as a response to a citation of the Judahites in Babylon. Based on comparisons to other popular statements attributed to the Judahites in Babylon, notably Ezekiel 33:10, Walther Zimmerli (1983, 258) argues that the citation of the Judahites in Ezekiel 37:11 accurately reflects the thinking and mindset of those Judahites. The oracle in Ezekiel 37:1–14 therefore cites the Judahite exiles of Babylon and responds to them. It is these exiles, who have been in Babylon for some time, who are both Ezekiel's interlocutors and his audience.[8]

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[7] As many have noted, the use of מורשה here is intended to evoke the covenantal language of Exodus 6:8, a covenant in which the Israelites are bound to recognize divine authority.

[8] The specific date of the prophecy is impossible to determine. Zimmerli (1983, 258) places it between the fall of Jerusalem and 572 BCE (the date cited in Ezek

Unlike the passages discussed above (11:7 and 33:24–25), the dry bones vision does not open by citing the Judahites. The passage begins (37:1–9) by describing Ezekiel's visionary experience and his dialogue with God. God opens the dialogue by asking Ezekiel an impossible question, which illustrates the drama of the narrative. Against the background of a valley filled with "very dry" bones, God asks: "Will these bones live?" (37:3). Ezekiel refuses to answer and is then given a prophecy. The structure of the prophecy is significant: it opens with the promise of "spirit" (Heb. רוח), which God will place in the bones (37:5). Subsequent elements in the prophecy include sinews, flesh, and skin (37:6), all of which surround the bones in verse 8. But the bones still do not live. Only when the prophet fulfills a further instruction to prophesy to the "wind" (רוח) and when the "wind" (or "spirit," for the Hebrew words are identical) enters the bones do they finally live in verse 10. Clearly, the wind/spirit (רוח) is the key to answering the initial question, "Will these bones live?" As I explain below, the wind/spirit is a metaphor for hope. But understanding this metaphor requires attention to the divine speech in verses 11–14, which explains the vision.

That divine speech begins by referencing the popular statement of the Judahites in Babylon: "Our bones are dry, our hope is lost; we are cut off" (37:11). As many have noted, that statement of the people links the narrative of the vision in verse 1–10 to the divine speech that explains the vision in verses 11–14.[9] As Zimmerli argues, the divine speech in verses 12–14 expands and explains the popular saying in verse 11. This follows the format noted in the verses discussed above (11:7 and 33:24–25) in which Ezekiel uses popular statements as a basis for an oracle. As in the passages cited above, Ezekiel's citation of a popular statement allows him to create a dialogue with his audience.

Why do the people make this rather strange statement, on which Ezekiel bases his prophecy? Declaring "Our bones are dry" seems to be a reference to death, and the speakers are very much alive. But as

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40:1). All we can know for certain is that the oracle reflects the period after the fall of Jerusalem and before Cyrus's impending victory appeared on the political horizon.

9 See Zimmerli 1983, 257 and citations there; see also Greenberg 1997, 747.

Zimmerli (1983, 262) notes, bones here are a metonymy, as in Psalms 31:11 ("My bones grow weak" and in Proverbs 17:22, which describes how a downcast spirit dries up the bones. Furthermore, the idea of "Our hope is lost" is inconsistent with a series of statements that describe death. The clear purpose of the oracle is not to restore life: the dry bones are palpably a metaphor. Rather, the purpose of the oracle is to restore hope. It is therefore far more logical, and consistent with the tendency in Biblical Hebrew metaphor that Zimmerli (1983, 262) notes, to interpret the phrase "Our bones are dry" not as a reference to death but as a reference to depression.

The source of the depression is clearly articulated in the next stich of the people's statement: "Our hope is lost." Ezekiel 37:12–14 makes it clear that the hope referenced in 37:11 is the hope of a physical return to Judah. All interpreters see 37:11–14 as a literary and compositional continuum, and it is therefore most reasonable to interpret the loss of hope in 37:11 in light of 37:12–14 and to understand the statement "Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost; we are cut off" as a reference to the loss of hope of return to Judah. It is the loss of this hope that causes the people to feel depressed and cut off.

Furthermore, if the bones are a metaphor for the Judahites (as Ezek 37:11 states) and what these Judahites lacked was hope for a physical return to Judah, then it follows that the spirit/wind (רוח) that the bones lacked in order to live stands as a metaphor for that hope of return. The fulfillment of that hope is promised in 37:12–14. Connections between loss of hope and depression are well-known and are most clearly articulated by Viktor Frankl (1962).[10] In psychologist C. R. Snyder's definition, hope has three components, of which the most important is having clearly defined goals that one desires to achieve. Achieving those goals requires two elements: (1) mental willpower, "the mental energy that helps propel a person" (Snyder 1994, 5–6), which subsequent writers call "agency thoughts," because they encapsulate the individual's belief that s/he has the mental power to do what is required; and (2) "way-power," which Snyder defines as "the mental plans that guide hopeful

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[10] For empirical evidence for the correlation between high hope levels and the absence of depression, see Feldman and Snyder 2005.

thought … The perception that one can engage in planful thought is essential for waypower thinking" (1994, 7–8).

Snyder emphasizes that neither willpower nor waypower on their own suffice to create hope. Both the internal willpower ("agency thoughts") and an assessment of perceived pathways through which one might achieve the stated goals are necessary for hope to exist. Snyder's model is important in understanding how the Judahites with whom Ezekiel interacts lost hope. As I show below, the Judahites had defined goals and agency thoughts (mental willpower) but lacked the perceived pathway toward achieving those goals ("waypower," in Snyder's language). Snyder acknowledges the importance of a realistic assessment of circumstances beyond a person's control to designing these pathways (1994, 10). Subsequent scholarship has argued that "the subjective experience of hope does not depend upon the existence of real, workable pathways to goals, but rather upon a perception that such pathways exist and can be used if desired" (Feldman et al. 2023, 233).
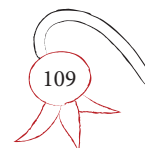
Why Did Ezekiel's Judahites Lose Hope? They Had Defined Goals and Agency Thoughts!

Understanding the role of goals in the concept of "hope" is critical in understanding why the Judahite interlocutors of Ezekiel lost hope. We know of these Judahites' economic circumstances from the corpora of cuneiform texts mentioning Judahites in Babylon as early as the sixth century BCE.[11] These inform us of the relatively good economic situation of the exiles, who engaged in what Anjelika Berlejung (2017) called "social climbing": Judahites occupied economically important positions in Babylon, and gradually became government employees and successful merchants. This "social climbing" was based on a very clear Babylonian policy toward deportees: "They were settled in marginal areas and integrated into the land-for-service sector of agriculture" (Alstola 2020, 7). These marginal areas included the lands

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[11] For further discussion, see, for example, Pearce and Wunsch 2014; Waerzeggers 2014; Horowitz et al. 2015; Wunsch 2022.

eventually known as Al-Yahudu, east and southeast of Babylon (Zilberg 2021, 413). Because they were not treated as slaves but as "semi-free persons" (Alstola 2020, 110), whose main obligations were to develop the land they were assigned agriculturally and to remit services to the crown, Judahites were able to advance economically and also develop mutually profitable relationships with the Babylonian administration. Some Judahites became tax collectors for the Babylonian administration (Alstola 2020, 110). Other Judahites became traders, centered in Sippar and "integrated into the commercial sphere of Babylonian society," who benefited from profitable long-distance trade routes (Alstola 2020, 78–91). These traders "were able to make their way into the priestly circles of Ebabbar" (Alstola 2020, 93). The picture emerging from this brief discussion is of a wide range of possibilities for Judahites to benefit from many opportunities for economic advancement in Babylonia and even from a certain degree of social integration.

This does not mean that the Babylonian or Persian administrations aimed to assimilate the exiles fully into Babylonian culture. But the economic success of the Judahites was certainly the result of Babylonian policy, and the cultural integration of immigrants is generally a natural outcome of their economic success. This is nicely summarized by Tero Alstola:

> Natural integration into the surrounding society can be observed on many levels: Judeans found their place in the local economy, no tensions between Judeans and other population groups are evident, and some Judeans were able to find ways to prosper beyond the limits of their plot of royal land.[12]

Therefore, the "hope" that Ezekiel speaks of in 37:11–14 is not connected to the opportunities for economic advancement offered in Babylonia. These opportunities were important for the exiles' survival, but economic advancement was not all that Ezekiel's interlocutors wanted. Their goal, and therefore their hope, was directed in a different direction: that of return to the land from which they had been deported.

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[12] Alstola 2010, 163.

This hope seems bizarre in light of the vast gap between the economic opportunities available to the exiles in Babylonia and those in the land that even Ezekiel acknowledges was full of ruined dwellings (Ezek 33:24). In Babylonia, the empire expected the exiles to advance economically, to fulfill economic roles allocated to them by the elites, and to become, if not true Babylonians, at least happy residents of Babylonia.

In conceiving of a return to Judah as a goal, Ezekiel's interlocutors had implicitly rejected this Babylonian program and accepted the view of Ezekiel, articulated in detail in chapters 1–24. Throughout these chapters, Ezekiel strenuously encouraged the exiles to retain their identity as exiles and demanded that they maintain an old and displaced identity, continuing to view themselves as "out of place."

This view is expressed in Ezekiel 4, where the prophet is told first to make an image of Jerusalem, place a siege around the image, and "prepare your face to it" as "a sign to the house of Israel" (4:3). Clearly, the point of this sign is to preserve the sense of displacement among the exiles and to encourage them to continue to think about Jerusalem as their place of origin.

This becomes clearer in the continuation of Ezekiel 4, where the prophet is told to lie on his side and eat measured quantities of bread and water that are cooked on dung. The goal is to force the prophet to identify with the people of Jerusalem, as God explains: "Son of man, behold I am breaking the staff of bread in Jerusalem, and they will eat bread by weight and in worry, and they will drink water in measured quantities and in desolation" (4:16). The goal is not only for the prophet to identify with Jerusalem, but for all the exiles with him to do so. This seems to be implied in 4:17, "That they rot in their sins," which is a formulation that references Leviticus 26:39: "Those who remain among you will rot in your sins in the land of your enemies, and even in the sins of your ancestors in them you shall rot." The exiles must recognize their guilt and admit their sins (Lev 26:40), after which they will be able to return (Lev 26:42–45).

Ezekiel's program of maintaining the exiles' identity as displaced people is expressed even more strongly in Ezekiel 20:3. There, the exiles' elders ask the prophet about what their future holds. Ezekiel's answer is

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clear: your future is your past. In 20:5–29, he dissertates on the history of Israel from the Exodus to the monarchy, noting how the Israelites repeatedly disobeyed God. Yet God "acted for the sake of His name" and did not break His covenant with the Israelites. Why, then, would the Israelites think that God would break His covenant with them just because they are in Babylon? In Ezekiel 20:31, Ezekiel expresses astonishment, as if to say "You, Judahites, think that I will tell you your future?" He has already given them a dissertation on their past and argued effectively that their past is their future.

He then responds to the idea that they should become new Babylonians: "That which comes up in your minds, it shall not be, that you say, 'we shall be like the nations, like the families of the earth, serving wood and stone'" (Ezek 20:32). In this verse, Ezekiel equates the imperial program of economic integration with one of religious assimilation to worship the gods of Babylon. He discourages the loss of identity inherent in becoming new Babylonians and demands that the exiles not lose their sense of being displaced because that sense is central to their relationship with God.

The statement of Ezekiel's interlocutors in Ezekiel 37:11, "Our bones are dry, our hope is lost," shows that they have accepted Ezekiel's identity-shaping goals and rejected the program of settling in Babylonia on a long-term basis. They acknowledge that they have had hope; if we accept Snyder's understanding of hope, that means that they have had goals. Their main goal is to return to Judah, and they will never feel at home in Babylonia. They are to see themselves as temporary residents, bent on return, with their identity rooted in a specific place, which they have lost.

In verses such as those cited above, Ezekiel helped the exiles define a goal that they considered realistic: the goal of return. Together with the willpower that Ezekiel's prophecies helped the exiles develop, the exiles now have two of the three elements that Snyder defines as necessary for hope to flourish. But as Ezekiel 37:12–14 makes clear, the exiles say "Our bones are dry, our hope is lost; we are cut off" in 37:11 because they perceive that external circumstances currently prevent them from having a way to achieve the goals they have defined and for which they have the mental energy.

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Why Did Ezekiel's Judahites Lose Hope?
They Lacked Waypower

In Snyder's elaboration of hope, goals and mental willpower are not enough to create it; hope also requires "waypower," a practical path toward achieving said goals. This was the element lacking for Ezekiel's interlocutors, and this is evident from Ezekiel 37:12–14, which elaborates the pathway toward their main goal: God Himself will lead the Judahites to Judah.

But until this promise was made, the exiles lacked the ability to move toward Judah. Although the community of exiles included upwardly mobile individuals, some of whom held government appointments, they were strictly forbidden to leave Babylon. It might appear that people in such a socioeconomic position would have had the wherewithal to travel throughout the empire. But a recently published document, the Beirut Declaration, shows that the empire was aware of this possibility and took pains to ensure that no exiles left Babylon.

The Beirut Declaration is an Aramaic text found on the antiquities market; Yigal Bloch (2018) showed that it dates from the Neo-Babylonian period, more specifically to the period of Nebuchadnezzar II. It is an imperial decree, written in Imperial Aramaic. It deals specifically with this phenomenon of exiles leaving Babylon and moving northward along the Euphrates.[13] The Aramaic language of the document, its contents, and its relatively large size (nearly 29 by 29 cm, inscribed on stone) suggest that it was destined to deter those living on this route from assisting any exile who tried to leave Babylon and head for the Levant.

The state's deterrence strategy was implemented in a drastic manner. Rather than prohibiting the exiles themselves from leaving, the empire imposed the death penalty on anyone who assisted them:

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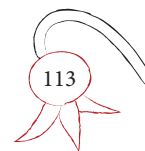
[13] Bloch (2018, 219–21) shows that the term סלק ("to go up") in the declaration refers to a route following the upstream path along the Euphrates River and then west through the Syrian Desert to Palmyra.

1–5. A man, in whose house or city a man who has moved up (Aramaic סלק) from the land of Akkad is found, should not delay but hand him over to a royal delegate.

5–8. The head of the household in whose house he entered, as well as the city mayor and the delegate who saw him but did not seize him, shall not live.[14]

Death was the fate of anyone who assisted exiles in leaving. Under these circumstances, what chance did the exiles have of getting out of Babylonia and heading to Judah?

The imperial policy that we know about from the Beirut Declaration effectively barred the way home for exiles who had both the goal and the willpower to return to Judah. There is every reason to see this text as reflecting a historical policy barring the route of any exile who wished to return home. The drastic penalties suggest that the empire was committed to enforcing the prohibition on exiles leaving, and the publication of this ban on an Aramaic (rather than Akkadian) stone tablet suggests that it was designed to be publicized not among officials but among the householders to whom it was aimed. Such a prohibition fits well with what we know of imperial policy, which saw the exiles as a vector for the economic development of Babylonia.

Faced with this harsh reality, in which their goals are clear, their willpower strong, but the route to achieving these goals effectively barred, the exiles complain: "Our bones are dry, our hope is lost; we are cut off." In Snyder's language, despite their willpower, they lack the ability to get "there" from "here." Ezekiel's answer (Ezek 37:12–14) to their cry is improbable: God will appear *ex machina* and give the exiles "spirit" (רוח), a metaphor for hope. Bones that lack "spirit" cannot live, but those with "spirit" can rise from the dead:

(12) So prophesy and say to them: Thus says the Lord God: Look, I am opening your graves and I will cause you to go up from your graves, My people, and I will bring you onto the land of Israel. (13) And you shall know that I am the Lord by My opening your graves and by My causing you to come up from your graves, My people. (14) And I shall insert My

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[14] Bloch 2018, 217.

spirit into you and you shall live, and I shall place you upon your land, and you shall know that I am the Lord who spoke and fulfilled, speech of the Lord.[15]

The promise "I shall insert My spirit into you and you shall live" is clearly meant to negate the people's assertion "Our bones are dry, our hope is lost; we are cut off." The promise refers back to the vision in verses 5–10, which showed that wind/spirit (רוח) is required in order for the bones to live. Only in verses 9–10, when Ezekiel calls on the wind, do the bodies come back to life. Verse 11 explains the meaning of the metaphor of wind/spirit (רוח): the bodies could not live, because the people (for whom the bodies are a metaphor, as shown by verse 11) lacked hope. Their lack of hope is attested by their statement in verse 11: "Our bones are dry, our hope is lost; we are cut off." Their loss of hope prevents them from moving, both in the vision of the dry bones and in the reality of the exiles' inability to leave Babylon. Verses 12–14 solve the problem of the exiles' lack of spirit (רוח) by providing them with hope: God will arrange the way out of Babylon.
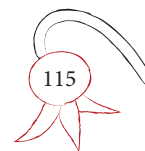
Does this prophecy actually provide the exiles with hope? It must have seemed wildly improbable if it was delivered in Babylonia in the mid-sixth century. But historically, several decades later, the Babylonian Empire fell to Cyrus, and the Achaemenid Empire instituted a policy of encouraging exiles to resettle the Levant.[16] Ezekiel's goal in this prophecy is not to solve the exiles' need for a way to reach Judah in the immediate future but rather to keep alive their hope of return. The exiles have set goals, have willpower, and he encourages them to believe that God will solve the problems that they cannot solve: God will remove the imperial policy that barred them from travel to Judah. Ezekiel does not promise a date for this solution but demands that they keep hope alive until such time as God provides the way for them to achieve their goals.

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[15] Ezekiel 37:12–14.

[16] Avraham Faust (2021, 350–73) discusses the "Achemaenid Revolution," which led the Persian Empire to encourage the resettlement of exiles in the Levant.

Conclusion

As a matter of historical fact, some of the exiles did maintain that hope: some exiles did leave Babylon and return to Judah in the generations after Cyrus. The precise number of exiles who returned is less important to us here than the mechanism we see for maintaining the hope of return. Applying Snyder's theory of hope to Ezekiel 37 allows us to more fully understand Ezekiel's strategy in response to the Babylonian Exile. First of all, in chapters 1–24 he fights against the empire's attempt to turn the exiles into happy Babylonians by providing economic opportunities and requiring that they remain in Babylonia. Ezekiel demands that they maintain both their view of Judah as their home and their goal of returning there.

Applying Snyder's theory of hope allows us to understand how the vision of the dry bones serves as a capstone of Ezekiel's program. In previous prophecies, Ezekiel successfully convinced the people of specific goals. He instilled in the people the willpower to maintain their ethnic identity, an identity connected to a return to Judah. In the vision of the dry bones, he recognizes the lack of a clear path to achieve that return in the immediate future but argues that this is a problem that God will solve.

In instilling hope in the people, Ezekiel recognizes their statements and interacts with them. By citing their statements, he constructs them as his interlocutors. In this manner, he keeps his readers aware of his interlocutors' opinions, and in 37:11 he informs us that his interlocutors are losing hope because they lack a practical means of achieving the goal of return, despite their willpower.

Faced with this challenge, he argues against the impossibility of returning to Judah. He does not deny the severe penalties that will be meted out to anyone who assists exiles, which prevents the exiles from returning home. But, he argues, there is a divine promise that the exiles will return, so it does not really matter that the empire is not allowing such return right now. The divine promise will be fulfilled at some point, and what the exiles need to do right now is to maintain their hope. The exiles will eventually return, implying that the empire will fall. History

shows that he was right. In this light, the use of the metaphor of רוח/spirit for hope takes on new meaning. The power of the spirit can keep hope alive even against improbable odds.

