

Ian Douglas Wilson  
**Tyre, a Ship**

## The Metaphorical World of Ezekiel 27 in Ancient Judah<sup>1</sup>

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»My mother is a fish«, states the child Vardaman in William Faulkner's novel *As I Lay Dying*. The statement, My mother is a fish, is extremely brief, but certainly not short on complexity. A reader does not take the statement at face value; one knows that Vardaman's mother (a human being) is not actually a fish. But the non-literalness of metaphors is what gives them their explanatory power. Paul Ricoeur argues that the essence of the metaphorical statement is the verb »to be«. He comments, »The metaphorical ›is‹ at once signifies both ›is not‹ and ›is like«.<sup>2</sup> In other words, a metaphor brings to mind a myriad of positive and negative associations that requires participation in the making of meaning, conscious and unconscious organization of literal attributes and symbolic relationships known to the reader of the text. Metaphors are culturally and linguistically systemic; every metaphorical association carries with it socio-cultural and linguistic data from which the reader draws in order to make meaning, and the literary and socio-cultural contexts of the metaphor inform that meaning. At the cognitive level, understanding and interpreting metaphor requires extensive conceptual blending. This blending takes place actively, but it also happens passively, guided by the metaphor's (and the reader's) socio-cultural, discursive world.<sup>3</sup> With a short metaphorical statement like »My mother is a fish«, which famously

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<sup>1</sup> A draft of this essay was presented at the 2012 meeting of the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies in Waterloo, Ontario, where I received valuable feedback. I am also grateful to Brian Doak for his insightful critique of a draft.

<sup>2</sup> P. Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 1977, 7. Cf. C. Newsom, *A Maker of Metaphors – Ezekiel's Oracles Against Tyre*, *Interpretation* 38 (1984), 151–164, 152–153.

<sup>3</sup> For more on metaphor in the context of biblical studies, see, e.g., M. Brettler, *God is King*, *JSOTSup* 76, 1989, 17–28; F. Landy, *On Metaphor, Play and Nonsense*, *Semeia* 61 (1993), 219–237; D. H. Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities*, 2001; the essays in P. Van Hecke (ed.), *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible*, *BETL* 187, 2005. For a survey of metaphor in modern philosophical discourse, see C. Caazeaux, *Metaphor and Continental Philosophy*, 2007. On reading the book of Ezekiel in particular, with its abundance of rich metaphors, see, e.g., S. S. Apóstolo, *Imagining Ezekiel*, *JHS* 8 (2008), article 13, available at <http://www.jhsonline.org>.

constitutes an entire chapter in Faulkner's novel, there is ample room to explore potential implications in meaning within its contexts.

In Ez 27, one reads about Tyre, a sinking ship. The metaphor of the ship lies at the foundation of the world that the book of Ezekiel presents in this chapter.<sup>4</sup> In the analysis below, I present a reading of the text that considers its socio-cultural discursive setting, its place within its own symbolic milieu. Ezekiel, the book, is deeply couched in symbolic language. Indeed, the prophetic oracles and actions described in the book are often strange (e.g., the sign-act in 2,8–3,3; see below), and these odd visions and events have invited an array of interesting interpretations from scholars. The book contains some of the most striking metaphors in the Hebrew Bible: for example, Jerusalem, the whoring woman (Ez 16; 23); the princes of Israel, two lion cubs (Ez 19,1–9); and Assyria, the cedar of Lebanon (Ez 31,3–9). The metaphor in Ez 27 creates a complex symbolic world, offering vivid descriptions of the ship's construction, its workers, its trading partners and goods exchanged, and ultimately its demise. Many scholars have seen this text as a window into the socio-economic world of the ancient Near East in the sixth century BCE, and a number of in depth historical-critical analyses of the text have mined data from the list of traders and goods in 27,12–25a.<sup>5</sup> Anson Rainey and Steven Notley, for instance, write, »Ezekiel's portrayal may reflect some poetic license, but it gives us a view of the world economy as conceived by people of the Levant in the late Iron Age.«<sup>6</sup> Others have taken a different path and focused pri-

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**4** Some text critics argue that the chapter explicitly calls Tyre a ship from the outset. In 27,3 the MT reads, צור את אמרת אני כלילת יפי »O Tyre, you yourself said, I am perfect in beauty«. BHS, however, without giving any reason or justification, states that צור את אמרת אני should probably read אניה »ship«. This emendation yields, »Tyre, you are a ship, perfect in beauty«. W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2*, Hermeneia, 1983, 42, follows a suggestion made much earlier by Wellhausen, namely, that the word אני is »ship« and not the first-person pronoun (cf. I Reg 9,26; Isa 33,21); cf. L. C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, WBC 29, 1990, 80. Zimmerli also argues that a shorter, emended text fits better with the supposed qinah meter of the poem. In this case, I prefer to leave the MT as is. In line with M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, AB 22A, 1997, 548, there is no reason that »the poet must specify his metaphor before employing it«. And emendations based on metrical schemes are entirely speculative.

**5** Some recent examples are M. Liverani, *The Trade Network of Tyre*, in: M. Cogan/I. Eph'al (eds.), *Ah, Assyria...* (Festschrift Tadmor), 1991, 65–79; I. M. Diakonoff, *The Naval Power and Trade of Tyre*, IEJ 42 (1992), 168–193; M. A. Corral, *Ezekiel's Oracles against Tyre*, BibOr 46, 2002; A. F. Rainey/R. S. Notley, *The Sacred Bridge*, 2006, 28–29; M. Saur, *Ezekiel 26–28 and the History of Tyre*, SJOT 24 (2010), 208–221. For surveys of Phoenician and Tyrian history in general, including discussions of the various biblical and extra-biblical sources available for study, see B. Peckham, *Phoenicia, History of*, ABD 5, 349–357; H. J. Katzenstein/D. R. Edwards, *Tyre*, ABD 6, 686–692.

**6** Rainey/Notley, *Sacred Bridge*, 29.

marily on the symbolic, literary aspects of the text, highlighting and emphasizing the »poetic license« to which Rainey and Notley refer.<sup>7</sup> Not infrequently, however, scholars try to find some middle ground, recognizing literary artistry and rhetoric in the poem and nevertheless reading it within a particular context in antiquity.<sup>8</sup> In this essay, I too attempt to traverse the middle ground. But rather than focusing on the sixth-century prophet himself and the events and socio-economic world of the Neo-Babylonian period, I situate the text in the temple-centered, literate community of Jerusalem in the late Persian period, approximately the fourth century BCE. It is during this era that many of the »books« eventually included in the Hebrew Bible came together as authoritative collections of texts that were an integral part of life for the literate community working in and around the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup> There is no doubt that many of these collections have their roots

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7 E.g., E. M. Good, *Ezekiel's Ship*, *Semitics* 1 (1970), 79–103; Newsom, *Maker of Metaphors*; J. B. Geyer, *Ezekiel 27 and the Cosmic Ship*, in: P. R. Davies/D. J. A. Clines (eds.), *Among the Prophets*, *JSOTSup* 144, 1993, 105–126; J. A. Durlleser, *The Metaphorical Narratives in the Book of Ezekiel*, 2006.

8 Greenberg's *Anchor Bible* volumes are probably the most extensive examples of such an approach to Ezekiel the book. He sees it as the work of an historical Ezekiel, an artistically gifted priest and prophet of the sixth century BCE who witnessed the Babylonian catastrophe, and who drew upon the traditions available to him (cf. *idem*, *Ezekiel* 21–37, 395–396). See also, e.g., P. Joyce, *Ezekiel*, *LHBOTS* 482, 2007, 7–16; C. L. Crouch, *Ezekiel's Oracles against the Nations in Light of a Royal Ideology of Warfare*, *JBL* 130 (2011), 473–492.

Viewing Ez 27 as a literary work in an ancient historical context usually involves some reference to Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre, which Josephus tells us lasted an astonishing thirteen years. E.g., R. Lessing, *Satire in Isaiah's Tyre Oracle*, *JSOT* 28 (2003), 89–112, argues that Ez 27, along with Isa 23,1–14, is a satirical city-lament. Lessing situates this satire in the early sixth century BCE, just before (or during?) the siege (*ibid.*, 101–102). On the siege, see Josephus' *Ant.* 10.11.1 and *Ag. Ap.* 1.21 (cf. *Ez* 29,18). On Josephus' comments, see A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000–330 BC*, vol. 2, 1995, 591, who suggests that his claims reflect Babylon's drawn-out besieging of the entire Levant, not just Tyre.