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AGRARIAN HOPE IN ISAIAH 40–55

William L. Kelly

Abstract

It is widely recognized that hope is a central theme in Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 40–55). With the help of interdisciplinary work in ecological criticism and moral philosophy, this article analyzes the theme of hope in the text and argues that the renewal of the natural environment is central to its vision for the future. Using insights drawn from agrarian approaches to biblical texts, the article shows how this renewal is understood as mutually beneficial for both humans and the land, strongly linking the flourishing of Zion with the Judean hinterland. This is demonstrated through a survey of language in the text referring to the natural landscape and readings of specific texts relating to the theme of ecological restoration (41:17–20; 43:16–21; 44:23; 45:8; 51:1–8; 55:1–13). As Deutero-Isaiah's message of hope responds to the experience of cultural disaster in the sixth century BCE, it resembles the "radical hope" identified by Jonathan Lear. This hope stands apart from the traditional institutional forms of monarchy and Temple, and instead looks toward a vision of human flourishing deeply connected to the landscape.
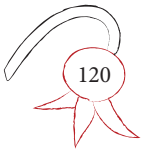
On reconnaît habituellement que l'espoir est un thème central du Deutéro-Ésaïe (És 40–55). À travers un travail interdisciplinaire en critique écologique et en philosophie morale, cet article analyse le thème de l'espoir dans le texte et soutient que le renouveau de l'environnement naturel est au cœur de sa vision de l'avenir. Avec l'aide d'approches agraires des textes bibliques, cette contribution montre comment ce renouveau est mutuellement bénéfique pour les humains et la terre, liant fortement l'épanouissement de Sion à l'arrière-pays judéen. Cela est démontré par un examen du langage du texte faisant référence au paysage naturel et par la lecture de textes spécifiques relatifs au thème de la restauration écologique (4 :17–20 ; 43 :16–21 ; 44 :23 ; 45 :8 ; 51 :1–8 ; 55 :1–13). Comme le message d'espoir du Deutéro-Ésaïe répond à l'expérience d'un désastre culturel au sixième siècle avant notre ère, il se rapproche de « l'espoir radical » identifié par Jonathan Lear. Cet espoir se démarque des formes institutionnelles traditionnelles telles que la monarchie et le temple et se tourne plutôt vers une vision de l'épanouissement humain profondément lié au paysage.

AGRARIAN HOPE IN ISAIAH 40–55

William L. Kelly

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> Found your hope, then, on the ground under your feet.
>
> —Wendell Berry[1]

Introduction

All of the biblical texts from the sixth century BCE are "attempting in one way or another to cope with the experience of disaster" (Blenkinsopp 2002, 104). While some of these texts dwell on the experience of disaster itself (e.g., Lamentations), Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 40–55) responds with a message of hope.[2] As a human phenomenon, hope is usually under-

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[1] Berry 2010.

[2] There are numerous intertextual connections between Lamentations and Deutero-Isaiah, so much so that "Isa 40–55 actively interacts with and sometimes also reverses statements in Lamentations" (Tiemeyer 2011, 348). See Gottwald, 1954, 44–45; Tull Willey 1997, 48–50, 86–89, 256–66; Seitz 1998, 130–49; Sommer 1998, 127–30; Linafelt 2000, 62–79.

stood as a combination of desire and belief in the face of uncertainty.[3] What makes hope distinct from belief in philosophical terms is usually a third element, whether a perceived route to achieving one's hope, a resolve to fulfill the hope, or an external factor such as fate or, as is the case for the Hebrew Bible, God.[4] My aim in this article is to show how the hope articulated by Deutero-Isaiah envisions a future where the natural environment is renewed for the benefit of both humans and the land itself. Instead of basing its hopes on the traditional institutional pillars of Judean society—monarchy and Temple—the text of Deutero-Isaiah envisions a flourishing social order based on an integrated, reciprocal relationship between city and landscape.

Two interdisciplinary works serve as the framework for this analysis. The first comes from a growing body of scholarly literature in biblical studies that seeks to recover the ecological concerns of the text that have been neglected or overshadowed by androcentrism.[5] One subset of this approach is the agrarian perspective advocated by Ellen Davis (2009). Agrarian thinking is a "comprehensive way of viewing the world and the human place in it," and it is seen in the pervasive "appreciation and concern for the health of the land" in the biblical text (Davis 2009, 1). Arising from the insight that the basic human act of eating has ramifications for "virtually every other aspect of public and private life" (Davis 2009, 22), the ethics of land resource management and agricultural practice are a major aspect of this approach. Davis (2009, 155–78) highlights the ways that an agrarian reading reveals how biblical texts view cities as social locations fully integrated with their hinterland.[6]

The second work considers the phenomenon of cultural devastation, or a complete breakdown of a cultural way of life when the very meas-

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[3] For recent overviews of hope, see Heuvel 2020; Bloeser and Stahl 2022.

[4] Mies 2010, 714–15; Milona 2020. There is a wide body of literature on the topic; see, e.g., Boer 1954; Ploeg 1954; Westermann 1964; Zimmerli 1971; Hubbard 1983; Menxel 1983; Groß 1988; Dempsey 1999; Williamson 2000.

[5] Almost all studies in this area note the seminal influence of White 1967. See also Habel 2008; Horrell 2009, 2010; Horrell et al. 2010; Nilsen and Solevåg 2016; Kavusa 2019; Northcott 2020; Marlow and Harris 2022a.

[6] This insight has not gone unrecognized elsewhere; see Gray 2018, 30.

ures of what it means to live a good life become unintelligible. This possibility, and the possibility to respond to it with hope, is the central preoccupation of Jonathan Lear's (2006) book *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*.[7] In a case study of the Crow Indians, the increasing threats to their continued existence in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and their decision to ally themselves with the United States government, Lear considers the case of Plenty Coups, "the last great chief of the Crow nation." Witnessing his own culture collapse, Plenty Coups sought to chart a new course of human flourishing for his people (Lear 2006, 1).[8] While the particular historical contingencies faced by the Crow were unique, Lear claims to have uncovered an ontological "vulnerability that we all share simply in virtue of being human" (2006, 8), one where our cultures can completely fall apart, which then invites analogical comparisons with similar instances of hope responding to cultural devastation. Lear himself has suggested that the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple is a relevant analogy,[9] and while Hindy Najman (2014, 13–16, 123–54) has used Lear's framework in her analysis of 4 Ezra, no previous study has considered the case of Deutero-Isaiah or the cultural disasters of the sixth century BCE.

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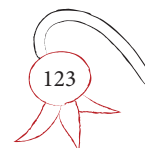
Ecological Hope in Deutero-Isaiah

Hope is a foundational theme in the book of Isaiah, no less in Deutero-Isaiah.[10] This is evident in terms of language, as there are four instances of the primary term for hope (*qwh*) itself (Isa 40:31; 44:13;

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[7] Critical responses to the book (Dreyfus 2009; Sherman 2009) were published in the journal *Philosophical Studies* together with a response from Lear (2009).

[8] The name "Plenty Coups" is a rough translation of the Crow name Alaxchiiaahush ("Many Achievements"); see Lear 2006, 20.

[9] Lear 2006, 163n43. There is some ambiguity to Lear's reference, but I take him to have in mind the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 CE.

[10] With no intention to advance any claims here regarding its author, I will refer to these chapters as "Deutero-Isaiah" throughout. Issues related to authorship and the composition history of the book of Isaiah are extensive. Since my interests in this article are primarily thematic, I will approach the text of Isaiah 40–55 as a

49:23; 51:5) and two instances of *yḥl* ("wait, hope") as well (42:4; 51:5), and the text makes frequent use of lexemes that express related ideas, such as *nḥm* ("comfort"),[11] *rḥm* ("have compassion upon"),[12] *gʾl* ("redeem"),[13] and *ʿzr* ("help").[14] The common view is that this hope primarily pertains to the destiny of the city of Jerusalem and its rebuilding after the destruction of the city and the Exile.[15] A large amount of scholarship has shown the importance of the "Zion tradition" for the book of Isaiah as the grounding ideology of these hopes, and more recent scholarship has emphasized the literary role played by Zion/Jerusalem as a unifying theme across the book (see Poulsen 2020, 266–68). The city is one of the main addressees of Deutero-Isaiah, along with Jacob/ Israel (Isa 40–48), with references to Jerusalem (40:1–2; 51:17) and Zion (49:14–21; 51:3, 11, 16) appearing independently or in parallel with one another (40:9; 41:27; 44:26; 52:1–6, 7–9). The prevalence of these terms rises as one proceeds through Deutero-Isaiah, and this pattern continues into Trito-Isaiah, culminating in the description of the restored Jerusalem (60–62), sometimes considered its original literary kernel.[16] Deutero-Isaiah opens with a tenderly spoken message of comfort for the city (40:1–2); it describes the expansion of its territory as her borders are enlarged and extended like a tent covering a wider area (54:2–3);[17] it hopes for the restoration of the city's gates, battlements, and walls with extravagant materials (54:11–12). All of this restoration

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unity despite the fact that it is clear that these chapters were edited over time. For references to literature on the topic, see Becker 2020.

[11] Isa 40:1; 49:13; 51:3, 51:19; 52:9; see also 51:12; 54:11.

[12] Isa 49:10, 13, 15; 54:8, 10; 55:7.

[13] Isa 43:1; 44:22–23; 48:20; 52:9; see also 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; Waschke 1989.

[14] Isa 41:6, 10, 13, 14; 44:2; 49:8; 50:7, 9.

[15] Jacob Stromberg calls this "arguably the most pervasive theme in the book" (2011a, 62). See, for example, the essays in Wieringen and Woude 2011.

[16] See esp. Steck 1986; Stromberg 2011b, 11–13, 27–30.

[17] We also see a similar idea in Isaiah 60:21, where the text promises the possession of land—without the definite article, as in Psalm 37:3—with the aim to right social wrongs (Blenkinsopp 2003, 218).

for Jerusalem is "good news" for the villages and towns of Judah (40:9–11),[18] which are also assured that they will be rebuilt (44:26; 49:19).

What is often overshadowed by Deutero-Isaiah's clear interest in the city of Jerusalem is the extent to which this interest is paired with an abiding concern for the land. For all the hopeful expectations for the city itself, the text contains a striking amount of language and imagery drawn from the physical, or natural, world. In the past, this language has been seen predominantly as either a part of a "new exodus" theme in Deutero-Isaiah,[19] or as a series of metaphors without any particular historical referent.[20] As I will show, however, an ecological approach to the text, particularly with an agrarian perspective, reveals new possibilities for understanding the hope expressed in it.

While there is neither a generalized concept of "nature" in the Hebrew Bible, nor a strict ontological distinction between "natural" and "human" space (Simkins 2022, 270–71), there are a number of lexemes that refer to the parts of the physical world that do not arise from human design or intention (Marlow and Harris 2022b, 2–4). The overarching term for the material world is the merism *šāmayîm vāʾāreṣ* ("heavens and earth"), and notably these terms appear twice together in Deutero-Isaiah as a direct addressee in the text in addition to Jacob/Israel and Zion/Jerusalem (Isa 44:23; cf. 45:8).[21] The prevalence of terminology for the physical environment suggests its signal importance for Deutero-Isaiah (Marlow 2022). The most common and generic term for the physical world is *ʾereṣ,* which appears forty-two times in Deutero-Isaiah.[22] These instances, combined with more than

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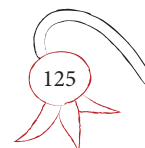
[18] The distinction between Jerusalem and other cities ("in reality, settlements, farms, and villages") is encapsulated in the designation "Judah and Jerusalem" found in late texts from the Persian period onward (2 Chr 11:14; 20:17; 24:6, 8; Ezra 9:9; 10:7; Isa 1:1; 2:1). "It is therefore unsurprising and unexceptional if Jerusalem is called on to proclaim good news to the cities of Judah" (Blenkinsopp 2002, 185).

[19] For a summary of past scholarship, see Tiemeyer 2011, 156–68.

[20] Barstad 1989; cf. Schmid 2014, 180–98.

[21] Goldingay 2005, 272; Joerstad 2019, 148.

[22] Isa 41:9, 18; 42:4, 5, 10; 43:6; 44:23, 24; 45:8, 12, 18, 19, 22; 46:11; 47:1; 48:13; 20; 49:6, 8, 12, 13, 19, 23; 51:6 [x 2], 13, 16, 23; 52:10; 53:2, 8; 54:5, 9; 55:9, 10.

twenty other related terms, total two hundred words in these chapters that refer to the aspects of the physical world.

A significant number of terms for the physical world share a close semantic relationship to *midbār* (Isa 40:3; 41:18–19; 42:11; 43:19–20; 50:2; 51:3), referring to "wild" areas considered unsuitable for agriculture or difficult to cultivate.[23] Less common than *midbār* but closely related are *ḥorbâ* (44:26; 48:21; 49:19; 51:3; 52:9; 58:12) and *ʿarābâ* (40:3; 41:19; 44:4; 51:3), both of which are associated with the scarcity of water (Kaiser 1982). This is true for other terms in the same semantic field as well: *yĕšimôn* (43:19–20), *ṣiyyâ* (41:18; 53:2), *yabbāšâ*, and *ṣāmēʾ* (44:3).

In the case of terrain related to mountains and hills, the common term *har* (Isa 40:4, 9, 12; 41:15; 42:11, 15; 44:23; 49:11, 13; 52:7; 54:10; 55:12) and terms in its semantic field are associated with spaces either difficult to traverse or cultivate due to their ruggedness. The closely related term *gibʿâ* only appears together with *har* as a merism (40:4, 12; 41:15; 42:15; 54:10; 55:12). These locations, which celebrate Yahweh with the rest of creation (44:23; 49:13; 55:12), are used in metaphors for judgment (41:15; 42:15) or Yahweh's faithfulness (54:10). Other terms for uneven or rugged terrain are most often described as sites of potential transformation (49:11). This is evident in the idea expressed in 40:4 of leveling out uneven land by raising up *gayʾ* and flattening out *ʿāqōb* and *reqes*. In a similar fashion, *šəpāyîm* are transformed with water (41:18) or become a site for pasture (49:9), and *maʿăqaššim* are leveled out (42:16). When spaces such as these are transformed into something more arable, the texts typically refer to *śādê* (40:6; 43:20; 55:12), *biqʿâ* (40:4; 41:18), *mišôr* (42:16), and the somewhat less tame *yaʿar* (44:14; 44:23; Mulder 1982).

The frequency of the term *māyîm* constitutes a significant *leitmotif* in these chapters with nineteen appearances, sometimes generally referring to bodies of water (Isa 40:12; 40:18; 43:2, 16, 20; 44:3–4; 48:1, 21; 49:10; 50:2; 51:10; 54:9), other times specifically referring to water for drinking (41:17; 44:12; 55:1). Most of the references to *yam* in Deutero-Isaiah evoke the mythical aspects of both creation and Reed

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[23] On the general significance of *midbār* and the concept of wilderness in the Hebrew Bible, see Talmon 1966, 31–63; 1984; Leal 2006; Feldt 2012, 2014.

Sea traditions (43:16; 50:2; 51:10 [x2], 15),[24] while the others refer to it as a home for living things (42:10) or use its waves as a metaphor for vindication (48:18). In reference to a moving body of water, the most frequent term is *nahar*, as it appears in the desert (41:18; 43:19–20) or dries up (42:15; 44:27; 50:2), is crossed over by people (43:2; 47:2), or is used as a metaphor for prosperity (48:18). The terms *nōzēl* (44:3) and *môṣāʾê māyîm* (41:18) refer to water that is rained onto or channeled into dry ground. There are also references to bodies of water opening up to transform dry land, such as *agam* (41:18; 42:15) and *maʿyān* (41:18), or those that dry up, such as *mabbûʿê mayim* (49:10).

Other terms for the physical world are used in order to suggest places that are far off, such as *ʾî* (Isa 40:15; 41:1, 5; 42:4, 10, 12; 49:1; 51:5)[25] and *qəṣôt hāʾāreṣ* (40:28; 41:5, 9, 19), and there are also references to the four cardinal directions with *ṣāpôn* and *temān* (43:6; cf. 41:25; 49:12) and *mizroḥ* and *măʿrob* (43:5; 45:6; cf. 41:2, 25; 46:11) used together as a merism expressing something like "far and wide."

There are multiple references to *šāmayîm* as a part of Yahweh's creation (Isa 40:12, 22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; 48:13; 51:13, 16; cf. 51:6; 55:9); a co-celebrant of Yahweh with the rest of creation (44:23; 49:13); a source of information (47:13); a place of darkness (50:3);[26] and, together with *šahaq* (45:8), a source of rain (55:10). There are references to threatening weather phenomena, such as the potential for *šemeš* and *šārāb* to cause thirst (49:10), and destructive winds with *səʿārâ* (40:24; 41:16) and *rûaḥ* (41:16).

In addition to the spaces of the physical world, Deutero-Isaiah also contains references to its materiality with mention of rocks (Isa 44:8; 48:21; 51:1), dust (40:12; 41:2; 47:1; 49:23; 52:2), and clay (41:25; 45:9).

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[24] Note especially the terms *təhôm rabbâ* and *maʿămaqqê-yām* in Isaiah 51:10; see Goldingay and Payne 2006b, 233–38.

[25] In some instances, *ʾî* refers to a group of people rather than the physical world. For example, in Isaiah 42:10 the text refers separately to the landscape with the phrase *ʾîyyim wəyōšbêhem*.

[26] The term used here in Isaiah 50:3 is a *hapax legomenon* derived from *qdr*; see HALOT 2.1072. Elsewhere, there are also references to the related terms *ʾôr* (Isa 42:6, 16; 45;7; 49:6; 51:4), *ḥōšek* (42:7; 45:3, 7, 19; 47:5; 49:9), and *maḥšāk* (42:16).
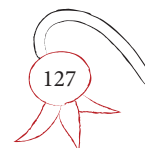
There are also multiple references to vegetation and growth, such as grass (40:6–8; 51:12), flowers (40:6–8), plants (42:15), and trees (40:20; 41:19; 44:14, 23; 55:12).[27] Additionally, there are references to non-human life: agriculture or animal husbandry, as with ʿedrō and ṭəlāʾim (40:11) and ḥayyâ (40:16), along with other animals understood as uncontrollable or hostile (40:31; 41:14; 43:20; 46:1). Human activities and social relations that interact with the physical, material world are present as well, from subsistence agriculture and animal husbandry (40:11; 49:9), to the activities of the household, to work and labor in making gardens (51:3) and quarries (51:1), woodworking, smithing and ironworking (41:7), and threshing and winnowing (41:15–16).

Isaiah 41:17–20

The text of Isaiah 41:17–20 is one of several descriptions of ecological restoration where the landscape is transformed (42:11; 43:18–21; 44:3; 48:20–22; 49:9–13, 19; 51:3). There are clear connections between this text and the transformation of the *midbār* and ʿarābâ in Isaiah 35, and the reference to watercourses (*yiblê-māyim*) in 44:1–4. The ecological transformations described in 41:17–20 are for the benefit of the poor and needy (*hā ʿănîyyim wəhā ʾebyônim*), who suffer due to a lack of water (41:17); they will have their needs met, as four different arid environments will be renewed by the presence of water to make them more conducive to human flourishing (Mills 2018, 115–16).[28] These hopes have traditionally been understood as provisions for exiles returning on the "way in the wilderness" to Judah from Babylonia, but there is no direct reference to this idea in the text (Blenkinsopp 2002, 228). The fourth item in the list is suggestive, as the dry land (*ʾereṣ ṣîyyâ*) is renewed by the presence of a canal of water, or a watercourse (*môṣāʾê māyim*).[29] This suggests that the author has in mind the creation of an irrigation

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27 The three tree species in Isaiah 41:19 are difficult to identify. See Goldingay and Payne 2006a, 183–86.

28 Further examples of the motif of provision of water are found in Isaiah 35:6; 43:19–20; 44:3–4; 48:20–21; 49:9; cf. 55:1.

29 See DCH 5.184; HALOT 2.559. There is an additional reference to the needy being provisioned by *môṣāʾê māyim* in Isaiah 58:11.

system, thus emphasizing that the restoration of the land through agricultural means (Goldingay and Payne 2006a, 182). The ecological flourishing of a well-watered, fructified, and productive wilderness benefits the city and its residents who depend on its local agrarian economy (cf. Ps 107), and here it is explicit that the economically disadvantaged will benefit (Davis 2009, 158–59). What we find in these texts is that the expectations and hopes for restoration are ones that are extended to both human and non-human recipients, as nature terminology may also "denote conditions of existence rather than just distinct ecologies" (Blenkinsopp 2001, 44).

Isaiah 44:23; 45:8

According to Davis, the idea of blessing in the Hebrew Bible is an "ecological phenomenon" (2009, 164). In Deutero-Isaiah, the natural world is twice the subject of direct address, as "the earth itself participates in the restoration of salvation" (Joerstad 2019, 149). A short hymnic statement concludes Isaiah 44:6–23 and exhorts the heavens (*šāmayim*), the depths of the earth (*taḥtîyyôt ʾāreṣ*),[30] the mountains (*hārîm*), and forests (*yaʿar*) to shout in celebration (44:23). A similar hymnic statement concludes 45:1–7, calling for the skies to rain down and the earth to sprout up vindication (*ṣedeq*) in 45:8. In other passages, Yahweh's word is equated with rain and snow falling to the ground (44:3–4; 55:10–11), and following in his ways brings prosperity that flows like a river and success like waves of the sea (48:18–19), so that even the coastlands await divine salvation (51:5). These ecological metaphors do more than just express theological concepts, as the question of a city's righteousness "is a question of who controls the land" (Davis 2009, 156) and enjoys access to its bounty. Just as the celebration of hope results in the natural order breaking out in song (42:10–12; 44:23; 49:13; cf. 54:1; Marlow 2022, 126), so also do the ruins of Jerusalem break out into joyful shouts (52:9).

If blessing is an ecological phenomenon, then we can see that Deutero-Isaiah understands its opposite in ecological terms as well. In

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[30] This construction can be taken as a reference to the underworld; see Goldingay and Payne 2006a, 365–66.
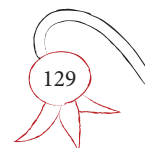
the same way that "positive action is expressed in terms of ecological transformation and the renewal of nature," the inverse is true, as "destructive power, demonstrations of power to intervene decisively in the political arena, is expressed in the language of ecological degradation" (Blenkinsopp 2002, 317; see also 182). So, the imagery of 41:17–20 is reversed in 42:15 as mountains and hills are scorched; rivers and marshes are dried up (42:15); grass withers and flowers fade when Yahweh's breath blows on them (40:7); the islands look on in fear and the earth trembles from end to end (51:12); mountains are threshed into dust; and the hills are reduced to chaff, winnowed, carried off, and scattered (41:15–16). In contrast, to take but one example from the Isaian tradition, we never find in Isaiah 40–55 a description of ecological degradation combined with the destruction of human-designed space like the one in 2:14–15 that describes the "day of Yahweh" coming against the mountains and hills as well as every "tower" (*migdāl*) and "wall" (*ḥômâ*). The rhetorical power of these warnings in Deutero-Isaiah comes from their assumption that the land is valuable and susceptible to degradation.

Isaiah 51:1–8

The interrelationship between city and nature is made even more explicit, for example, as in the very interesting reference to a version of the Eden myth in Isaiah 51:3.[31] Here, Jerusalem's ruins are "comforted" (*nḥm*) as "her wilderness" (*midbārah*) and "her desert" (*ʿarbātah*) are likened to idyllic gardens. These are unique suffixed forms (Goldingay and Payne 2006b, 225), but they are related to other texts throughout Isaiah that depict the city as a rewilded space. These descriptions of the city are not necessarily negative; several use a wilderness theme to describe the destroyed city as a "rural utopia" where "a just and equitable social order" may emerge (14:17; 27:10; 64:9; Blenkinsopp 2001, 43),

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[31] A similar idea is evident in Isaiah 62:4, where the text's description of the restoration of Zion includes her land becoming "espoused," leaving the reader with "the impression that city and land are somehow conflated in the writer's mind" (Blenkinsopp 2003, 237). Several references to Eden emerge in the post-destruction period; see Ezekiel 28:11–19; 31:8–9, 16, 18; 36:35; Joel 2:3; Goldingay 2005, 423.

or describe it as a locus for animals to graze as a "'pivot point' through which to express their hope that restoration would ultimately follow from the wreckage of historical disaster" (5:17; 17:2; 27:10; 32:14; Stulac 2019, 688). It is often unrecognized in the modern West that practices of urban agriculture and animal husbandry have an extensive history beginning with the very first cities (Davis 2009, 160–63, esp. 161). The positive transformations of these wild spaces in 51:3 into Eden and Yahweh's garden (*gan-yhwh*)[32] suggest a hopeful view of human interaction with the landscape. By evoking the site of ruptures between humanity and the land, the restorative transformation of the wilderness into Eden suggests "the healing of the relationship between the city and countryside" (Davis 2009, 170).[33] Gardens are spaces where human design and natural forces are balanced together, "a material site which is boundaried and under control while also enlivened by the elemental forces of nature" (Mills 2018, 118). While urban spaces are not seen to be free from natural life, the landscape is not seen to be free from all human activity.
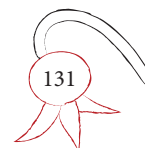
Cultural Devastation

Both the Crow Indians and the ancient Judeans experienced cultural devastation following military defeats at the hands of an expansionist empire and subsequent deportations from their ancestral territory. Though they were numerous and strong as a tribe in the early nineteenth century, the Crow were surrounded in their hunting grounds in what is modern-day Montana and Wyoming by enemy tribes, namely, the Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Blackfeet. The westward movement of the Sioux, the most bitter enemy of the Crow, brought severe fighting, which made it necessary for the Crow to side with the United States in fighting against them.[34] Despite a succession of treaties with

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[32] The only other instance of this construct is in Genesis 13:10 as a part of a description of a verdant, "well-watered" landscape.

[33] See also Davis 2006.

[34] White 1978, 319–21, cited in Lear 2006, 22–23.

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the United States government, and military victories against the Sioux, Crow territory was severely diminished—from 33 million acres in 1851 to 2 million acres in 1882—and by 1884 the Crow had relocated to a reservation. After a failed rebellion was put down by the United States in 1887, traditional Crow life had effectively ended (Lear 2006, 21–31).

In recollections gathered by his biographer Frank B. Linderman, Plenty Coups refused to discuss life for the Crow on the reservation, simply saying that "when the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened."[35] Lear focuses his attention on Plenty Coups's insistence that "nothing else happened" once "the buffalo went away." There are multiple ways one can explain what Plenty Coups may have meant by this statement, but Lear sees a profound "insight into the structure of temporality" where there is "a genuine possibility of happenings' breaking down" (2006, 5–6). In other words, as the traditional Crow way of life ended, so also did the very framework within which events "had traditionally been counted as happening" (2006, 9). Here, Lear refers to the work of Marshall Sahlins to emphasize how events acquire significance *only* through cultural schema; "an event becomes such as it is interpreted" (Sahlins 1985, xiv). If the schema itself within which events happen breaks down, then there is no longer a way to "locate 'happenings' in an explanatory and meaning-filled context" (Lear 2006, 158n7).[36] In this interpretation, Lear can understand Plenty Coups's claim that "nothing else happened" to be a radical statement about the meaning in human culture. There exists a possibility for all of us that "the field of possibilities in which all human endeavors gain meaning" (Lear 2006, 7) can be lost.

All of the texts of the exilic period, including Deutero-Isaiah, are variously "coming to terms with a failed history, ending in near-terminal disaster," and several grapple with the loss of a cultural scheme with

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[35] Linderman, 1962, 308–9, cited in Lear 2006, 2.

[36] Lear notes how this is very similar to Ludwig Wittgenstein's idea that forms of life give meaning to concepts. See Wittgenstein 1958; Lear 2006, 162–63n40.

which to interpret events (Blenkinsopp 2002, 105).[37] One salient example is Psalm 137, which describes the exiled community weeping by the rivers of Babylon. Here, the exiles are mocked by their captors, who are goading them to sing "one of the songs of Zion" (137:3), but the following stanza in 137:4–6 asks how it could be possible to do so in a foreign land. Jerusalem remains in the mind of the poet, who refuses to lose his memory of the city and affirms its importance above any other joy he might find, but the only hope he has is for revenge (137:7–9). The destruction of the Temple was "a classical case of social anomie" (Hanson 1987, 489), and its loss, together with the monarchy, brought the end of "a millennial tradition, which had to be rethought with the loss of everything that world signified" (Landy 2020, 398).[38] This is not unlike the way that scholarship in the field of trauma studies explains these experiences as a "confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge" (Caruth 1996, 153).[39] There is an absence of descriptions of the destruction of Jerusalem—"an anticlimax in the prophetic book" (Poulsen 2020, 272)—or of actual life in Babylonian exile—a "history that has no place" (Carr 2014, 75). Deutero-Isaiah refers to the despair brought on by these events, as texts question Yahweh's silence (42:14), his hiddenness or forgetfulness (40:27), and his casting off of his people (41:9). With language that directly echoes Lamentations 5:20, personified Zion wonders in Isaiah 49:14–15 if Yahweh has abandoned (ʿzb) and forgotten (škḥ) her (Tiemeyer 2011, 353–54). At the conclusion of Lamentations, the text asks why Yahweh has completely forgotten and forsaken his people; there is one final plea for restoration, for the situation to return to as it was in the "days as of old," but Yahweh's rejection and anger seem to make this hope impossible (Lam 5:19–22).[40]

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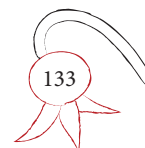
[37] It should be stressed, as Najman (2014, 3) does in her use of Lear, that these descriptions pertain to the *tradition* of the Exile, rather than the historical realities of the period. See also Barstad 1996, 23; 2008, 97.

[38] See also Halvorson-Taylor 2011; Poulsen 2019.

[39] See Carr 2014, 74–75.

[40] Here Norman Gottwald's interpretation of Lamentations 5:19–22 is helpful, as he understands this plea to "impl[y] at the very least a return of national freedom

There are similar sentiments elsewhere in texts from this period: the faithful wonder whether Yahweh will hide himself forever (Ps 89:46); some question whether Yahweh is dispassionate about or aloof from the fate of his people (Ezek 18:2, 25); and those who remained devoted to Yahweh are asked: "Where is your god?" (Ps 42:4; 115:2).

"Radical Hope" in Deutero-Isaiah

According to Lear, the core of "radical hope" consists of a commitment "to the bare idea *that something good will emerge*" (2006, 94). In his recollections of his youth, Plenty Coups tells of a spirit-dream that forewarned him of the coming disasters for the Crow and the departure of the buffalo, and Lear interprets the dream as a form of ethical advice "designed to help him survive the cataclysmic rupture that is about to occur" (2006, 80). Though traditional ethics were facing collapse, Lear describes how Plenty Coups resisted a Kierkegaardian "teleological suspension of the ethical" and remained committed to "a goodness that transcends one's current understanding of the good" (2006, 92). This commitment to a transcendent form of goodness—in Plenty Coups's case, a religious form of commitment to God—is what constitutes "radical hope":

> What makes this hope *radical* is that it is directed toward a future goodness that transcends the current ability to understand what it is. Radical hope anticipates a good for which those who have the hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it.[41]

The good that is hoped for does not necessarily take on traditional form; in Plenty Coups's case, it requires "a creative maker of meaning-

under king and priesthood … [since] it was impossible to think of a bright future without the reconstruction of those ancient and venerated forms through which God made his will and goodness known" (1962, 110–11). This hope is faintly present, but it is unlike the "radical hope" discussed by Lear since it is only oriented toward a return back to a previous way of life.

[41] Lear 2006, 103.

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ful space" who is able to "take up the Crow past and—rather than use it for nostalgia or ersatz mimesis—project it into vibrant new ways for the Crow to live and to be" (Lear 2006, 51). For the Crow, this meant a new way of planting a coup stick, a ritual object carried by clan leaders that, when planted in the ground during battle, would mark a boundary that Crow warriors would defend to their death (Lear 2006, 13–14). Representing Native American tribes in a ceremony to establish the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery in 1921, Plenty Coups stepped forward to the sarcophagus and laid upon it his coup stick and warbonnet—an act Lear interprets as burying them, "marking the end of a way of life in which the coup-stick and warbonnet had integral roles" (2006, 33). For Deutero-Isaiah, the use of prophetic speech forms is a similar kind of creative poetic response to a situation of crisis; the loss of a native monarchy "caused drastic changes in prophetic agency" as scribal forms of prophecy emerged in the exilic and postexilic periods.[42]

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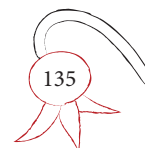
Isaiah 43:16–21

The text of Isaiah 43:16–21 in particular closely parallels Plenty Coups's hopeful reinterpretation of his tradition. A messenger formula in 43:16–17 introduces the unit, which gives an instruction not to remember former or old things (*ri'šōnôt wǝqadmōnîyyôt*) because Yahweh says in 43:18–19 that he will do "something new" (*ḥădāšâ*). Five other texts in Deutero-Isaiah refer to *ri'šōnôt* (41:22; 42:9; 43:9; 46:9; 48:3), but given the description of ways through water, horses, chariots, and armies in 43:16–17,[43] the likely referent of the *ri'šōnôt* and *qadmōnîyyôt* in 43:18 is the victory at the Sea of Reeds. Instead of remembering this salvific tradition, the prophet announces something new with the ecological transformation of the desert (*yĕšimôn*) and the wilderness (*midbār*) with water (43:20). The text sets the honor of wild animals and the praise of the people in parallel as they celebrate the revival of the landscape. The reference to wild beasts, jackals, and ostriches evokes the "grazing-space *topos*" described by Stulac (5:17; 17:2; 27:10; 32:14), a

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[42] Nissinen 2017, 351. See also Sanders 2017.

[43] Cf. Exodus 14:4, 6, 7, 9, 17, 18, 23, 26, 28; 15:1, 4, 10, 19, 21.

polyvalent "continuum of interrelated concepts familiar to a premodern, agrarian society" where the landscape is both rewilded and redomesticated with the presence of animal life; it is "one expression of a worldview that perceives a permeable membrane between human agricultures and the larger panoply of creation in which those agricultures operate" (Stulac 2019, 688–89).[44]

Isaiah 55:1–13

The most striking way in which Deutero-Isaiah does not attend to "former things" is the way it passes over both the monarchy and the Temple as it articulates its hopes for the future. This is made clear in Isaiah 55:1–13, where hope is not expressed through these traditional institutional forms. In relation to the monarchy, Deutero-Isaiah is unlike Isaiah 1–39 in that there is almost no attention paid to David or the Davidic line.[45] The text does not look to the monarchy as a vehicle for its hope for the future, instead shifting the typical expectations placed on the monarch to other parties. First, by transferring titles usually associated with the Davidic line onto the Persian king Cyrus, referring to him as Yahweh's "servant" (ʿebed), "shepherd" (rōʿê),[46] and famously as his "anointed" (mašiaḥ) in 45:1, Deutero-Isaiah asserts that "the Davidic monarch has been superseded" and "Zion is displaced as the cosmic centre" (Landy 2023, 350). This constitutes a major ideological shift with a complete transfer of political legitimacy from the Davidic monarchy to the Achaemenids (Fried 2002). Not only would this supportive stance toward Persia take advantage of the empire's tolerance of local cults, it also would allow for an expression of a "radical" vision of religion separate from "nationality and territory," even hinting at a future

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[44] See Marlow 2022, 131.

[45] Roberts 1982, 140; Schmid 2002, 185–87; Blenkinsopp 2014, 134. Though there is no mention of David or the Davidic line, the description of the servant figure in Isaiah 42:1–4 does include language typically associated with the king, primarily the responsibility of ensuring social justice (Williamson 2020, 290).

[46] David is referred to as Yahweh's servant (2 Sam 3:18; 1 Kgs 8:24–26; 2 Kgs 19:34; Jer 33:21–22, 26; Ezek 34:23; 37:24) and shepherd (2 Sam 5:2 = 1 Chr 11:2; Ezek 34:23; 37:24; Ps 78:71–72; Berges 2014; Blenkinsopp 2014, 139).

apart from "the apparatus of an independent state system" (Blenkinsopp 2014, 143). Second, the text's only direct reference to David in 55:3 offers a "radically new perspective" on the monarchy where the promise of an everlasting covenant and steadfast love with David is democratized and given to the people.[47] Though the *hôy* introduction in 55:1 does not specify an audience, the use of plural forms in 55:3 makes it clear that the text collectivizes this formerly royal promise, likely including the primary addressees of Jacob/Israel in Isaiah 40–48 and Zion in Isaiah 49–55 (Williamson 2020, 288). Of primary significance for an agrarian reading is the way this covenant with the people is embedded in a text that is critical of commercialism and the marketplace, as the hungry and thirsty in 55:1–2 are assured that they will have plenty to eat and drink in a gift economy without the need of money (Altmann 2016, 303; see also 201–5). By assuring its audience that all will have access to food without the potential for economic exploitation, the text constitutes a critique of "a greedy urban-dominated agriculture that is oblivious to rural or common people" (Davis 2009, 174). Thus, the democratization of the Davidic promise should be understood to include a rejection of the urban expropriation of wealth from the hinterland.

Yahweh's covenant with the people is followed by one final reprise of the theme of natural renewal in Isaiah 55:6–13. A short exhortation in 55:6–7 calls for the text's audience to seek and call to Yahweh. These acts are moral or ethical in nature, not unlike the common instruction to listen and take heed in 55:3. While the act of seeking (*drš*) after Yahweh may refer to visiting a sanctuary or consulting a medium for an oracle, in 55:6 it has the meaning of a prayerful attitude responsive to Yahweh's instruction (Blenkinsopp 2002, 371), and is a part of what Ulrich Berges has called the "individualization of exile" (2019, 66–71) in the form of an ethical commitment to care for those in need. The ensuing text in 55:8–13 contains a short speech from Yahweh in 55:8–11 and a final recapitulation of Deutero-Isaiah's main themes of return from exile and the restoration of the land in 55:12–13. The efficacy of

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[47] Miller 2010, 224; Williamson 2020, 288. A majority of recent opinion holds that the phrase *ḥasde dāwid* refers to David as the recipient of Yahweh's steadfast love (Williamson 2020, 287–89).

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Yahweh's word is likened to the fertility brought to the earth by rains and snow (55:10–11), and the natural world joins in on the celebration of joy and security brought about by Yahweh's covenant with the people as the mountains and hills shout and the trees of the field clap their hands (55:12; see 44:23). As the culminating section of Deutero-Isaiah, it is notable that neither the faithful response of those who listen to and seek after Yahweh (55:3, 6) nor the joyful anticipation of Yahweh's provision (55:10–11, 12–13) refer to the Temple or cult at all. This fits with the generally "anti-priestly, and especially anti-Temple" outlook of Deutero-Isaiah, where the text shows "no practical interest at all in the restoration of the cult" aside from one reference to the return of the Temple vessels in 52:11–12 (Lipton 2009, 82–83). Additionally, the one isolated reference to the Temple in 44:28, found with the first mention of Cyrus in the text and his rebuilding of Jerusalem, seems primarily to have political rather than religious significance, simply referring to "a broader imperial policy of temple refoundations" (Landy 2023, 350). Instead of an assembled gathering in the central sanctuary (e.g., 56:7), a fertile, rejoicing landscape is the image of Yahweh's provision. The descriptions of cypress and myrtle replacing brier and nettle in 55:13 should be understood as occurring in the land of Judah, like the description of Zion being transformed into a garden in 51:3, but not in order to make it into "a kind of nature preserve or memorial park" (Blenkinsopp 2002, 373). It is worth pointing out that the abundant food promised in 55:1–2 comes from agricultural processes in 55:10; the vegetation of the earth brings seed used for sowing, and it is human labor that transforms its harvest into bread for eating. Thus, the fertile landscape described here is a cultivated and productive one. The same text that democratizes the Davidic promise locates Yahweh's provision in agricultural activity on the land and an ethical commitment to a just distribution of its yield rather than exploitation for profit or gain. Rather than extol the traditional institutional guarantors of Yahweh's blessing (i.e., monarchy and Temple), the hopes expressed by Deutero-Isaiah envision an agrarian vision of flourishing with a new kind of social formation built around the central recognition of land's importance.