9 See E. Ben Zvi, *The Urban Center of Jerusalem and the Development of the Literature of the Hebrew Bible*, in: W. G. Aufrecht/N. A. Mirau/S. W. Gauley (eds.), *Aspects of Urbanism in Antiquity*, *JSOTSup* 244, 1997, 194–209; L. L. Grabbe, *Jewish Historiography and Scripture in the Hellenistic Period*, in: L. L. Grabbe (ed.), *Did Moses Speak Attic?* *JSOTSup* 317, *ESHM* 3, 2001, 129–155. That is not to say, however, that these collections were completely set in stone in the late Persian period, nor do I mean to imply that the text of every book was entirely standardized by this time. LXX Jeremiah, of course, attests to the fluidity of the gradual process of standardization. For a recent study, see, e.g., D. M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, 2011, 221–224, who argues that the pentateuchal »Torah of Moses« and the »prophetic« books (i.e., the Former and Latter Prophets) emerged in the Persian period as authoritative collections for the literate elite; cf. T. Römer, *How Many Books (teuchs)?* in: T. B. Dozeman/T. Römer/K. Schmid (eds.), *Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch?* *SBLAIL* 8, 2011, 25–42, 37–39. Of course, Judean scribes probably restruc-

in much earlier periods, and that many underwent a long, complex process of scribal reception, editing, and expansion that took place over many centuries. But one can argue that these collections as we have them now – preserved as books in the MT – are mostly late Persian-period products, since it is during this time that many of these books, including Ezekiel, took their essentially final shape. As products of late Persian-period Judah, they are literary artifacts from that period and that milieu, windows into the community that put finishing touches on the texts, read and studied them, maintained them and made them a foundational aspect of their intellectual world.

How, then, would literate Judeans in Jerusalem, several generations removed from the days of Ezekiel the prophet, make sense of this metaphorical lamentation over Tyre in the book of Ezekiel? In the discussion that follows, I focus on the following questions: Exactly how does the text present this metaphor of the Tyrian ship? What might be the symbolic significance of some of the less obscure vocabulary in the metaphorical description? And how does the language of the text call attention to overarching discourses? After exploring the text itself, I offer some concluding remarks on how ancient Judean readers might have participated in the making of metaphorical meaning in this text, hoping to show that the ship's symbolism, which has a number of striking interconnections with the Tabernacle and Temple, contributed to late Persian-period understandings of the past, present, and future cities of Tyre and Jerusalem within an imagined Yahwistic empire.

## You Yourself Said, »I am Perfect in Beauty«

At the very start one should note that the metaphorical message of Ez 27 begins in typical prophetic fashion: דבר יהוה »the word of Yahweh« comes to Ezekiel, Yahweh's mouthpiece, and the prophet – בן אדם »human«, as he is often called in the book – is told to share the message. The type of message that Ezekiel is to share, however, is rather atypical. Yahweh states, שא על צר קינה »lift up a dirge concerning Tyre« (v. 2). The word קינה »dirge« (commonly translated as »lament« or

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tured and/or expanded some of these texts in the third century (see Carr, *Formation*, 180–203; cf. K. Schmid, *The Old Testament: A Literary History* [trans. L. M. Maloney], 2012, 183–209), but, for the most part, the pentateuchal, historiographical, and prophetic »books« are products of the late Persian-period milieu. On the archaeology and history of Judah in the fourth century, see, e.g., the essays in O. Lipschits / G. N. Knoppers / R. Albertz (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth Century B.C.E.*, 2007; A. Fantalkin / O. Tal, *The Canonization of the Pentateuch (Part I)*, ZAW 124 (2012), 1–18.

»lamentation«) is relatively rare in the Hebrew Bible, despite the fact that lament, as a perceived literary form, is common, especially in Psalms.<sup>10</sup> Of the combined twenty-six occurrences of the noun and its related verbal root קָן, fourteen of them appear in the book of Ezekiel.<sup>11</sup> Thus – despite Jeremiah's (deserved) reputation as the lamenting prophet (cf. I Chr 35,25)<sup>12</sup> – the dirge, when it is specifically named and/or described as an action, features most prominently in Ezekiel.