Conclusion

In this article, I have read Deutero-Isaiah's hopeful response to cultural disaster alongside that of Plenty Coups. Has this brought out new meaning in Deutero-Isaiah? Are the descriptions of disaster in Deutero-Isaiah and similar texts to be understood as a collapse of cultural meaning, or what Lear refers to as an end of happenings? It would seem that the answer hangs on another question—*for whom?* Whether author or audience, it is historically correct to say that our texts originate in elite circles whose interests do not necessarily include those of non-elites. The traditions concerning Zion's inviolability, and the deep symbolic resonances it creates between human and divine kingship, serve to legitimate a social order. So, the loss of the two central institutions of Judean society would foreclose different sets of possibilities for different social groups. For elite circles connected to the cultic or royal establishment, who are "the human representations of the praised sign," the destruction of the symbol leads to the collapse of its symbolic universe, a collapse of a culturally ordered way of life (Miller 2010, 232). It is more difficult to say that the devastation for "official" Israelite culture (religion) would also extend to the "family" culture (or religion) of non-elites.[48] Yet, it seems clear that the loss of "established political and cultic hierarchies as immutable institutions" (Miller 2010, 230–33) would lead to changes in the social order itself.

Using Lear's account as a guide, we can see several major points of similarity between our two sources. Like the Crow, the Judeans suffered through an experience of cultural devastation that brought about the end of their traditional ways of life. Like the Crow, Deutero-Isaiah responded to this crisis through a traditional form of divine mediation—the dream-vision of the Crow and the prophetic speech of ancient Israel. Both sought to ensure the survival of their people through collaboration with empire rather than resistance to it. Finally, like the

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[48] Albertz and Schmitt assert that "the complete absence of official religious traditions in personal names testifies that family religion existed and functioned independently of Israel's history of national salvation and was uninfluenced by it" (2012, 335); see also Albertz 1978, 49–77.
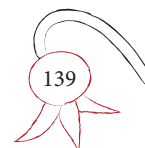
Crow, Deutero-Isaiah renounced the traditional means through which territorial boundaries were maintained. For the Crow, this meant the "burial" of the coup-stick; for Deutero-Isaiah, this meant the rejection of the central institutions of monarchy and Temple. Deutero-Isaiah instead advances the claim that the land is the guarantor of a good life for Yahweh's people, and that it has "the power to contribute to conditions that make righteous life and salvation available to humans" (Joerstad 2019, 150).

Deutero-Isaiah's hope for the deportees' return to Judah is not a hope for a *return to normal*. A traditional ideology of Zion, together with its attendant social forms, is no longer viable after the ruptures of exile. The prophet recognizes that the cultural schema has broken down and now anticipates "a future goodness that transcends the current ability to understand what it is." What ultimately tips the scales and makes Deutero-Isaiah's hope for the landscape *radical* in Lear's terms is that it directly confronts the impossibility that Yahweh's goodness could be found "without the reconstruction of those ancient and venerated forms" (Albertz 2003, 441–43) of monarchy and Temple. By democratizing the royal promise (Isa 55:3), the prophet offers a hopeful solution to the problem caused by the end of the Davidic line: a vision of human flourishing deeply intertwined with the land, one "where what happens in the fields is inseparable from what happens in cities and towns" (Tull Willey 2009, 27). It is, of course, a challenge to identify the precise social makeup of the community to whom the Davidic promise is extended. Within the latter sections of Isaiah, there are clear indications of social divisions, indicating that the process of taking up these new social forms was not straightforward.[49] What is clear, though, is that the prophet affirms in hope that the good will include Zion, with the land as an equal participant and recipient of that good as well.

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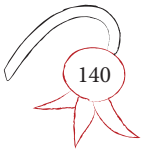
[49] As Mark Brett (2020, 627–31) observes, both John Kessler (2006) and Francesca Stavrakopoulou (2010, 17, 73, 140) use a postcolonial approach to interpret these conflicts between repatriating elites ("colonizers") and the indigenous population.

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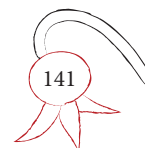
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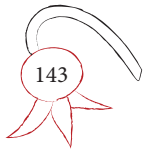
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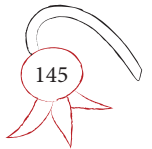
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Abstract

The theme of hope is evident in many places in Chronicles' retelling of the history of Israel and Judah. In 1 Chronicles 1–9, the theme of hope is envisioned through long genealogies, beginning with Adam and descending through the children of Jacob/Israel. The Chronicler spends most of the time focusing on the genealogies on Judah, Benjamin, and Levi, but the other tribes find a place within the genealogies as well. Using C. R. Snyder's model of hope theory, we explore the theme of hope in restoration and consider how the Chronicler envisions hope in postexilic Judah. We consider positive and negative images of hope depicted in the genealogical lists in 1 Chronicles 1–9.
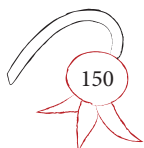
Le thème de l'espoir est présent en de nombreux endroits de la reprise de l'histoire d'Israël et de Juda dans les livres des Chroniques. Dans 1 Chroniques 1–9, il est envisagé à travers de longues généalogies, qui commencent par Adam et vont jusqu'aux enfants de Jacob/Israël. Le Chroniqueur consacre la majeure partie de ses généalogies à Juda, Benjamin et Lévi, mais les autres tribus y trouvent également leur place. À travers le modèle de la théorie de l'espoir de C. R. Snyder, nous explorons le thème de l'espoir dans la restauration et examinons comment le Chroniqueur conçoit l'espoir dans Juda à l'époque postexilique. Nous examinons les images positives et négatives de l'espoir dans les listes généalogiques de 1 Chroniques 1–9.

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HOPE IN RESTORATION: GENEALOGIES AS IMAGES OF HOPE IN 1 CHRONICLES 1–9

Deirdre N. Fulton and Diane E. Dungan

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Introduction

The framing of the book of Chronicles is unique compared to other texts throughout the Hebrew corpus because the former opens with the largest section of genealogies among the biblical texts.[1] These genealogies in Chronicles link specific family groups to people and institutions in the distant past, beginning with Adam and moving to the twelve sons of Israel and their descendants. Eventually, this long, interwoven web

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[1] Other lengthy—but shorter—genealogies in the Hebrew Bible are in Genesis (5:1–31; 10:1–32; 11:10–26, 27–32; 22:20–24; 25:1–4, 12–18, 23–29; 36:1–43; 46:8–27); Exodus (6:14–27); Numbers (3:14–39; 26:5–65); Ruth (4:18–22); and Ezra (7:1–5). Several studies have examined biblical genealogies, both in Chronicles and the rest of the biblical corpus. Marshall Johnson's (1969) book-length work is considered foundational to the study of this topic. Other studies include Wilson 1977; Sasson 1978; Levin 2001; Sparks 2008; Löwisch 2015. For a survey of scholarship, see Klip 2022.

of genealogies links the beginning of humanity to the postexilic Judean community.[2] While the genealogies focus on the twelve tribes of Israel, they are written long after the collapse of the Judean monarchy during a time when Judah was dominated by a foreign power.[3] Through this naming of their shared ancestry, the postexilic Judean community may draw hope out of the defeats and deep disappointments of their shared past in all its complexity.

Chronicles has many moments in which the theme of hope in restoration is present, such as the lengthy narratives surrounding the kingship of David and Solomon, but 1 Chronicles 1–9 grounds the book in the theme of hope in restoration by listing certain individual families of Israel.[4] While a number of scholars have argued that Chronicles conveys the theme of hope in these genealogies, the articulation of what precisely a state of hope may mean has yet to be fully explored.[5] In this article, we argue that hope is a motivational state that incorporates planning and activity (Snyder 2002). This hope is conceptualized explicitly

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[2] Heda Klip states that these genealogies "describe the birth of a nation" (2022, 157). Knoppers (2004, 256) points out that the relationship among the different genealogical groups is what articulates the *ethnos*. Mark McEntire and Wongi Park (2021) examine ethnic identity formation, specifically considering fusion and fission in the biblical genealogies (Old Testament and New Testament). All these studies on biblical genealogies highlight how ethnic identity is not static but dynamic and multifaceted.

[3] Most scholars date the composition of Chronicles to anywhere in the period from after the Edict of Cyrus mentioned in 2 Chronicles 36:22–23 (538 BCE) to the second century BCE. We maintain a late-fourth-century or third-century BCE date based on several criteria, including textual references that use Chronicles in the second century BCE. For a discussion of the compositional debates, see Knoppers 2004; Dirksen 2005.

[4] For a discussion of "all Israel" in Chronicles, see, for example, Kalimi 2005; Japhet 2009; Jonker 2016; Staples 2021, 111–16.

[5] A few important studies have addressed aspects of hope, mostly implicitly, for the Chronicler's outlook on the past regarding present events. See Williamson 1982; Hill 2003; Schweitzer 2007; Japhet 2009; Jonker 2016. These studies, however, have not discussed a theoretical approach to hope within the text of Chronicles, which is the goal of this present application. For a history of scholarship on how hope and redemption have been understood in Chronicles, see Japhet 2009.

through the successes and failures of past institutions—the Temple and monarchy—in order to champion the present and (hopefully) future restoration of Israel.

That the genealogies were composed during a period of foreign domination connects them to the theme of hope in restoration in several ways. Although it may be appealing to consider the genealogies as grounded in the past since they mention the twelve tribes of Israel, the genealogies actually reconfigure and reframe the history of the traditional twelve tribes for the Chronicler's contemporary audience. For example, there are genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9 for groups that do not extend to the Exile and therefore are no longer part of the postexilic Judean community, most notably certain northern tribes.[6] In contrast, Judah, Benjamin, and Levi are part of the contemporary Judean community, and it is to them that all the genealogies are directed.

Moreover, the sudden appearance of genealogies, written during a period of foreign domination and therefore at a time when the kingdom lacked its former autonomy, reveals the importance of new lines of identity for the Judean communities.[7] We examine here the general view of the genealogies, focusing on certain northern tribal groups who no longer play a role in Judah, in order to explore the theme of hope in the restoration of postexilic Judah. Using C. R. Snyder's (2002) hope

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[6] According to Chronicles, the northern tribes are part of the postexilic Judean community including Ephraim and Manasseh (1 Chr 9:3). The inclusion of these northern tribes reveals the Chroniclers' interest in Israel, both north and south, to be part of postexilic Israel (Kartveit 1989; Oeming 1990; Jonker 2016). Not all tribes, however, are included in the genealogies such as Zebulun and Dan. This inclusion of the northern tribes contrasts with Ezra-Nehemiah, which never names northern tribes in its articulation of Israel.

[7] Although there are no open critiques of the Persian Empire in the text of Chronicles (or in the rest of the Hebrew Bible), the depth of a genealogy may reveal subversive purposes to the genealogy. In place of dominance and control, establishing deep roots to a geographical location may serve to legitimate a group whose claims may seem threatened (Nash 2017). For a different view, see Jonker 2016, 120, which argues that the genealogies are meant to help postexilic Judah articulate its place in the Persian Empire. See further for a discussion of genealogical depth.

theory as a model, we demonstrate how the Chronicler develops his hopeful message as he examines the plight of Israel. We open with a discussion of Snyder's hope theory, move to an introduction of the genealogies in Chronicles, and then proceed to a discussion of applying hope theory to Chronicles.

Hope Theory

Hope is an important psychological concept and has been studied consistently since the 1960s (Callina et al. 2017). With the growth of positive psychology, this research has intensified. One of the earliest and most widely used models of hope was created by C. R. Snyder and has been used to explore the role of hope in contemporary society.[8] In his hope theory, he examines the ways that hope may be measured and applied to individuals (Snyder 2002). In his earlier work, Snyder, along with Lori Irving and John R. Anderson, defined hope in this way: "Hope is a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)" (1991, 287). Later, Snyder (2002; Snyder et al. 2006) viewed hope in the context of how one frames the future through goals, agency, and pathways.

Goals are the "cognitive component that anchors hope theory" (Snyder 2002, 250). These goals are targets that can be visual or verbal descriptions and can have a range of temporal frames from immediate ("I want a cup of coffee") to long-term ("I want to finish writing my book"). Specificity impacts the motivational property of the goals and the level of hope tied to the goals. Goals that are specific tend to have high-hope thinking and help clarify the pathways or motivation to pursue them. Vague goals lack the pathway for pursuit and are generally

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[8] Snyder's (2002) hope theory, which we describe in greater detail below, is certainly the most widely cited conception of hope in the psychology literature. However, critiques of Snyder's hope theory (e.g., Tennen et al. 2002) point to a need to more fully integrate ideas about hope from other scholars and from other disciplines, particularly philosophy. For further review, see Callina et al. 2017.

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lower-hope thoughts. Without a requisite way to accomplish a goal, the goal will not be accomplished. Thus, pathways thinking emerges as one seeks pathways to accomplish the goal. Pathways thinking considers the relationships between past, present, and future for understanding hope. However, Snyder observes that "there need not be an absolute unidirectionality in the movement toward the future" (2002, 251). Instead, he argues for a "reciprocal thinking where the past influences the future and vice versa" (2002, 251). When individuals have high hopes, they will adapt their pathways more effectively to reach the goal—that is, the individual will see barriers, draw from past influences, and will be able to develop plans to move toward meeting the goal. The individual with high hope learns from past successes and unsuccessful goal pursuits, while the individual with low hope will ruminate on past failures and will struggle to pursue the goal (Snyder et al. 2006).

Finally, agency thoughts are "the perceived capacity to reach desired goals [and are] the motivational component behind hope theory" (Snyder 2002, 251). Agency thoughts are particularly important when facing trials or obstacles to goal attainment. These thoughts keep one motivated and seeking the best pathway possible to reach the goal.

Snyder et al. (2002) describe the relationship between hope theory and religion. They emphasize the idea that every religion provides a set of goals related to action and moral values, pathways for accomplishing those goals, and agency thoughts for applying those pathways. For example, the Chronicler, presumably, is articulating the genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9 to Jerusalemites, and more broadly Judeans, with a common set of goals and is clarifying the pathways to reaching those goals that are in alignment with their belief system. These goals may be as fundamental as survival and hope for renewal.

Kinship provides agency and the pathway to achieve the goal of restoration. At their basic level, kinship connections articulated through a genealogy are a way to outline a long history of agency (through intentional marriage alliances) that links the past to the present. Although one cannot change past genealogical connections—specifically who your ancestors marry—how one conceives of a genealogy reveals much

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about the contemporary setting of the writer.[9] Thus, the genealogy in Chronicles is not just about the birth of a nation, but it is also about the continuation of its diverse and complex past. These genealogies portray Israel as a people and as being in a specific geographical location, and therefore also reflect a hope of future success: the past was successful, and the hope for future generations is that they experience expansion and growth like their ancestors did with a continued presence in the Land of Israel. Genealogies are not merely past-focused; they have a past focus, a present meaning, and a future implication.

Hope theory's triad of goals, pathways, and agency is the scaffold for us to consider hope in restoration in the Hebrew Bible, since the past becomes the basis for present and future hope. Through the use of genealogies, the Chronicler presents a view of how future restoration is possible: through the ongoing presence of Israel represented in the people and in the tribes with which they are affiliated. One of the many functions of the genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9 is to establish hope for this postexilic community living under foreign domination. Goals provide a way forward for envisioning a restoration for Judah, and these genealogies provide a mechanism to unite the descendants of these various families. Pathways thinking may be seen in the knitting together of names of people through the long and complicated history of Israel—a pathway from Adam to Judahites, Benjaminites, and Levites to those generations living under foreign rule in the Persian period. It is not a unidirectional movement to the future but rather a blending of the past so as to set a path toward the future. Agency empowers the Chronicler, who in turn empowers the people of postexilic Judah to draw on these genealogies as motivation and as evidence of their capacity to reach their goals. By using the above-mentioned triad of goals, pathways, and agency, we can analyze the thinking process of the Chronicler's genealogies and consider specifically how the northern tribes factor into this image of restoration. Further, the genealogies reveal successful and unsuccessful goal pursuits through those who continue the lineage.

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[9] Several studies have highlighted how genealogies organize communities and what their motive may be. See, for example, Kartveit 1989, 2007; Knoppers 2004; Jonker 2016.

Indeed, they provide a process, or an active pathway and agency, to energize Judah toward hope in restoration by seeing the past, its impact in the present, and the implications for the future. The Chronicler knows that these genealogies are not static but are an active means of developing hope.

The Use of Genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9

Genealogies appear in the Bible and in other ancient Near Eastern texts for a number of reasons, including making family connections explicit, creating identity, enhancing one's own pedigree, and asserting specific claims to a position or to a group of people.[10] Genealogies tie groups together, and noticing who they include and leave out is significant when examining their function and purpose. Moreover, the sudden appearance of genealogies in Judah, written during a period of foreign domination and control, reveals the importance of new lines of identity for the Judean communities (Fulton 2011). But these new lines of identity are depicted as rooted in a long line of ancestors of all kinds and not simply members of the monarchy, a time when Judah was autonomous.

The use of genealogies in Chronicles is meant to tie specific groups of people together into a kinship group. The book of Chronicles, written a few centuries after the Kingdom of Judah had ended, focuses on the period of the monarchy and ends with what is often referred to as the "Edict of Cyrus," which has the new Persian emperor encouraging the Judean exiles to return to their homeland. While the text centers on the period of the monarchy, the narrative begins with the lengthiest series of genealogies in the biblical corpus. It begins with the first named human, Adam (1 Chr 1:1) and ends nine chapters later with a genealogy of those living in the town of Gibeon, beginning with the person Gibeon (9:39), extending through the first king, Saul (9:44), and ending with his descendants living during the Persian period.

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[10] Wilson 1977; Knoppers 2004; Wright 2005; Sparks 2008; Fulton 2011; McEntire and Park 2021; Klip 2022.

Robert Wilson (1977) offers a variety of reasons for the use of genealogies in the biblical text. Borrowing on social anthropological studies of kinship, namely the examination of the different spheres of kinship ties, Wilson identifies three foci for biblical genealogies: private or domestic, political-jural, and religious. The private or domestic reasons center on the family unit; the political-jural apply to the political rights and obligations of a group of people; and, finally, the religious concentrates on cultic institutions. Wilson (1977, 37–38) maintains that in many cases there is no discernable distinction among these different classifications and that they in effect often overlap with one another.

Wilson's work highlights that genealogies are not meant to provide a history and that they are not "artificial with no relation to some historical reality" (Sparks 2008, 11). Rather, genealogies are meant to draw people together through named characters in order to assert specific claims to a position or ties to a group of people. Genealogies may also have multiple purposes, which Catherine Nash's (2017) more recent work highlights. In Nash's discussion of how genealogies may cause "trouble" for the contemporary hearer/reader to understand, she observes that these troubles are related to the different ways in which genealogies are used in "different geographical and historical contexts and by different social groups, across a spectrum of agendas from naturalizing the elite transfer of power and property to the use of genealogy as a radical recovery of historical knowledge by subordinate groups" (2017, 6). Nash also observes:

> A critical engagement with genealogical models of collective identity needs to be sensitive to the significance of shared ancestry for many, including immigrant ethnic groups having multiple or diasporic senses of belonging, or indigenous groups form whom genealogical depth has huge political significance in terms of claims to ancestral land.[11]

Nash's articulation of the purpose of genealogies in former and current societies is helpful for understanding the function of these biblical genealogies and the difficulties one may face in understanding them. And while her work looks at how they can cause "trouble," it also highlights

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[11] Nash 2017, 6–7.

how genealogies may ultimately build hope. In our case, we can see how they may help to build hope, as they enable a "radical recovery" for the Judeans, a subordinate group to the Persians: it allows them to imagine or reimagine their history. Yigal Levin (2003, 245) maintains that the Chronicler is telling a history that is not simply focused on the "perspective of the urban elites in Jerusalem." He states: "When the Chronicler, in his genealogical 'introduction,' lays out the ethnic and geographical framework of his 'Israel,' his perspective is that of the tribal, village, society, which was very much alive and functioning in his day" (2003, 245). Indeed, these genealogies envision Judah's realities within the contemporary realities of its "imperial existence" (Jonker 2016, 120). These genealogical articulations were a way to verify current institutions or families for specific societal functions, constructed (in some cases) out of past institutions and families.[12] This phenomenon is akin to someone in the modern era claiming to relate centuries back to famous historical characters. Notably, they also connect people to geography, which is important for building a sense of belonging and claims to an ancestral land.

Genealogies are written to tell one's story, albeit in selective and highly curated ways. Genealogies are simply written or oral in form and express the descent of a person and/or related groups of people from an ancestor or group of ancestors.[13] This clear connection of a person to another through kinship terms—brother, sister, mother, father, son, daughter—is what makes something a genealogy and not just a list.[14] And these genealogical connections contribute to pathways thinking. Genealogies are often structured as either segmented or linear. When a segmented genealogy expresses "more than one line of descent from a

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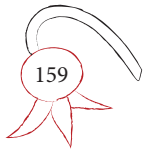
[12] For a discussion of the purpose of the genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9, and an outline of the different positions, see Levin 2003; Janzen 2018. See also Japhet 1979; Kartveit 1989, 2007; Oeming 1990; Kalimi 2005.

[13] Wilson 1977, 32; Sparks 2008, 14.

[14] To be clear, kinship claims are not synonymous with biological claims. Rather, they are culturally dependent and determined. See Sahlins 2013 for definitions of what kinship is and is not. See also Zerubavel 2012 for the way that contemporary readers of the Bible may understand genealogical relatedness.

given ancestor, then it will exhibit segmentation or branching" (Wilson 1977, 9). Each branch in a segmented genealogy is referred to as a "segment." First Chronicles 2–8 provides an example of one long segmented genealogy unified under the ancestor Israel. Linear genealogies are those that express only one line of descent from a given ancestor. Linear genealogies are only concerned with the one family line, and not how it relates to other lines. They may also take one of two forms: descending, that is, moving from a parent to a child, or ascending, moving from a child to a parent. While all of the names are significant in a genealogy, the first and last names are certainly the most important since they reveal *whom* the genealogy is *for* and *to whom* that particular person is connecting (Sparks 2008).
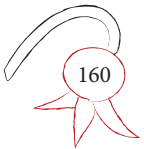
The ways that genealogies may function in relation to hope is that they are related to all Israel, and not, as David Janzen (2018) has pointed out, just the kings or Temple elite. Indeed, they are a monument to all Israel, connecting their shared past to the postexilic community. It is their shared history—leaders of the monarchy, religious institutions, and, significantly, families—that are remembered and memorialized in these lists. The genealogies highlight successes in goal pursuit from the past, difficulties in goal pursuit in the past, continued perseverance and energy toward the goal from generation to generation in the past and present, and a hope for the future. Those who are successful continue this lineage, keep moving toward restoration, and therefore continue the hope for all Israel.

Applying Hope Theory to 1 Chronicles

Goals

In Snyder's hope theory, hope is a cognitive, goal-directed experience. Goals may be difficult or easy to accomplish and may be accomplished quickly or take years or even decades to achieve. The goal must be of enough personal value for it to occupy conscious thought for the individual. Additionally, goals must be attainable but have some level of uncertainty—that is, the goal will take work to accomplish (Snyder et al. 2018). Snyder proposes that there are two major types of goal

outcomes: positive goal outcomes and negative goal outcomes. Positive goal outcomes reflect accomplishing, sustaining, or increasing a positive consequence whereas negative goal outcomes involve delaying or avoiding a negative consequence.[15] Our proposition, that genealogies may be images of positive hope, is based on how the Chronicler constructs the genealogies for a positive goal outcome. Using a list of dead people—for that is what a genealogy of this length is mostly naming— the Chronicler looks to the future for hope. But negative goal outcomes may be evident within these genealogies as well. The absence of certain tribal groups may be a reflection of this reality.

Structurally, the Chronicler is focused on Israel and the most common tribal affiliations in postexilic Judah: Judah, Benjamin, and Levi. These tribes have the most material dedicated to them compared to other tribes in 1 Chronicles and are also mentioned in other postexilic texts such as Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi. The genealogies of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi clearly continue after the Exile into the Persian period, as is evident in 1 Chronicles 9:2–34. These are the genealogies that the Chronicler spends the most time delineating.

In comparison, the five northern tribes Issachar, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Asher have only thirty-three verses dedicated to them, specifically 1 Chronicles 7:1–5, 12–40 (Knoppers 2004, 470).[16] The segmented genealogies of these tribes are all found in Genesis 46.[17] Benjamin is also mentioned in 1 Chronicles 7:6–11.[18]

While these five northern tribal genealogies are not nearly as lengthy as those of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi, they are nevertheless present. Why does the Chronicler include these genealogies at all? Many scholars

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[15] Snyder 2002; Snyder et al. 2018.

[16] Other genealogies in the North also appear and then disappear. For a discussion of the texts in Chronicles that discuss Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, see Ederer 2013; Amar 2020.

[17] 1 Chronicles 7:1–12 is a list of certain tribes of Israel and their military muster. Within the list, the founder of each tribe is listed and then their sons. The list then follows Tola's line for two more generations. The Chronicles list is almost identical to the lists in Genesis 46:13 and Numbers 26:23–24 except for two minor variants. See Knoppers 2004, 450–73; Sparks 2008, 189.

[18] For the specific orthographic issues, see Knoppers 2004; Klein 2006.

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have pointed out that Chronicles generally focuses on a pan-Israel ideal.[19] Julius Wellhausen (1885, 212) observes that in Chronicles tribes that were once extinct come again to life. But Gary Knoppers (2004, 470), and more recently Louis Jonker (2016), question why the Chronicler includes these northern tribes if these tribes are truly extinct. While they are not allotted to the lands that are envisioned in the Pentateuchal lists of tribes (such as in Josh 13–19), Knoppers (2004, 471) hypothesizes that there may have been members of the Chronicler's own audience that had connections to certain phratries of the northern tribes. This connection of current tribes to former tribes works as a type of present–past relationship, providing an example of how things operate in all directions in Chronicles.

The appearance of the northern tribes in the genealogies indicates a focus on all Israel; however, not all Israel is present in the postexilic reality. Jonker (2016, 155) observes that certain tribes, specifically the Transjordanian and other northern tribes (Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh) mentioned in 1 Chronicles 5:1–26 were probably no longer in existence in the postexilic period. The case of the Zebulun genealogy represents a noteworthy absence in the 1 Chronicles 7 text. In Genesis 46:14–15 and Numbers 26:26–27, Zebulun's genealogy of Zebulun, Sered, Elon, and Jahleel follows Issachar's genealogy, but not so in 1 Chronicles 7. In fact, in 1 Chronicles 7:6–11 a Benjaminite genealogy follows Issachar. Since a lengthy Benjaminite genealogy is found in 1 Chronicles 8:1–40 and 9:35–44, scholars have offered emendations to the 1 Chronicles 7:6–11 Benjaminite text, most commonly arguing that this should be either a genealogy of Zebulun or Dan. As Knoppers (2004, 459) observes, while there is reason to believe that there is disturbance to the text, no meaningful solution can make the Benjaminite genealogy read as that of Zebulun.

Furthermore, the northern tribe of Dan has found no place in the Chronicler's genealogy either. Dan is remembered as one of the twelve children of Israel in 1 Chronicles 2:2, but the descendants are never delineated in the text. The four subsequent references to Dan in Chronicles

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[19] Japhet 1979, 1993; Williamson 1982; Willi 1995; Knoppers 2004; Klein 2006; Jonker 2016.

are to the city (1 Chr 21:2; 27:22; 2 Chr 16:4, 30:5), not the people. In all other major lists of the twelve tribes found in Genesis, Numbers, Joshua, and Judges, Zebulun and Dan and their descendants are always present. Additionally, certain tribes such as Ephraim have truncated genealogies in 1 Chronicles that do not even make it to the monarchy but rather end in the era connected to Joshua's generation.

The goal of a representative Israel in 1 Chronicles 1–9 is clear, nonetheless. These genealogies serve as a target for future restoration, even if Israel may be somewhat reimagined and missing foundational tribes (such as Dan and Zebulun). The absence of certain tribes may also reveal, as Snyder's model asserts, that not all goal outcomes are positive. As these truncated and missing genealogies represent, it may also reveal the negative side to goals—that is, if your family made poor choices in the past, you are not remembered in the present. This failure to be remembered is something to be avoided, and hope exists in doing whatever it takes to avoid this negative outcome.

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Pathways

The second part of the hope theory triad is pathways. As Snyder observes: "Goals remain but unanswered calls without the requisite means to reach them" (2002, 251). For the Chronicler, genealogies function as the pathways for the community of Judah to reach the goal of restoration. And pathways run three ways—they are part of the present, but part of moving forward into the future is looking back into the past. To be clear, the genealogies are a highly refined articulation of goals through actual named people, past and present. The length of and details in these genealogies, even when they are somewhat truncated as is the case of the northern tribes, reflect the reality that the Chronicler is using a well-known structure for the purpose of articulating and understanding their community. Providing a known form of connectivity—that is genealogies—is relatable to the Chronicler's community.

It is noteworthy, however, that this relatable structure is also making a clear statement. The genealogies function as more than just lists of names. They also provide an ideological outlook for the Judean community. Just like the stories of the northern monarchy are largely removed from the narratives of Chronicles, the genealogies may also

function as a way to direct the Chronicler's contemporary community on how to proceed. The genealogies reveal the communities that (for the Chronicler) have a shared ideology and identity. Moreover, these names help to define the positive and negative goals for the postexilic Judean community, that is, where it should go and where it should not go. Thus, these truncated northern genealogies may function as a cautionary tale for Judah, Benjamin, and Levi.

Snyder and his colleagues[20] elaborated the hope theory model (Fig. 1) to demonstrate that hope thoughts are a combination of pathways (developmental lessons of correlation/causation) and agency (developmental lessons of self as author of causal chains of events). One's history of learning from events impacts their approach to events moving forward, but feedback from goal outcomes creates a feedback loop to impact learning and change hope thoughts. Surprise events and stressors are
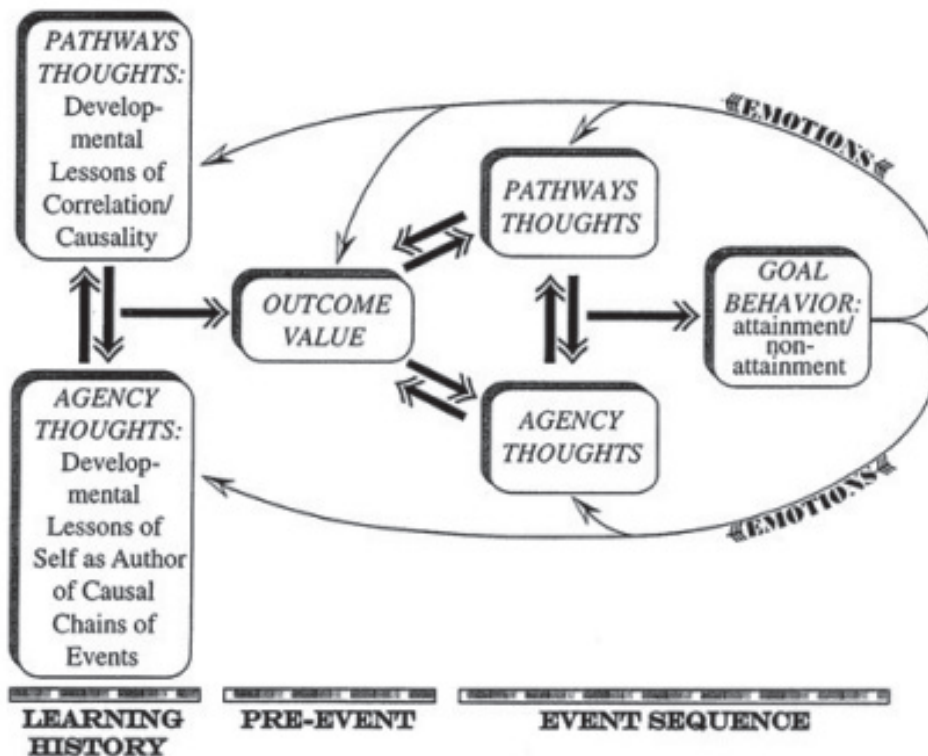
Figure 1: From Snyder et al. 2018. Schematic of feed-forward and feed-back functions involving agency and pathways (goal-directed) thoughts in hope theory.

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[20] Snyder 2002; Snyder et al. 2018.

expected and are included in the model. Applying this phenomenon to the Chronicler's community in the form of genealogies makes sense. The historical record (genealogy) can influence the current community's pathways and agency thoughts, and impact the community's commitment to the goal. As Thomas Willi (1995, 124), citing Sara Japhet (1989, 393), observes, the claim of these opening chapters is to show that Israel was created as the Lord's people, which was not a historical development but the continuous unfolding of this relationship:

Agency

The third part of the triad is agency. According to Snyder, agency thought is the "perceived capacity to use one's pathways to reach desired goals, [and] is the motivational component in hope theory" (2002, 251). Additionally, agentic thinking is important in all goal-directed thought, but it takes on special importance when one encounters difficulties or barriers in reaching a desired goal. Agency helps the person to persist and to choose the best pathway to continue moving toward the goal. The use of genealogies reveals the Chronicler's focus on human agency as a marker of hope and restoration. What better way to focus on human agency than through begetting? Begetting is one form of agentic thinking that energizes a person to continue toward a goal—those who continue a line are remembered and included in the genealogies. Additionally, this begetting is linked to the geography of Israel, which is presented as a place that Israel has always occupied.[21] The land is not

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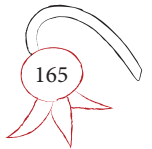
[21] Building on scholars such as Japhet (1983) who link the people to the land of Israel in 1 Chronicles 1–9, Philippe Abadie observes: "Comme nous l'avons vu, le Chroniste occulte l'exode au profit d'un autre mode de représentation: l'habitation continue d'Israël sa terre. Cette réalité géographique est directement liée à la définition du peuple saint … Ainsi, par les nombreuses notices géographiques qui interrompent les listes généalogiques (1 Ch 2,22–23; 2,55; 4,9–10.22–23.28–33.38–43; 5,8–10.11–22.23.26; 6,39–66; 7,21–24.28–29) et disent l'occupation du sol en ses moindres parcelles. Les chapitres qui ouvrent le livre déterminent ainsi un double espace, à la fois géographique et ethnique" (1997, 84) [As we have seen, the Chronicler obscures the Exodus in favor of another mode of representation: the continued habitation of Israel in its land. This geographical reality is directly linked to the definition of the holy people … Thus, by the numerous geographical

mapped in geographical terms that outline each tribal designation—as we see in Joshua 13–19—but rather through the people who, as Magnar Kartveit observes, "inhabit the land" (2007, 80*).[22]

The presence of the northern tribes is in direct contrast to the stories of the monarchies in 2 Chronicles, where the northern kings are conspicuously absent. Chronicles intentionally leaves out the parallel materials of the kings of Israel, rather focusing on the kings of Judah. For example, the reigns of the kings after Jeroboam, outlined in 2 Kings 8:15; 15:25–21:29; 22:52–2, are all absent from Chronicles.[23] The last six kings of Israel, outlined in 2 Kings 15:8–31 and 2 Kings 17, are also absent in Chronicles.[24] Thus, it appears for the Chronicler that, once the Northern Kingdom broke away from the Davidic monarchy and Jerusalem-centered worship, its narrative is no longer important (Japhet 1993; Knoppers 2004).

Indeed, for the Chronicler the Northern Kingdom used its own agency and broke away. Yet individual northern tribes are not synonymous with the Northern Kingdom, which is evident when the different

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notices that interrupt the genealogical lists (1 Chr 2:22–23, 55; 4:9–10, 22–23, 28–33, 38–43; 5:8–10:11–22, 23, 26; 6:39–66; 7:21–24, 28–29) and tell about the occupation of the land in its smallest plots. The chapters that open the book thus determine a double space, both geographical and ethnic].

[22] Several scholars have studied how 1 Chronicles 1–9 is related to the rest of Chronicles, providing many different hypothetical connections. After outlining the general debate, Kartveit asserts that the people are central: "1 Chronicles 1–9 give no description of the land or geography itself, only of the people inhabiting the area. There is no geography in our sense in these chapters, no description of the land and its topography, its climate or vegetation. Only the people constitute the land. People fill the land, as Genesis 1 says. They develop from Adam, Seth, Enosh, and from Abraham, to take lands and territories. They inhabit the world, shape it, and dominate it" (2007, 80*).

[23] These kings are missing in Chronicles: Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, and Joram.

[24] Specifically, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea (2 Kgs 15:8–31; 17:1–6). Additionally, the entire Elijah and Elisha cycles are missing (1 Kgs 17 – 2 Kgs 6). The absence of narratives concerning the Northern Kingdom dramatically changes the narrative flow and historical arc regarding the Judahite kings.

tribal groups reappear in Chronicles as individual units. This focus on agency thinking for the Chronicler is seen in 2 Chronicles 30:1–11 when Hezekiah appeals to the northern tribes of Israel to attend his Passover celebration. The Chronicler imagines that if tribes so desire—that is, if they have the agency to do so—they can be part of this celebration. And tribes that have been left out of the genealogies—namely Zebulun and Dan—are present at this Passover celebration along with Asher, Ephraim, and Manasseh.

Hope in Restoration

Of course, it is too simplistic to imagine that these northern tribal groups relate to the contemporary context of the Chronicler. While the text contains genealogies of Asher, Issachar, and Naphtali, Knoppers observes the following in relation to the northern tribes and larger genealogies within Chronicles:

> The northern genealogies, limited and contextualized as they are, validate the importance the Chronicler ascribes to Judah, Levi, and Benjamin. He puts the various tribes of Israel in their place, much as he put the nations in their place within his universal genealogy (1:1–2:2). His work presents a broad understanding of Israel's identity in coordination with the prominent influence of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi in his own time. The minor genealogies draw attention to the major genealogies. The differences between the group identities posited in his sources and the group identity the author posits through his lineages reveal the passage of centuries. Indeed, the very fact that the Chronicler finds it necessary to contest, restructure, and supplement past traditions indicates that those traditions no longer met the needs of his contemporary situation.[25]

While the Chronicler cannot pretend to continue the traditional groups of all Israel, and it would be reductionistic to see these genealogies as mirroring the Chronicler's time, hope in restoration is grounded in the genealogical connectivity to the past. But there is a reason that

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[25] Knoppers 2004, 473.

the Chronicler, in his own time, chose to narrate history in this way. These past people (not simply institutions) are what will propel Judah, Benjamin, and Levi toward future possible restoration. We could frame this idea in the context of resilience, a popular topic in the current psychological literature. Resilience can be broadly viewed as one's ability to "bounce back" or "recover" from any disturbances or negative life events, the ability to resist illness, and the flexibility to adapt to new situations to maintain one's psychological health.[26]

In Snyder's (2002) hope theory model, resilience is the continuation or persistence toward one's stated goal. People with high hope, a clearly articulated goal, a well-defined pathway, and the motivation to pursue set action in the face of obstacles would be resilient. Snyder assumes there will be stressors and events that attempt to derail the pursuit of goals. However, those higher in hope will be goal-persistent. And this kind of hope is the link the Chronicler is making to his contemporary audience: Israel has persevered a long time and will continue to do so, even under foreign occupation. This kind of thinking both boosts their perception of their capacity to achieve a goal and also supports their sense of agency.