This recurring theme in Ezekiel's prophetic corpus should not surprise a reader familiar with the bizarre event described in 2,1–3,3. After Ezekiel witnesses a vision of the divine (Ez 1), a wind or spirit (רוּחַ) enters him (2,2) and calls him to prophetic duty. The רוּחַ then gives him a scroll, commanding him to open his mouth and eat it. Upon the scroll are written קָנִים וְהִגָּה וְהִי »dirges, sighing, and woe« (cf. 2,8–10).<sup>13</sup> Margaret Odell argues that the curious sign-acts in Ez 3–5 (beginning with the heavenly vision and subsequent ingestion of this scroll) are a sort of initiation during Ezekiel's liminal existence between the roles of priest and prophet.<sup>14</sup> The consumption of the scroll fills the priest – now prophet-to-be – with Yahweh's words, preparing him for his task of mediating the divine message, which includes קָנִים. Thus, as he utters the divine dirge preserved in the text of Ez 27, the prophet is regurgitating, as it were, the scroll he consumed during his initial encounter with the divine רוּחַ.<sup>15</sup> The דְּבַר יְהוָה of Ez 27 – the dirge that the prophet is to utter – presents two perspectives on the city of Tyre. First, one reads Yahweh's own short, to-the-point description of the city: it dwells upon

**10** Gunkel's form-critical classifications of Psalms are still widely accepted today, even if many scholars disagree with his placement of them within a specific *Sitz im Leben*. The lament psalm, he argued, is the most common form in the Psalter; see idem, *The Psalms* (trans. T. M. Horner), 1967. For a more contemporary presentation of lament psalms, see, e.g., J. Limburg, *Psalms, Book of*, ABD 5, 531–532; or any recent critical commentary on Psalms.

**11** See 2,10; 19,1.14 (2x); 26,17; 27,2.32 (2x); 28,12; 32,2.16 (4x).

**12** Cf. also Jer 7,29; 9,9.16.19, in addition to the general theme of mourning and gloom present in the book. One should also note the book of Lamentations, which is of course a collection of dirges/laments, and which both Jewish and Christian tradition associates with Jeremiah.

**13** The word הִי occurs only here. LXX reads οὐαί, equivalent to the Hebrew הִי »woe«, an interjection, not a noun. HALOT therefore tentatively suggests the reading נָהִי »lamentation« from the root נָהָה (cf. GKC §19h). D. I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24*, NICOT, 1997, 124–125, suggests that both הִי and הִגָּה are meant to be onomatopoeic with regard to the act of mourning.

**14** See M. S. Odell, *You Are What You Eat*, JBL 117 (1998), 229–248; cf. E. F. Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 1989.

**15** Cf. J. Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel, Interpretation*, 1990, 25, who comments, »Julius Wellhausen, who was not fond of Ezekiel, spoke of him swallowing a book and giving it up again«. Blenkinsopp interprets this event as representative of the transformation of classical prophecy into a literary activity. See also Apóstolo, *Imagining Ezekiel*, 25.

the entrance to the sea (הַיָּם מִבּוֹאֵת יָם), and is a merchant to the peoples, to many coastlands (רַכְלֹת הַצִּמִּים אֶל אֵיִם רַבִּים) (v. 3a). And then, second, Yahweh states Tyre's perception of itself:

צֹר אֶת אִמְרַת אֲנִי כְּלִילַת יָפִי

O Tyre, you yourself said, »I am perfect in beauty« (v. 3b)

Thus begins the dirge. This second perspective, Tyre's self-perception, sets the stage for the metaphor that follows. Although the passage originates from Yahweh, presented via the mouth of the prophet, what one reads in vv. 4–25a – the description of the well crafted and skillfully appointed vessel, and the catalogue of fine goods and trading partners – surely paints a picture of how Tyre would view its own merchant-empire.<sup>16</sup> Tyre's self-perception, indeed, is largely the focus of each oracle in Ez 26,1–28,19. The structure of these oracles evinces a clear rhetoric against Tyre's self-perception, which was hubristic according to 28,2.

Ezekiel's oracles against Tyre may be divided into two parts (26,1–27,36 and 28,1–19), each consisting of a judgment and a dirge. As Carol Newsom points out, the pairing of judgment oracle and dirge functions as a diptych in the text; in each case, the judgment reveals themes upon which the following dirge expands.<sup>17</sup> So in 26,3 one reads that Yahweh will bring nations up against Tyre just as the sea brings its waves.<sup>18</sup> These invading nations will wipe out Tyre – literally a צֹר »rock« in the sea, an island just off the Levantine coast – making it צֹרִיחַ סֶלֶעַ »a bare rock« (26,4,14), a desolate place בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם »in the midst of the sea« (26,5; cf. 27,32). Furthermore, 26,15–18 – the dirge of the coastlands – prefigures the content of ch. 27, especially 27,27–36.<sup>19</sup> Tyre's litany of trading partners, who provide goods as

**16** Katzenstein, Tyre, 688, speculates that the text actually has its roots in a Tyrian anthem of sorts (cf. Isa 23,16; Ez 26,13), perhaps from the ninth century BCE, during the reign of Tyrian king Ethbaal I. Diakonoff, Naval Power, 191–192, to the contrary, suggests that Ezekiel himself might have sojourned in Tyre and observed the hub of trade firsthand. See Greenberg, Ezekiel 21–37, 568–569, for even more opinions on potential source material behind the text. I tend to agree with the opinion of Liverani, Trade Network, 79, who reads the text as a source on late Iron Age socio-economic data, but nevertheless recognizes that its present literary setting is a written prophetic oracle, which has its own unique purpose and ideology (cf. Saur, Ezekiel 26–28, 215–216).