Conclusion

Chronicles 1–9 outlines a pathway, bolsters Israel's agency, and establishes the goal of restoration. According to the components of hope theory, we conclude that it is a narrative of hope. It contains a goal of restoration, a pathway, and agency for accomplishing the goal that is clarified through genealogies. The genealogies point out the long history of Israel through the memory of Israel's lineages. While communities may be scattered—and even absent—Benjamin, Judah, and Levi are present. The Chronicler begins his account with these genealogies to remind the ancient listener that the path was not easy or linear and comprised real families, not only the royal lines or institutions. We see the Chronicler's focus on highlighting the complexity of the people's

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[26] Ryff and Singer 2003; Smith et al. 2008; Schiraldi 2017.

history in the places that diverge from other versions of the genealogies—they have been here before. Their group affiliations may have changed, but survival and restoration are possible. There is hope for Benjamin, Levi, and Judah.[27]

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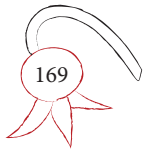
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THE EVIL WITHIN: HOPE AND HUMAN AGENCY IN THE POST-70 CE JEWISH APOCALYPSES

C. D. Elledge

Abstract

Rome's triumph in the Great Jewish Revolt (66–70/74 CE) and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple inspired the renewed flourishing of literary apocalypses in ancient Judaism. Fourth Ezra (2 Esdras) and 2 Baruch interpret the crisis and offer hope to the Jewish community in ways familiar to earlier apocalyptic traditions. Yet they also advance the apocalyptic genre as a medium of intellectual debate through extended dialogues that explore questions of theodicy. The purposes of the complex literary dialogues remain an ongoing scholarly problem. Comparative analysis reveals within both dialogues an intense focus on the human will, the power of sin, and the possibilities of moral agency. While their approaches to these anthropological questions meaningfully differ, their respective dialogues, nevertheless, construct a near-term, interim ethic in which the righteous may find hope to persevere even amid their own deeply threatened moral agency. This is especially apparent in the dialogues' anxieties over human nature, their intercessory prayers, and the models of practical leadership embodied by their respective protagonists.

Le triomphe de Rome lors de la révolte juive (66–70/74 de notre ère) et la destruction du temple de Jérusalem ont inspiré un renouveau florissant des apocalypses littéraires dans le judaïsme ancien. Le Quatrième Livre d'Esdras (2 Esdras) et 2 Baruch proposent une interprétation de cette crise et créent de l'espoir pour la communauté juive d'une façon similaire aux traditions apocalyptiques antérieures. Cependant, ils font également progresser le genre apocalyptique comme outil de débat intellectuel par le biais de dialogues prolongés qui explorent des questions liées à la théodicée. La recherche continue de réfléchir aux objectifs de ces dialogues littéraires complexes. Une analyse comparative de 2 Esdras et 2 Baruch révèle que les deux dialogues insistent sur la volonté humaine, la puissance du péché et les possibilités d'agentivité morale. Bien que leurs approches de ces questions anthropologiques diffèrent de manière significative, leurs dialogues respectifs construisent une éthique provisoire à court terme dans laquelle les justes peuvent trouver l'espoir de persévérer, même si leur propre agentivité morale est profondément menacée. Cela s'exprime particulièrement dans les craintes que les dialogues révèlent quant à la nature humaine, dans leurs prières d'intercession et dans les modèles de gouvernance que leurs protagonistes respectifs incarnent.

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C. D. Elledge

> Everyone who makes a stand and rules over his inclination and masters
>   his inclination,
> like Moses in his time, David in his time, Ezra in his time—
> his entire generation depends upon him.
>
> —Song of Songs Rabbah 4:4

Introduction

Rome's triumph in the Great Jewish Revolt (66–70/74 CE) and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple inspired the renewed flourishing of literary apocalypses in ancient Judaism. As the apocalypses of 4 Ezra (2 Esdras) and 2 Baruch seek hope in the generation of the desperate aftermath,[1] they advance the apocalyptic genre as a medium of

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[1] The dating of 4 Ezra to the late first century CE has typically rested with its typological setting "in the thirtieth year after" the Temple's destruction (4 Ezra 3:1),

intellectual debate through extended dialogues exploring questions of theodicy. Such revelatory dialogues make the literary apocalypse a medium of explicit conceptual deliberation, comparable to other forms of ancient dialogue literature. Comparative analysis of their dialogues reveals an intense focus upon moral agency, the persistence of sin, and the redemptive possibilities of the law. To be sure, both works locate ultimate redemption in the divine agency that will inaugurate the Messianic era, resurrection, and new creation. This is evident throughout the dialogues themselves[2] and within the apocalyptic revelations/interpretations that highlight each book.[3]

Yet for the authors of 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch, the hope of future apocalyptic deliverance raised intense questions of anthropology. Who is the human who will be able to withstand the last days and inherit final redemption? The dialogues struggle to find hope in human agency amid the problems of transgression and mortality. As a result, both books pursue an apocalyptic theodicy that converges with anthropodicy.[4] Through intense inquiry into human nature, the dialogues gradually construct a provisional interim ethic in which the righteous may find hope to persevere even amid their own deeply threatened moral agency. Contemporary examinations of hope (especially Shade 2001)

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as well as its possible internal allusions to the latter years of the reign of Domitian (81–96 CE) (11:33–35, 12:28) (e.g., Stone 1990, 9–10; Longenecker 1995, 13–16). DiTommaso (1999, 3–38) qualifies chapters 11–12 as reflecting a later redactional updating of 4 Ezra (c. 218 CE). Second Baruch appears to have originated within the same late-first-century context, perhaps c. 95 CE, if "the twenty-fifth year of Jeconiah" (2 Bar 1:1) symbolically reflects the second "Exile" that began in 70 CE (Gurtner 2009, 16–18). Other scholars more cautiously estimate a range from the late first to the early second century (Whitters 2003, 149–55; Lied 2011, 245). Neither ancient text reveals knowledge of the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132–135 CE). Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

[2] 4 Ezra 4:26–43; 5:1–13; 6:1–28; 7:10–16, 25–131; 8:37–63, 9:1–13; 2 Bar 15:7–8; 20:1–6; 23:5–26:1; 48:26–52:7.

[3] 4 Ezra 9:38–10:59; 11:1–12:39; 13:1–58; 2 Bar 6–8, 27–30, 36–43, 53–76.

[4] James Crenshaw (1983, 6) emphasizes a competitive interaction between the two concepts (e.g., the vindication of God at the expense of the human being). The present article examines their interdependency in 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch.

may illuminate how each work negotiates the tensions between "un-conditioned transcendence" and "conditioned transcendence" in their respective constructions of hope.[5]

4 Ezra

Fourth Ezra explores the problems of human nature within one of the most formidable literary dialogues in ancient Judaism. Scholars have traditionally discerned a sevenfold structure to the book.[6] The first three units constitute a dialogue between the exilic scribe Ezra and the angel Uriel.[7] In the first round, Ezra laments the fall of Israel, as well as the more universal plight of sinful humanity in "anxious words" (3:3). In rounds two and three, Ezra fasts, prays, and receives "the spirit of understanding."[8] The dialogues, thus, take on an increasingly revelatory character, as Ezra painstakingly emerges beyond his despair over the past. In the second half of the work, dialogues give way to three visions,[9] which offer an ultimately messianic and apocalyptic resolution to Ezra's anxieties. The work concludes with a narrative that solidifies Ezra's experience of revelation and presents his final exhortation to his contemporaries (14:1–48).

While interpreters have discerned the author's perspective most clearly in the apocalyptic visions and concluding narrative,[10] the theologies within the dialogue units, as well as their larger functions, have presented a persistent challenge. Modern studies have deliberated whether

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[5] See below, "Hope, Agency, and Interim Ethics." By "conditioned transcendence," Shade (2001, 179) emphasizes the expansion of human agency as it takes practical action in the construction of hope. "Unconditioned transcendence" relocates agency in an unconditionally transcendent power, such as God.

[6] Among others, Thompson (1977, 121–25); Stone (1990, 21–23); Longenecker (1995, 20–22); Hogan (2008, 1).

[7] 4 Ezra 3:1–5:20; 5:21–6:35; 6:36–9:26.

[8] 4 Ezra 5:20–22; 6:30–37.

[9] 4 Ezra 9:38–10:59; 11:1–12:39; 13:1–58.

[10] Brandenburger 1981, 149–51; Hogan 2008, 15–19; Collins 2009, 91; Stewart 2013, 384.

to identify the author's message in the voice of Uriel, or Ezra, or neither, or both (Hayman 1975, 47). Egon Brandenburger (1981, 65–67, 150–52) and Wolfgang Harnisch (1969, 64) side with Uriel, while Ezra's theology raises errant questions that the author seeks to correct. Alden Thompson (1977, 296) prioritizes Ezra's faithful skepticism and humanistic empathy over Uriel's more narrowly orthodox positions. Karina Hogan (2008, 15–19) chooses neither, as the dialogue demonstrates the insufficiency of both "covenantal" (Ezra) and "eschatological" (Uriel) sapiential traditions. Gabriele Boccaccini (2013, 76–77) emphasizes a conciliatory purpose in the dialogue, as it encompasses contradictory voices in the Jewish community with a tendency toward inclusivity. Each of these approaches discerns within the dialogue discordant traditions and sectarian conflicts within the author's Jewish context.[11]

Psychological approaches have emphasized "both." For Hermann Gunkel (1900, 339–42, 348), the dialogue reveals the "double-consciousness" (*Doppelbewüsztsein*) of its author, his "inner conflict" between human doubt and divine wisdom. Michael Stone (1990, 30–32) develops this approach through a linear reading in which Ezra dynamically emerges beyond his initial despair to fulfill his calling as consolatory prophet to Israel. All major units of the book hail Ezra himself as the unparalleled prophetic authority of his day, a figure of immense piety, humility, and righteousness.[12] As Ezra is "sage, lawgiver, and prophet" (Gore-Jones 2016, 214; 2021, 399), it remains difficult to dismiss his voice entirely when assessing the author's message (Collins 2009, 88). Ezra's transformation becomes apparent by the first apocalyptic vision, as the disconsolate survivor of exile now becomes the prophetic comforter of Israel (9:27–10:59).[13] The agonizing dialogue units awaken this "progressive intensification" of Ezra's consciousness (Merkur 2004, 329), as he emerges from disputant, to questioner, to learner (Stone 1990, 81–82).

Some interpreters thus distinguish between the earlier "Ezra" (who is often "wrong") and the more fully developing "Ezra" (whose views

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[11] See also Brand 2013, 137; Stewart 2013, 373–91.

[12] 4 Ezra 6:32; 7:44; 8:51–54, 62; 10:57; 12:36; 13:53–56.

[13] Longenecker 1995, 59–64, 96–98; Henze 2011, 149; Stuckenbruck 2013, 137–50.

gradually reflect the author's).[14] Ezra's emergence concludes with his final exhortation to keep the law in hope of eschatological redemption (14:27–36). Such confidence offers vivid contrast to his initial bewilderment and despair. The psychic progression of Ezra may thus advance an "experiential," rather than strictly "rational," theodicy (Thompson 1977, 295).[15] The drama of Ezra's emergence may have functioned as a paradigm of hope for the ancient author, who sought "to guide the reader through a transformation similar to that undergone by the protagonist" (Najman 2014, 23, 48–49, 62).[16]

The perspective taken in what follows shares a developmental and positive approach to Ezra's voice, further emphasizing how his intercessions for sinful humanity mark a distinct and underappreciated moment in his emergence. Within the dialogue units and prior to the first, pivotal apocalyptic vision of the book, Ezra stands alongside the formidable intercessors of Israel's earlier traditions. Faced with despair over human nature, Ezra actively constructs a daring and hopeful pathway in which the righteous few may exercise moral agency by interceding for the sinful many. His gradual discovery of this intercessory vocation further reveals an important contribution of the dialogue units: the formation of an interim ethic. Ezra and "the few" like him transcend despair to forge a viable form of hopeful agency that preserves the larger community in the present world and prepares it for final redemption.

Human Nature

The dialogue's exploration of the anthropology of the created human with their mysterious capacity for evil comprises a distinct conceptual achievement of the ancient author (Violet 1924, 5). The stark anthropological concern emerges all the more clearly amid the absence of external, dualistic powers that drive humans toward transgression. As Boccaccini observes: "There is no devil, no fallen angels, no cosmic

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[14] DiTommaso 2013, 130; Zurawski 2018, 178–79.

[15] Cf. Longenecker 1995, 96–98; Du Rand 2008, 124; Gore-Jones 2016, 234.

[16] See also Najman 2007, 529–36; Moo 2011, 33.

conflict" (2013, 73). The dialogue opens with Ezra's lamentation over the "evil heart" (*cor malignum*). While God planted the Torah within the human, Ezra can only bewail the conquest of the evil heart over mass humanity:

> Yet you did not take away from them the evil heart, in order that your law might bear fruit within them. For the first Adam, bearing the heavy burden of the evil heart, transgressed and was conquered (*victus est*), as were also those who were born from him. And the disease (*infirmitas*)[17] has been made permanent. The law was in the heart of the people along with the evil root. Yet what was good departed, while the evil remained.[18]

Adam's transgression reveals an inherent, constitutional problem within human creation, one that even the law itself does not immediately remedy. The human plight transcends the physical evils of suffering and mortality that have resulted from Adam's transgression. Through the "evil heart," an internal capacity for moral evil has burdened, conquered, and corrupted humanity from creation. Miryam Brand (2013, 130–31) clarifies that such moral evil is not simply a consequence of Adam's sin, but rather its mysterious cause.[19]

The evil heart is a metaphorical "burden" that weakens the human. Combative metaphors express how humanity is "conquered" by it (3:21). It has become a perennial "infirmity," an "inherited weakness" (Stone 1990, 65), a "character defect" (Zurawski 2018, 182). The dialogue stops just short of directly attributing the evil heart to God (Stone 1990, 63, 95), even as it more subtly evokes the probability.[20] Uriel acknowledges, perhaps with keen use of the divine passive, that a "grain of evil seed *was sown* within the heart of Adam from the beginning" (*granum seminis mali seminatum est in corde Adam ab initio*; 4:30). Likewise,

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[17] Or "weakness" (Stone 1990, 65; Zurawski 2018, 182).

[18] 4 Ezra 3:20–22. See also 4 Ezra 9:27–37. Unless otherwise noted, translations of 4 Ezra are based upon the Latin editions of Robert Bensly and Montague James (1895), as well as A. Frederik Klijn (1983).

[19] See Harnisch 1969, 44; Thompson 1977, 330–37; Burkes 2003, 195; Zurawski 2018, 180; García 2021, 86.

[20] Zurawski 2018, 181: "There is little reason not to view God as the creator and implanter of the evil seed."
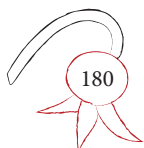
humans bear an "evil inclination *formed* within them" (*cum eis plasmatum cogitamentum malum*; 7:92) through creation (cf. Gen 2:7).[21] Both Ezra and the angel utilize organic metaphors ("root," 3:22, 8:53; "grain," 4:30) implying the dynamic "growth" of the evil heart (Harnisch 1969, 51). While perhaps only a small "grain" or "root" at creation, it has produced a catastrophic harvest as each generation habitually acts upon it (4:30–32, 7:48). A dangerous implication of Ezra's opening lament is that the evil heart has nullified the redemptive possibilities of Israel's law and even eschatological salvation altogether (cf. 7:65–69). The dilemma raises further despair concerning the possibilities of righteous agency within the present age.

Uriel's response to Ezra's doom-ridden lament is twofold. First, Ezra's anxiety arises from the imperfections of human understanding (4:11; see Stone 1990, 78). The human dilemma is not only moral, but also epistemological. The question "why is the heart evil?" remains an impenetrable mystery (4:4–5). Second, Ezra has not reckoned the role of eschatological time within the divine plan (4:22–5:11). He has focused only on creation, transgression, and exile within the present world, in which God's justice cannot be fully realized (4:27–29). Indeed, as all three dialogue units proceed, they methodically begin with Ezra's "anxious words" of grievous complaint about existing circumstances,[22] and they conclude with angelic discourses concerning future "signs" of the end.[23] The structure pedagogically admonishes Ezra away from the past and toward the future.

In round two, Ezra complains of the historical reality of exile, in which God elected one people only to hand them over to the multitude of transgressors. The elect have fared poorly at the hands of divine justice. In addressing Ezra's anxieties, Uriel offers crucial clarification concerning the evil heart. Only in the "end" will "the heart of (earth's) inhabitants ... be transformed and converted into a different disposition" (*et mutabitur cor inhabitantium et convertetur in sensum alium*; 6:26). Redemption demands a new heart, transformed only in the messianic

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[21] Elsewhere, Ezra implies that the deity created the world "without help" (3:4).

[22] 4 Ezra 3:1–36; 5:21–30; 6:35–59.

[23] 4 Ezra 4:52–5:13; 6:11–28; 8:63–9:13.
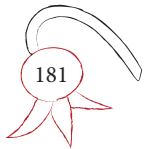
era, finally free from its grievous malady. The eschatological "harvest" will reap away (4:28–29) the "evil that has been sown," so that "good" may finally flourish (Moo 2011, 108).

After more fasting, Ezra comes out of the corner for the final and most extensive round of dialogue. Now Ezra complains of the disparity between the orderly world of creation (6:38–59) and the current place of Israel: "If the world has indeed been created for us, why do we not possess our world as an inheritance?" (6:59; NRSV). Here, Ezra returns to Israel's national election amid its present endangerments. For the third time, Uriel redirects Ezra from the past toward the future (7:16). He also counters Ezra's national concern with a universal argument. The order of creation and human nature became alienated from their original harmony "when Adam transgressed my statutes" (7:10–14). As a result, the physical evils of suffering and mortality predominate (cf. 3:7, 10). While there remains a path of righteous agency for the human being, it has now become a journey against the inertia of the present, corruptible world.

The earlier metaphors of Adam's primal defeat (3:20–22) now resurface in Uriel's rousing call that humans must understand their place within the arena of a grave and decisive contest:

> This is the meaning of the contest (*certaminis*) which every man who is born on earth shall wage, that if he is defeated (*victus fuerit*) he shall suffer what you have said, but if he is victorious (*vicerit*) he shall receive what I have said. For this is the way of which Moses, while he was alive, spoke to the people saying, "Choose for yourself life, that you may live!"[24]

This is one of few moments in the dialogue that a text from the Torah is explicitly referenced (cf. 6:38; Najman 2014, 93). Uriel interprets Deuteronomy 30:19 as affirming the integrity of free will, a view found in other writings.[25] Ben Sira, in particular, interprets the same Deuteronomic language as assurance that the deity never compels anyone to sin (Sir 15:17–20). For Uriel, the Deuteronomic injunction

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[24] 4 Ezra 7:127–29; OTP.

[25] Cf. 2 Bar 19:1; Henze 2011, 31.

applies universally to "every man who is born on earth." Thus, there is no excuse for any human transgression (Hogan 2008, 90).

In arguing for the rugged survival of righteous agency, Uriel affirms that through the Torah the human may yet "choose life." Those who have "kept the ways of the Most High" will inherit everlasting life "because they have contended (*certati sunt*) with great labor in order to conquer the evil inclination (*vincerent cum eis plasmatum cogitamentum malum*) formed within them" (7:92). The evil heart has pervasively damaged the human being's divinely created place in the world. Even so, the dialogue teaches Ezra that the law "remains in its glory" (9:37) despite human failure (cf. 7:20–25). Uriel repeatedly consoles Ezra that he, too, is living proof that the righteous few may conquer in their dreadful conflict with evil (8:51–54). Righteousness will be excruciating, yet it remains possible for the noble few.[26]

There remain further tensions in how Ezra and Uriel understand the implications of the "evil heart." Uriel resolutely asserts the survival of individual free will, in spite of the "evil heart." The wicked "received freedom (*libertatem*), but they despised the Most High" (8:56).[27] From this perspective, the deity's historic judgments have been righteous, necessitated by the devices of the free-acting human that have endangered the entire creation (9:20).[28] Ezra's own anxious words, however, reflect a more empathetically human perspective, in which the "permanent malady" of the evil heart demands penitence and divine mercy upon an imperfect creation.[29]

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[26] As Hogan (2008, 116, 139) observes, the evil heart may not afflict all people equally.

[27] Cf. 4:26–32; 7:21–25, 72.

[28] For Uriel, even God must "labor" against human freedom, so that a remnant may be "perfected" (9:22).

[29] Ezra's final exhortation may express a synthesis of the two approaches (14:34): "If, therefore, you will rule over your own disposition (*imperaveritis sensui vestro*) and instruct your own heart (*erudieritis cor vestrum*), you shall be preserved alive and obtain mercy after death" (14:34). While reflecting the more rugged theology of Uriel, Ezra also insists that, even for the victorious, salvation will remain a matter of divine "mercy" (Thompson 1977, 317; Burkes 2003, 198–99, 228; Hogan 2007, 549).