**17** Newsom, Maker of Metaphors, 157–158; cf. J. T. Strong, Ezekiel's Oracles against the Nations within the Context of His Message (Ph.D. diss.), 1993, 179–184; G. S. Goering, Proleptic Fulfillment of the Prophetic Word, JSOT 36 (2012), 483–505.

**18** Cf. Ez 27,26: the sea's eastern wind, which causes waves, breaks the Tyrian ship.

**19** Cf. Greenberg, Ezekiel 21–37, 564.

well as workers and warriors to the sea-bound merchant (cf. 27,4–25a), are horrified (שמם) (Ez 26,16; cf. 27,35; 28,19) at the devastating destruction brought by the waves of the crashing sea, that is, Babylon (cf. 26,7–14). Here the dirges of Ez 26 and 27 reverse the common depiction in the prophets, especially in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, of Jerusalem and Judah's horror and devastation at the hands of Babylon.<sup>20</sup> Throughout Ezekiel's oracles against the nations, Yahweh is to bring desolation and horror upon haughty and sinful peoples of the world,<sup>21</sup> much like Assyria and Babylon brought destruction to the rebellious Israel and Judah.

Tyre's hubristic self-perception – its god complex and its desire to take advantage of Jerusalem's misfortune (cf. 26,2) – is eloquently and appropriately transferred in the text to the image of a ship. One reads of the ship's perfected beauty (כליל\כלל + יפי) no less than three times in the first eleven verses (27,3,4,11), and this topos is conspicuous in ch. 28 as well (28,7,12,17).<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere the combination of כליל or כלל and יפי is reserved for Jerusalem alone (Ez 16,14; Thr 2,15; cf. Ps 50,2). This led Rashi to observe that Tyre had appropriated the epithet of God's chosen city.<sup>23</sup> Tyre claims for itself the lofty praise God had reserved for Jerusalem.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, the materials used to craft this beautiful ship are closely connected to Jerusalem and the Tabernacle and Temple, and carry significant cultural symbolism. Take 27,5, for instance:

ברושים משניר בנו לך את כל לחתים  
 ארו מלבנון לקחו לצעות תרן עליך  
 With junipers from Senir they built for you all (your) planks  
 Cedar from Lebanon they acquired to make a mast for you

The flooring and walls of Solomon's Temple consist of Tyrian ברוש (juniper or cypress) and ארו (cedar), acquired from Hiram of Tyre.<sup>25</sup> This connection in Solomon's story is not surprising; the Phoenician homeland was famous for its forests, and timber trade was undoubtedly a central aspect of Phoenicia's eco-

<sup>20</sup> E.g. among many, Jer 4,9; 18,16; Ez 6,4; 7,27.

<sup>21</sup> Ez 29,9–10,12; 30,7,12,14; 32,10,15; cf. Jer 25,12.

<sup>22</sup> On the phrase »perfect in beauty« in relation to the king of Tyre in ch. 28, see D. E. Callender Jr., *The Primal Human in Ezekiel and the Image of God*, in: M. S. Odell/J. T. Strong (eds.), *The Book of Ezekiel*, SBLSym 9, 2000, 189 n. 44.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Greenberg, *Ezekiel* 21–37, 548.

<sup>24</sup> However, as M. S. Odell, *Ezekiel*, 2005, 345, comments, in neither Jerusalem's case nor Tyre's is »beauty an enduring attribute«. Jerusalem's perfect beauty is sullied by its unfaithfulness, and the beautiful Tyrian ship is swallowed by mighty waters.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. I Reg 5,22,24; 6,15; 9,11; II Chr 2,8; 3,5.