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Intercession

A significant achievement of the carefully formulated dialogue is that each angelic proposition, however immaculately devised, leads Ezra only to proportional levels of despair. As Uriel presents eschatological resolutions to the problems of divine justice (7:26–44), these very instructions achieve an adverse effect upon Ezra:

> And now I see that the world to come will bring delight to few, but torments to many. For an evil heart has grown up in us (*increvit enim in nos cor malum*) that has alienated us from these things, and has brought us into corruption and the ways of death, and has shown us the paths of perdition and removed us far from life—and that not merely for a few but almost all who have been created.[30]

If the evil heart raises dire questions concerning the redemptive possibilities of the law, it equally threatens eschatological redemption.[31] How can the human observe the law and enter into life if the evil heart reigns? How can the world to come promise reward if only few can merit it? It is clear from the linear structure of the book that the hopes of the author ultimately reside in future Messianic and apocalyptic deliverance. Reflexively, however, these very hopes only ricochet back to the problems of human nature expressed within the dialogues if the path to life is to become viable for "all who have been created."[32]

Faced with despair over the evil heart, Ezra turns toward the pathway of intercession, which dominates the concluding rounds of dialogue (7:102–8:36).[33] Ezra inquires: On the day of judgment, can the righteous few "make excuse for," "absolve," or "apologize for" (*excusare*)

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[30] 4 Ezra 7:47–48; NRSV.

[31] Willett 1989, 71; Moo 2011, 73; Gore-Jones 2020, 63, 92.

[32] Cf. Du Rand 2008, 133: "The eschatological solution is only viable if the issue of sin is solved."

[33] Without consensus, scholars have treated the puzzling intercessory episodes. See Gunkel 1900, 338–40; Thompson 1977, 301–3, 315–18; Cook 1988, 89–100; Willett 1989, 68–71; Stone 1990, 247–89; Bauckham 1998, 136–44; Trumbower 2001, 31–34, 50–53; Burkes 2003, 207–12; Najman 2014, 130–32; Brutti 2022, 199–206. The final round of dialogue increasingly resembles the "intercessory

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the wicked? Can they "intercede (*deprecari*) on their behalf before the Most High—fathers for sons or sons for fathers, brothers for brothers, relatives for their kinsmen, or friends for friends?" (7:102–03; trans. Stone 1990, 247). His intercessory proposition accepts the angelic premise that the righteous are few and the wicked many,[34] yet advances a hopeful pathway in which the righteous few may intercede for the sinful masses. In spite of Ezra's ingenious proposition, Uriel's answer is resolute denial: "Everyone shall bear his own righteousness and un-righteousness" (7:105; trans. Stone 1990, 147). Individual retribution marks the angelic theodicy. On the day of judgment, the righteous cannot atone for the wicked, nor can the wicked pollute the righteous. Intercession remains a quality of the present world. Its function will have forever ceased on the last day.[35]

Ezra's intercessory barrage will not relent, however. He returns to his argument, supporting his strategy with eight compelling Midrashic *exempla* of granted intercessions (7:106–11):

1. Abraham for Sodom (Gen 18)
2. Moses in the wilderness (Exod 32–34; Num 14, 21; cf. Deut 9:18–29)
3. Joshua for Israel (Josh 7)
4. Samuel for Saul (1 Sam 7, 12)
5. David in plague (2 Sam 24)
6. Solomon in the sanctuary (1 Kgs 8)
7. Elijah in famine and death (1 Kgs 17–18)
8. Hezekiah in Assyrian invasion (2 Kgs 19; Isa 37).

The carefully constructed catalogue reveals the author's studious inquiry into intercession. Among the diverse intercessory precedents, none is explicitly denied. A few episodes conclude with immediately granted intercessions,[36] whereas others feature within the more ambiguous drama

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dialogues" (Miller 1994, 267, 272; cf. Reventlow 1986, 236; Balentine 1993, 132) of earlier scriptural traditions (e.g., Gen 18; Exod 32–34; Amos 7:1–9).

[34] Thompson 1977, 328; Najman 2014, 132.

[35] Stone 1990, 282: "Until the judgment, the complementary qualities of mercy and repentance are active … In judgment they are withdrawn."

[36] For example, Joshua 7; Numbers 21; 1 Samuel 7:8–9; 2 Samuel 24; 1 Kings 17–18; 2 Kings 19.
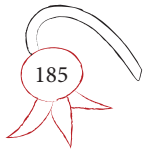
of the divine–human relationship.[37] The catalogue immediately locates Ezra himself among these formidable intercessors.[38] More than this, Ezra's own intercessions will reflect the rhetoric of these precedents. Like Moses (Exod 34:6–9; Num 14:17–19), Ezra will implore pardon on the basis of the deity's merciful attributes (4 Ezra 7:132–40). Like Solomon (1 Kgs 8:46), Ezra will plead that there is no one who has not sinned (4 Ezra 8:34–36),[39] a claim that takes on specialized meanings in light of his *aporia* over the "evil heart."

Capitalizing upon these precedents, Ezra projects the possibilities of intercession into the eschatological future: if "the righteous have prayed for the ungodly" (*exoraverunt justi pro impiis*) in this present age, how will it not also be the same on the last day? (7:111). Ezra's argument emphasizes continuity (Cf. Collins 2009, 84). Uriel counters with discontinuity (Bauckham 1998, 143). Intercession has been a part of this present corruptible world (7:112–13), yet "no one will then be able to have mercy on someone who has been condemned in the judgment, or to harm someone who is victorious (*vicerit*)" (7:115; NRSV). Ezra has erred in imagining that intercession can occur at the final judgment, even if Uriel subtly concedes its legitimacy within the present corruptible world.[40] Denial of intercession is familiar to the Hebrew Bible,[41] as well as the Enochic Book of Watchers and Dream Visions.[42]

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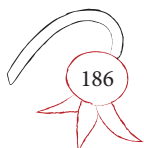
[37] For example, Genesis 18; Exodus 32–34; Numbers 14; 1 Samuel 12; 1 Kings 8. See Reventlow 1986, 237; Miller 1994, 262.

[38] On intercession as an authority function, see Reventlow 1986, 229; Balentine 1993, 50–64; Parker 2006, 81. One may compare the petitionary status of the Qumran Maskil, as interpreted by Judith Newman (2018, 112–15, 125–26).

[39] Cf. 4 Ezra 4:38, 7:46–48. On this intercessory argument, see Bauckham 1998, 139–40.

[40] Trumbower 2001, 30; Brutti 2022, 201.

[41] Jeremiah 15:1; cf. 7:16, 11:14, 14:11–12; 1 Kings 14:1–18; 2 Kings 1; Reventlow 1986, 260; Miller 1994, 264.

[42] Trumbower 2001, 53; Parker 2006, 80. In the Book of Watchers, the fallen watchers petition Enoch to intercede, yet his petition is denied (1 En 12–16). In the Dream Visions, the angelic witness and Enoch petition God repeatedly for Israel (89:57–58, 69–71, 76–77; 90:3; cf. 84:1–6). In every instance, the deity remains silent until the predetermined judgment is complete.

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Such denials insist that judgment must run its terrible course until the end (Jer 15:1). Even "failed" intercessions, however, reveal the prophets' intense identification with their people, as they fulfill their vocation amid its agonizing burdens (1 Sam 12:23).[43] The denial of intercession will only lead to Ezra's bold, even defiant, return to intercession as the dialogue approaches its conclusion.

Uriel's rejection casts Ezra into outright despair, as he further laments Adam's transgression: "O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the calamity was not yours alone but ours also who are your descendants!" (7:118; NRSV). Faced with the full gravity of the human dilemma, Ezra's final stand appeals centrally to the attributes of God's mercy. The Most High is "merciful … gracious … patient … bountiful … abundant in compassion" (7:132–37). Interpreters have long detected that Ezra's appeal offers a Midrashic expansion of Exodus 34:6–7, where Yahweh proclaims the divine attributes of mercy and justice in the aftermath of the broken tablets of the law.[44] Here, Ezra's earlier allusions to Mosaic intercession explicitly resurface in his own petitionary rhetoric. In words, as well as stature, Ezra's intercessions position him as an increasingly Mosaic figure.

Like those of Moses and other intercessors, Ezra's approach to intercession also involves penitence. Daniel Boyarin (1972, 30–34) demonstrates that Ezra's intercessions bear commonalities with later Jewish penitential liturgy.[45] From this perspective, Ezra's frequent lamentations over human nature, while they raise profound questions over divine justice, simultaneously fulfill a penitential role. Uriel commends his penitent humility (4 Ezra 8:48). Penitence and prayer for mercy also rank among the clearest commonalities between the hero of 4 Ezra and his "scriptural" namesake (Neh 9:1–38), in spite of their many

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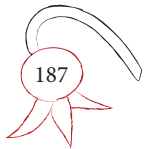
[43] Reventlow 1986, 260.

[44] Thompson 1977, 201; Stone 1990, 260–61; Longenecker 1995, 54; Hogan 2008, 145.

[45] Commonalities include confessing sin (8:31), recalling episodes of granted intercession (7:106–11), and listing the merciful attributes of God (7:132–40; e.g., Exod 34:6–7).

differences.[46] If one may bring Daniel's penitential prayer (Dan 9:1–19) into the picture, Ezra's penitence within the dialogues may further prepare him for revelation (Portier-Young 2011, 254). As he brings his "penitential" intercession to fruition, Ezra focuses on the very heart of the deity's merciful nature.[47] For Ezra, the perplexities of the human condition can only be reconciled through the hope of divine mercy, without which the creation itself would cease to exist (4 Ezra 7:137). His defiant intercessions demonstrate that, while he has learned through the dialogue, he refuses to capitulate. In spite of the prevalence of sin, Ezra stubbornly rises to conviction and moral agency. Perhaps he can even see what angels cannot.

Heartened by the necessity of divine mercy, Ezra focuses next on God's diligent care for the created human in their frailty (4 Ezra 8:4–36). His intercessory strategy skillfully maneuvers between creationary and covenantal claims.[48] The deity's maintenance of creation should demand mercy toward Israel. Most pertinent to his anxieties over human nature, Ezra explicitly prays for "a seed for our heart and cultivation of our understanding so that fruit may be produced" that will lead to life (4 Ezra 8:6). Remarkable in this case is Ezra's vocation to intercede in light of the specific problems of the human "heart." His plea may further reflect the prophetic hope of a "new heart" within God's people to keep the law (Ezek 36:26–27).[49] The claims of the creature upon the creator resound in an intensely monotheistic corollary: "For you alone exist, and we are a work of your hands" (4 Ezra 8:7). Monotheism compels the deity to hear the plight of a suffering creation.

Moving prenatal, birth, and infancy metaphors follow (8:7–14). Ezra applies them directly to Israel:

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[46] On the differences between Ezra in the Hebrew Bible and 4 Ezra, see Stone 1990, 37–39; Hogan 2008, 133; Whitters 2013, 571; Najman 2014, 51, 58; Mroczek 2016, 168.

[47] On this intercessory tactic, see Balentine 1993, 132; Miller 1994, 268; Bauckham 1998, 139–40.

[48] Moo 2011, 73–82; cf. Longenecker 1995, 54–55; Collins 2009, 95–96.

[49] Moo 2011, 123. For a position against the association, see Hogan 2008, 116.

> About all humankind you know best; but I will speak about your people
> for whom I am grieved ... I will pray before thee for myself and for them,
> for I see the failings of us who dwell in the land, and I have heard of the
> swiftness of the judgment that is to come.[50]

Refocusing away from speculative intercessions for humanity at the last
judgment, Ezra returns to the problem of "your people." He penitently
acknowledges Israel's transgressions and accepts angelic instruction to
prepare for "the judgment that is to come." His intercessory strategy
now implores that God will attend to the righteous within Israel, rather
than the wicked alone (8:26–28; NRSV). In reminding God of the right-
eous few, Ezra may recall Abraham's intercession for Sodom. Hogan
further compares the penitential prayers of Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9, and
Daniel 9.[51] If the evil heart has made righteousness an arduous task,
God must all the more acknowledge those "who have kept your cove-
nants amid afflictions" (8:27). The wickedness of the wicked many must
not annihilate the righteousness of the righteous few.

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The powerful intercession concludes with a declaration that takes
Ezra's petition to its uttermost implications:

> For in truth there is no one among those who have been born who has
> not acted wickedly; among those who have existed there is no one who
> has not done wrong. For in this, O Lord, your righteousness and good-
> ness will be declared, when you are merciful to those who have no store
> of good works.[52]

The intercessory tactic that all have sinned is attested among Ezra's own
intercessory precedents (1 Kgs 8:46). Yet it achieves specialized mean-
ing within 4 Ezra's exploration of the "evil heart." Through his uniquely
empathetic "sensitivity to the human dilemma" (Thompson 1977,
328), Ezra reveals how even the afflicted righteous have transgressed
in their contest against the evil heart (cf. 7:46, 67–69). On the basis
of the struggling righteous within Israel, Ezra hopes to move the deity

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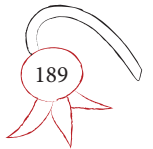
[50] 4 Ezra 8:15–19; OTP.

[51] Hogan 2008, 133. Cook (1988, 99) compares "penitential Psalms" (e.g., Ps 38,
51, 73, 130). Cf. 2 Baruch 1:15–3:8 (Venter 2005, 408–13).

[52] 4 Ezra 8:35–36; NRSV.

toward mercy upon sinful humanity as a whole. As Bruce Longenecker expresses the matter, "the defender of Israel has become the defender of the human race" (1995, 56). The conclusion of the petition demands that the ultimate vindication of God's righteousness will be achieved through mercy upon sinful humanity as a whole.

Ezra's intercession now achieves a response remarkably different from his earlier inquiry:

> Some things you have spoken rightly, and it will turn out according to your words. For indeed, I will not concern myself about the fashioning of those who have sinned, or about their death, their judgment, or their destruction; but I will rejoice over the creation of the righteous, over their pilgrimage also, and their salvation, and their receiving their reward.[53]
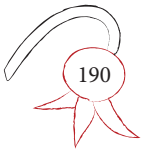
Ezra's intercession has at least won assurance that God will focus upon the struggling righteous, their arduous journey in the present world, and their eschatological reward. While interpreters have sometimes viewed Ezra's foray into intercession as a dead end,[54] Uriel vindicates Ezra and promises that "some things" have been achieved through his prayers. If Ezra's voice aligns more closely with the author's own perspective as the book develops,[55] then it would appear that Ezra's intercessions model a righteous stance toward human sin within the present world.

One may question whether this moment actually constitutes a change in the ways of divine justice. Is the deity of 4 Ezra as dialogical as the one whom Abraham and Moses inclined toward mercy? God may hardly be said to have "repented" (cf. Exod 32:12–14) in 4 Ezra.[56] Both Uriel and Ezra testify to the deity's predetermined plan for the grand scale of creation (Moo 2011, 42–43). In its epochal sweep, there seems

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[53] 4 Ezra 8:37–39; NRSV.

[54] Stewart 2013, 382: "Ezra's impassioned pleas for mercy and compassion accomplish nothing." See also Thompson 1977, 318; Longenecker 1995, 99–100.

[55] Stone 1990, 81–82; DiTommaso 2013, 130; Zurawski 2018, 178–79.

[56] All along, Uriel has emphasized God's favor for the righteous few (4 Ezra 7:59–61, 131; 9:1–13).

little to suggest that humans can sway the deity's predetermined will.[57] In its finite details, however, humans retain a limited range of initiative to choose their own place within the structures of creation. As Lorenzo DiTommaso (2013, 123) insists, this is not a contradiction. Ezra seems unable to alter the deity's more infinite "way." Yet he achieves a potent realignment of mission in the present hour that will aid the righteous in their more finite struggle with human weakness. Through the process of fasting, penitence, argument, and intercession, Ezra and the deity now turn from the terrifying retributions of the past toward preparing a remnant for final salvation.

Ezra remains contentious in the aftermath of his intercession. He hardly retreats into self-abnegation.[58] Nor will our author vindicate God at humans' expense. Uriel dichotomizes between mass humanity, who are like many seeds sown into the earth, and the righteous few, who alone take root and live (8:41). Ezra counters that the seeds must have "rain in due season" to grow (8:42–43), a subtle redirection of the analogy back to divine responsibility (García 2021, 86). Nor are humans mere seeds:

> But man, who has been formed by your hands and is called your own image because he is made like you, and for whose sake you have formed all things—have you also made him like the farmer's seed? No, O Lord who are over us! But spare your people and have mercy on your inheritance, for you have mercy on your own creation.[59]

Ezra reinforces his intercession, emphasizing the unique claims that human creation has upon the creator (cf. Miller 1994, 271). Emboldened by intercession, perhaps he even gains momentary leverage. In this instance, the words of Job 16:21 may surely be applied to Ezra: "He will argue with God for a man, as a human for his fellow."[60]

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[57] 4 Ezra 4:27, 36–37, 40; 6:1–6, 20; 7:25–44, 70–74.

[58] Contrast Crenshaw 1983, 6: "Self-abnegation lies at the heart of all theodicy. Only as the individual fades into nothingness can the deity achieve absolute pardon."

[59] 4 Ezra 8:44–45; OTP.

[60] On the passage, see Parker 2006, 84.
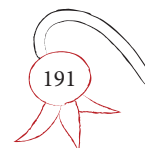
Ezra's intercessions thus result in an intensely negotiated settlement that is at least moderately rational. Aspects of each interlocutor's voice are somewhat roughly justified together. The reader receives neither confirmation, nor denial, regarding Ezra's intercession for universal humanity.[61] Whether God must accept what the human has become, so strongly asserted by Ezra, remains an imagined possibility. Uriel's own instruction narrows the application of Ezra's intercessions to the struggling righteous, who like Ezra himself may rest assured of mercy (8:46–61, 9:21–22).[62] At least this much has been achieved by Ezra's bold intercessory stand.[63] Thus, it seems hasty to conclude entirely that "an intellectual compromise" between the two voices of the dialogue "is impossible" (Hogan 2008, 157). The dialogue at least achieves a missional reorientation toward the redemption of a righteous remnant and stands in continuity with the concluding visions of the book.

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Leadership

The dialogue's conceptual reorientation toward a hopeful future positions Ezra himself as the righteous agent who will prepare his people for eschatological redemption. Early in the work, Ezra isolates himself from the petitions of his people (Markley 2011, 116–17). He does not yet possess the revelation to "shepherd" his endangered "flock" (5:16–19), falling short of the prowess of his "scriptural" namesake (Neh 8:1–3). Yet as he emerges through the revelatory dialogues and visions, Ezra publicly declares his intercessory role "to pray on account of the desolation of Zion and to seek mercy on account of the humiliation of our

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[61] Cf. Thompson 1977, 321: "It is the God of mercy whom the author wishes to serve, but in the end, it is the righteous judge who remains"; Hogan 2008, 149: "The author is more sympathetic to Ezra's position"; Collins 2009, 87: "Ezra at least argues that there should be a place for mercy, even if it is not apparent."

[62] A reader of BT Rosh Hashanah 17b might have concluded that Ezra's penitent recitation of God's merciful attributes (Exod 34:6–7) would assuredly have received compassion. Richard Bauckham (1998, 138) describes a more certain assurance of mercy in the Armenian version.

[63] Willett 1989, 70; Najman 2014, 134.

sanctuary" (12:48; NRSV). Here, his intercessions no longer concern the "evil heart" but rather the national-cultic concerns of the book's concluding visions.[64] In spite of the shift in focus, intercession remains a central feature of Ezra's religious mission.

There remains an intercessory plea, as well, within Ezra's prayers in the book's concluding narrative. Ezra receives the apparent twenty-four books of the Hebrew canon, as well as seventy additional works of esoteric revelation (14:37–48). It is thus through Ezra himself that the Torah, whose physical copies perished in exile (4:23), is now revealed anew.[65] Ezra actively intercedes for the spirit-inspired revelation, "so that people may be able to find the path, and that those who want to live in the last days may do so" (14:22). Given the intercessory tone of the prayer for the "people" and "those who want to live," the author may present the scriptural revelation as an answer to Ezra's repeated pleas for divine mercy. Through the new scriptural revelation, the people may indeed "find the path" and "live in the last days."

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The esoteric books, reserved for the wise, further accentuate the role of the righteous few, who are like Ezra (8:51).[66] While the problems of human nature will be resolved only at the eschatological advent, the figure of Ezra offers a complementary, interim ethic in which righteous agency is safeguarded within the hands of a "remnant by merit."[67] Najman considers the possibility that Ezra serves as a model of religious perfection to be imitated (2014, 48, 62). If so, "the few" like Ezra will also fast, repent, and intercede. They will "rule over" their own "disposition" and "instruct" their own "heart" (14:34). For the pseudonymous author, tortured by the failures of the past, hope demands a sacred, reliable place in which it can safely gain root within a corrupted world. Until the end, Ezra—and a few like him—exemplify the "good soil" in which hope tangibly survives. With its concern for the righteous elite, interpreters have sometimes viewed the author's theology as a "covenantal redefinition" that narrows "the scope of divine grace … limiting

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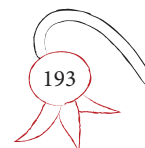
[64] Such pleas for mercy resemble those of Daniel (9:16–19; cf. Zech 1:12–17).

[65] Najman 2014, 69–71; Gore-Jones 2021, 399.

[66] See also 4 Ezra 8:62; cf. 3:11–27; 7:8, 44; 8:3; 13:53–55.

[67] Thompson 1977, 303; cf. Longenecker 1995, 104; Collins 2009, 92.

covenant membership to include only a remnant" (Longenecker 1995, 31, 99–100). Perhaps most striking is that while the author clearly views the "many" of his own day as sinful, he nevertheless exemplifies in Ezra a hopeful, pleading, penitent, and intercessory stance toward all Israel and universal humanity.

2 Baruch

In its numerous comparisons with 4 Ezra, the apocalypse of 2 Baruch has too often been considered theologically and stylistically less daring and more conventional in approach.[68] These very features, however, make 2 Baruch more accessible and "pastoral" (Gore-Jones 2020, 19). Comparisons between the two remain mutually illuminating, revealing how 2 Baruch advances its own exploration of hope amid the problems of human nature. Scholarship once emphasized that 2 Baruch contained a sevenfold structure, comparable to that of 4 Ezra.[69] Yet as Henze demonstrates, the book flows more discursively through multiple genres that cannot be reduced to a heptadic structure.[70] Dialogues, prayers, narratives, public speeches, visions, and epistles offer complementary discourses in which the book explores its major concerns (Henze 2011, 36–43). Three rounds of dialogue emerge,[71] as Baruch discourses directly with the deity. The unmediated dialogues greatly reduce the interpretive problems of locating the author's perspective, when compared with the discordant voices of Ezra and Uriel.

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[68] For example, Thompson 1977, 312: "II Baruch takes a rather superficial view of the problem of moral evil and does not begin to approach the depth of feeling demonstrated by IV Ezra."

[69] For example, Murphy 1985, 11–29; also Bogaert 1969; Thompson 1977, 121–25; Sayler 1984.

[70] Mark Whitters (2003, 36) emphasizes a threefold structure at the core of the book, organized by apocalyptic revelations (27–28, 36–37, 53), interpretations (28–30, 38–43, 54–74), and public addresses (31–34, 44–46, 77–87).

[71] 2 Baruch 13:1–20:6, 22:1–30:5, 48:26–52:7; Henze 2011, 136.

Human Nature

Like 4 Ezra, the book avoids reference to dualistic entities, allowing for a more intensive focus upon the human being's own capacity for sin.[72] Yet 2 Baruch never utilizes the problematic phrase "evil heart."[73] The tragic implications of Adam's transgression profoundly diminish, as 2 Baruch moves beyond collective understandings of sin by emphasizing individual responsibility. Baruch realizes, relatively early in the book, that "while many have sinned in time, still others, not a few, have been righteous" (21:11). Like 4 Ezra, the book utilizes the language of conflict, struggle, and prize to express the agonies of doing good in the present age. As the deity admonishes: "This world is to them a contest (ʾagonā) and toil (ʿamlā) with much trouble. And that which will come, a crown with great glory" (15:8). Baruch himself further regards final redemption as an act of divine mercy, even for the vigilant righteous.[74] Many, however—and not a few (!)—have prevailed, affirming the integrity of the human being in spite of the consequences of transgression.

In decisive contrast with 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch narrows the implications of Adam's sin to individual volition, a power that humans retain despite primordial transgression. Baruch himself confesses:

> For, although Adam sinned first and has brought death upon all who were not in his own time, yet each of them who has been born from him has prepared for himself the coming torment. And further, each of them has chosen for himself the coming glory.[75]

Adam's transgression extends its consequences in the form of death, which pervades the present, corruptible world. The most dreadful consequences of Adam's sin thus concern mortality (21:23) and physical

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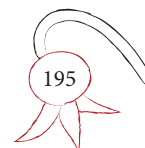
[72]   The primordial sin of the angels is acknowledged. Even here, Adam's sin was the cause of angelic transgression, not *vice versa*. Some angels freely chose to follow Adam's example, while the majority remained righteous (56:10–14). For angels and humans, sin remains a choice, not a compulsion.

[73]   Murphy 1985, 34: "The Adam theme is at the periphery of his thought."

[74]   2 Baruch 75:5–6; 77:7; 84:10–11.

[75]   2 Bar 54:15; OTP.

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evil.[76] These may pose moral consequences, as death and scarcity lead to "pride," violence, false worship, and "passion" (56:6). Second Baruch frequently utilizes the term "corruption" (ḥbālā) in a dual sense.[77] It embraces the mortality that reigns over the present age, yet it also characterizes those who through their own volition replicate Adam's sin and experience its consequences.[78] Thus, "corruption will take those who belong to it, and life those who belong to it" (42:7; trans. Gurtner 2009). As Rebecca Harris interprets the role of volition, the righteous willingly internalize the glory of the Torah through obedience, leading to everlasting life, even as the wicked internalize the corruptibility of the present age, leading to everlasting death (Harris 2019, 101–8). Neither group was fated to its destiny (15:6).

This leads Baruch to a declaration that offers a stunning contrast to Ezra's lamentation over the evil heart:

> But now, turn yourselves to destruction, you unrighteous ones who are living now, for you will be visited suddenly, since you have once rejected the understanding of the Most High. For his works have not taught you, nor has the artful work of his creation which has existed always persuaded you. Adam is, therefore, not the cause, except only for himself, but each of us has become our own Adam.[79]

Where Ezra mourns judgment, Baruch welcomes it, as he individualizes the nature of Adam's sin. The first human ancestor becomes the prototype of each human, who exercises free human agency in a world where good and evil, life and death, stand before them.[80] Baruch's perspective

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[76] 2 Baruch 14:19; 19:8; 21:9–17; 23:4–5; 31:5; 44:9–15; 48:42–43; 56:5–6. The view may be considered widespread; see Wisdom 1:12–16, 2:21–24; Sifre Deuteronomy 323, 339; Genesis Rabbah 9:5, 17:8; BT Shabbat 55a–b; Mekhilta Exodus 14:29.

[77] 2 Baruch 28:5; 31:5; 40:3; 42:7; 44:12; 48:43; 54:17; 74:2; cf. 39:4; 53:7; 83:15; 85:5, 13.

[78] Bogaert 1969, 405; Levison 1988, 139; Henze 2011, 169. See further Dik 2023, 398–405 on 2 Baruch 41:4.

[79] 2 Bar 54:17–19; OTP.

[80] One may identify hints of more collective understandings of sin and judgment. The Northern Kingdom fell because its kings caused the people to sin; yet the Southern Kingdom fell because its people caused the kings to sin (2 Bar 1:3).

thus more frequently resembles that of Uriel in 4 Ezra (cf. 8:56) than it does Ezra's, which is more pessimistic (Stone 1990, 73).

Arguments from natural law further demonstrate how humans reject "the understanding of the Most High" evident within "the artful work of his creation."[81] Such reliance upon natural theology was hardly so explicit within 4 Ezra (Collins 2009, 86–87). Second Baruch, however, exhibits stronger epistemological confidence in what humans can know from the natural order. Likewise, the deity insists that those who came after Moses "knew that they had the Law reproving them and that light in which nothing could err. Also the spheres which testify, and me" (19:3; trans. Gurtner 2009). Through creation and covenant, God has "placed before you life and death" (19:1). The Deuteronomic language of choosing life (Deut 30:19) shares the perspective of Uriel in 4 Ezra (7:127–129) and is uncompromisingly asserted by the deity. Rather than drawing from "the light" of the law, transgressors knowingly drew from "the darkness of Adam" (2 Bar 18:2). Both powers, "light" and "darkness," remain active in the world and accessible to conscious human choice.[82] Second Baruch's approach to hope is, therefore, not so deeply threatened by the implications of anthropological pessimism.[83] The human remains knowledgeable, capable, and responsible.

Intercession

Both apocalypses exhibit the prayers of the righteous as a resilient, hopeful form of human agency in the face of despair. Baruch is told early in the book that his "prayers are like a strong city wall" in the face

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Likewise, Adam's transgression provoked the angels to sin (56:10). Even so, 2 Baruch clarifies: "For they possessed freedom in that time in which they were created ... But the rest of the multitude of angels, who have no number, restrained themselves" (56:11, 14; OTP).

[81] 2 Baruch 54:17–18; cf. 19:3, 57:2.

[82] 2 Baruch 48:40; cf. 51:16. On the light/darkness imagery, see Harris 2019, 101–8.

[83] 2 Baruch 48:29; 51:3–10; Murphy 1985, 18.

of Jerusalem's destruction (2 Bar 2:2). Like his counterpart, Baruch explicitly fulfills the role of interceding for his downfallen people (34:1). His major intercessory prayer transpires in multiple stages,[84] as Baruch raises the plight of humanity yet curiously answers his own petition within the process of intercession.[85] Baruch becomes his own "angel," so to speak. David Seal describes how the prayer evokes "feelings of hope and confidence" that "certain elements of the created order remain whole" (2019, 648–49). Reassurance concerning viable human agency becomes an urgent concern within his prayer.

After seven days of fasting (47:2–48:1), Baruch begins with a hymnic prelude that extols the deity's sovereignty over time and the mysteries of the cosmos (48:1–10). He then offers his "petition" for mercy upon the frailty of the human in the face of the deity's eternal powers (48:11–20). The petition employs the familiar intercessory tactic of pleading for mercy upon the weak, now applied specifically to human mortality. Why should the infinite creator remain wrathful toward corruptible humanity? Baruch further applies the intercessory logic specifically to "the nation that you have chosen" (48:20): "Protect us in your compassion, and help us in your mercy. Look upon the little ones that are subject to you ... and do not destroy the hope of our people" (48:18–19; OTP). This plea for divine mercy is as fervent as that of Ezra, yet it concerns mortality rather than sinful nature.

Baruch then didactically answers his own petition for mercy with a dogmatic assertion concerning the redemptive power of the law:

> But I will now speak before you, and I will say as my heart thinks.[86] In you do we trust, for, behold, your Law is with us. And we know that we will not fall as long as we keep your statutes.[87]

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[84] 2 Baruch 48:1–10, 11–20, 21–25, 26–41, 42–47. Henze (2020, 204) classifies the passage as "petitionary" prayer.

[85] Wright (2003, 77) observes: "Each of the dialogues ... ends with Baruch acquiescing."

[86] The transitional formula typically reorients Baruch from complaint toward reassurance (cf. 12:1; 48:44; 52:4).

[87] 2 Bar 48:21–22; trans. Gurtner 2009.

His intercession moves by degrees from the deity's surpassing might, to the frailty of mortal humanity, to the redemptive promise of the law within Israel. Embedded within the plaintive intercession is the assurance that the solution is self-evident. God need not grant anything new. The law remains with Israel; the human being is well equipped to understand and observe it. The deity accepts the premises of Baruch's prayer (48:26), then elaborates its eschatological implications. God's judgment will assert its righteous claims in the coming latter-day tribulations: "For each of the inhabitants of the earth knew when he was sinning. But my Law they did not know, because of their pride" (48:40).

Presented with these apocalyptic terrors, Baruch moves to a final round of self-explanatory intercession (48:42–47). He laments, no less than Ezra, the consequences of primordial transgression:

> O Adam, what have you done to all those who are born from you? And what will be said to the first Eve who heeded the serpent. For all this multitude are going to corruption.[88]

Once again, Baruch interprets the consequences of primeval transgression as mortality. His prayer then leads him to discover reassurance for his own plaintive lament:

> But again I will speak in your presence. You, O Lord, my Lord, know what is in your creature. For you did, of old, command the dust to produce Adam, and you know the number of those who have been born from him, and how much they, who have exited and did not confess you as their creator, sinned before you. And concerning all these, their end will convict them. And your Law, which they have transgressed, will repay them on your day.[89]

Baruch's intercession becomes a didactic discourse that contains within itself both complaint and reassurance. There is no intercessory "stalemate" between prophet and deity. The very attempt at intercession only reassures the reliability of the law, the abiding justice of the deity, and the authentic freedom of the human being. The final justice of God will

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[88] 2 Bar 48:42–43; trans. Gurtner 2009.

[89] 2 Bar 48:44–47; trans. Gurtner 2009.

thus be fully warranted, as is further revealed to Baruch in the ensuing dialogue on the afterlife (48:48–51:16). Baruch's concluding epistle will explicitly deny the possibilities of intercession at the final judgment in the strongest possible terms (85:12–13), eclipsing even the severity of Uriel's refutation (4 Ezra 7:105).[90] Such certainty rests upon the confidence that human agency retains a fighting chance, even within the present, corruptible age.

Leadership

As Baruch anticipates his coming ascension into the heavenly world,[91] he actively transfers his own inspired leadership to the elders of Israel, who are entrusted with his revelations (2 Bar 31, 44–46; Wright 2003, 91–97). Second Baruch thus requires no esoteric elite to preserve revelation (in contrast to 4 Ezra). The elders of Israel, fulfilling their hereditary vocation to teach the law, are sufficient to sustain the community until the end.[92] When the people despair that the Torah cannot be taught apart from Baruch's prophetic status (46:1–3; cf. 32:8–33:3), he immediately refutes this mistaken assumption: "Israel will not lack a wise man, nor the race of Jacob a son of the Law" (46:4; trans. Gurtner 2009). In his final address, the people yet again lament the passing of authoritative leadership, yet Baruch corrects their despair: "Shepherds and lamps and fountains come from the Law. And though we depart, the Law endures" (77:15–16; trans. Gurtner 2009). The Torah repeatedly

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[90] Such vociferous denials of intercession at the final judgment "suggests that the possibility was being canvassed and needed to be denied" (Bauckham 1998, 143; see Trumbower 2001, 31, 53). While 4 Ezra is somewhat more ambiguous, both works mediate away from the possibility of intercession on the last day, narrowing its application to aid the struggling righteous in the present age. Baruch's epistle exhorts the people to "pray diligently, from all your soul," pleading for divine mercy: "For if he does not judge us according to the multitude of his mercies, woe to all of us who are born!" (2 Bar 84:10–11; trans. Gurtner 2009).

[91] 2 Baruch 13:3; 43:2; 46:7; 48:30; 76:2.

[92] Whitters (2003, 64–65, 114–15) demonstrates how Baruch's audience expands to increasingly wider spheres.

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generates leaders in every generation. The imagery of the "lamp" of the Torah (18:2) now expresses the persistent instruction that shines perpetually, even in spite of the departure of faithful leaders (cf. 17:4, 59:2).

Nor is there need for an entirely new revelatory writing of the law, as in 4 Ezra (Gore-Jones 2021, 402). The Jewish people, "my people" (2 Bar 44:1), under the leadership of their present elders, will be well prepared in future generations to teach wisdom and Torah without an esoteric elite.[93] The unique, written revelation of 2 Baruch decisively secures this possibility while remaining a vessel that is transparently open to the greater community. This immediacy and openness to the totality of the natural community, rather than a commitment to the preservation of pure knowledge among elites, likewise reflects 2 Baruch's greater confidence in the integrity of the will, the clarity of human understanding, and the hope that all Israel may enter into life by freely keeping the commandments.

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Hope, Agency, and Interim Ethics

Contemporary philosophers and social scientists have explored the complex, blended roles that human agency plays in the construction of hope. In the cognitive psychological treatment of C. R. Snyder, hope rests upon "an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)" (Snyder et al. 2018, 27). By creating agentic pathways, often beyond multiple obstacles, hope connects "the present to [the] imagined future" (Rand and Cheavens 2009, 324). Hope, of course, may invest agency beyond the human being alone. Patrick Shade thus qualifies hope as a "transcendence" that may be "conditioned" or "unconditioned." Hope arises amid practical contingencies of context, inspiring a dynamic "stretching" of human agency beyond its conditioned limitations. Yet hope may persist "even when there is no human or conditioned basis,"[94]

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93 Murphy 1985, 13, 20; Henze 2011, 210, 238.

94 See also Lazarus 1999, 674: "We can hope even when we are helpless to effect the outcome."

as it relocates agency in an unconditionally transcendent power, such as God (Shade 2001, 179). For Shade, such unconditioned transcendence becomes dangerous when it diverges too radically from a constructive balance with practical, contingent agency.[95]

If ever a literary corpus pressed the boundaries of "unconditioned transcendence," it would be the literary apocalypses of ancient Judaism. The conventional apocalyptic paradigms in which divine agency transcends death through resurrection, purifies the cosmos through new creation, and redeems history through Messianism were long established and remained compelling for the late-first-century authors of 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch.[96] Yet in their creative innovation of revealed dialogues, the two works also invest hope in a reconceptualized human agent that can withstand the last days. As Baruch pointedly states the problem: "Who is worthy to live" (2 Bar 41:1) through the impending crisis? As Ezra desperately inquires: "What good is it that an everlasting hope has been promised to us, but we have miserably failed?" (4 Ezra 7:120). While their complex dialogues serve multiple functions, both express the realistic despair that threatens the human agent while reconstructing viable agentic pathways that will allow the righteous to survive, perhaps to flourish, until the final reckoning. They pursue meaningfully different strategies as they construct an interim ethic that meets this urgent demand.[97]

Ezra's journey from the paralysis of anxiety to a mission of prophetic consolation follows a more painstaking pathway of agentic restoration. The work cautiously invests a vigilantly guarded measure of hope in the visionary elite, their humble penitence, intercessory vocation, and newly inspired revelation of the Torah. As exemplified in Ezra, the formidable resistance posed by the "evil heart" demands a more radical transformation from *aporia* to consolation, one in which there remain

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[95] Shade 2001, 22, 177–79, 185, 196–97.

[96] Murphy 2012, 13–25; Collins 2016, 13–15.

[97] The present examination could be extended to the Apocalypse of Abraham, whose dialogues also concern the mystery of sin, free will, and righteous agency (14:3; 23:12–14; 26:5). See Orlov 2021, 34–41, 144–54.

legitimate tensions between human understanding and divine justice.[98] Nevertheless, in Ezra's journey the reader may visualize the reconstruction of a human agent who can stand in the last days and inherit eschatological reward.

Baruch's consolatory journey invests more immediate reassurance in human agency and, by extension, the natural Jewish community. Epistemology, volition, and communal agency remain sufficiently reliable that many—and "not a few" (2 Bar 21:11)—may pursue the light of the Torah within the present world. The tensions between human understanding and divine justice are less severe, so much so that Baruch even comes to correct his plaintive laments and intercessions through the process of his own righteous prayers. Hope arises less from radical transformation than from the gradual reassurance that the problems of mortality may be overcome through a human agent well equipped to know and pursue the light of the Torah until the end.

Through their explorations of the turbulent internal universe of the human, the two works thus wage an apocalyptic theodicy whose "unconditioned" hopes intersect, and indeed depend upon, anthropodicy. The vindication of God hinges precariously upon the vindication of the human being.

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98 For Najman (2014, 24, 128), hope in 4 Ezra becomes "radical in the sense that it transcends the culture's current understanding of its values." This definition of "radical hope" is informed by Jonathan Lear (2006).

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