conomic welfare in the Iron Age and throughout antiquity.<sup>26</sup> However, the significance of *ברוש* and *ארז* extends well beyond ancient economics and exchange. Cedar forests in general and cedars of Lebanon in particular have import in the realms of ancient Near Eastern mythology and royal ideology as well. In tablets III-V of the Gilgamesh Epic and in the Sumerian poem Bilgames and Huwawa (an antecedent to the Epic), Enkidu and Gilgamesh journey to a great cedar forest, where they encounter Humbaba, the hideous monster whom Enlil placed there to guard the forest; and cedar trees are often associated with the mountainous dwelling places of deities in Mesopotamian literature.<sup>27</sup> The powerful kings of Assyria and Babylonia revered cedar wood and utilized it to construct their palaces and temples, boasting of their fine constructions in palatial royal inscriptions.<sup>28</sup> Ideologically, their procurement and utilization of this natural resource put them on par with the gods, who planted the forests and walked in the midst of the great trees. In the Hebrew Bible the mythological and ideological tropes are also evident: Isaiah prophesies against Sennacherib, condemning the Assyrian king's pride with regard to cutting down cedars and junipers of Lebanon (II Reg 19,23//Isa 37,24; cf. Isa 14,8, which refers to the king of Babylon);<sup>29</sup> the planting of cedars and junipers is associated with divine refreshment and renewal, a sign of Yahweh's handiwork (Isa 41,19); and Ezekiel metaphorically compares the might of Assyria to a great cedar in Lebanon, greater than the cedars and junipers in the garden of God (*גן אלהים*) (Ez 31,8). The widespread cultural import of *ברוש* and *ארז* makes the Tyrian ship all the more impressive, especially since Tyre's own immediate region was the source for these renowned materials. The ship was not only crafted out of these highly sought after materials; it provided them to the world as well.

Also important are the *לוחים* «planks» constructed with cedar (27,5). Wooden *לוח* are used to build the Tabernacle's altar (Ex 27,8; 38,7), and upon stone *לוח* are written Yahweh's instructions and commandments, given to Moses on Sinai (Ex 24,12; Deut 4,13). *תכלת וארגמן* «blue and purple» (27,7; cf. 27,16.24), too, repeatedly occur, either together or separately, in reference to the furnishings of the Taber-

<sup>26</sup> Cf. N. Lipschitz/G. Biger, Cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*) in Israel during Antiquity, *IEJ* 41 (1991), 167–175.

<sup>27</sup> See CAD E, 274–276, for references.

<sup>28</sup> See the multiple examples in CAD E, 274–276; and CAD B, 326–328.

<sup>29</sup> On several occasions Sennacherib refers to cedar (Akk. *erēnu*) and juniper (Akk. *burāšu*) in the description of his «palace without rival» in Nineveh. For the text, see D. D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, 1924, 106.



nacle and Temple.<sup>30</sup> These parallels are striking and not coincidental. Ezekiel's priestly language and its relationship to the priestly material of the Pentateuch has long been a topic of interest in biblical scholarship, and many argue that the traditions play off of one another.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the metaphor of the finely constructed and decorated ship makes clear references to loci of central importance in the history of Israel's cultus, the Temple and Tabernacle. So it is fitting that the foreign warriors' battle gear gives the ship הדר »splendor« (27,10), an attribute frequently associated with Yahweh, the deity of central importance to Israel's cultus, who dwells in these loci.<sup>32</sup> Note, too, that many coastlands bring ivory and ebony to the ship as אשכר »tribute« (27,15), and in Ps 72,10, the only other occurrence of this word, a petition is made for the kings of Tarshish, the coastlands, and Sheba (i.e., the whole world) to bring אשכר//מנחה to the Israelite king.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, almost half of the geographical place names in Ez 27 appear also in the tables of nations given in Gen 10 and I Chr 1, giving the list of Tyrian trading partners a certain mythological connection and scope.<sup>34</sup> And if one maps out these places, one finds that the map covers the entire ancient Near Eastern world – north, south, east, and west – conveying a sense of totality and dominance in the ship's geographical coverage.<sup>35</sup> Recognizing many of these significant intertexts, John Geyer posits that place names in the text are »traditional rather than factual«, and that the ship building materials and items of trade reflect the author's attempt to portray something »sacred«. <sup>36</sup> In other words, in depicting a ship יפי כלילה and covered in הדר the text draws on biblical imagery of Jerusalem and its cult, familiar from the priestly traditions and elsewhere.<sup>37</sup> Geyer suggests in his

**30** One or both of the words occur in some 55 verses. Those that do not refer to the Temple or Tabernacle are: Jud 8,26; Jer 10,9; Ez 23,6; 27,7.16.24; Prov 31,22; Cant 3,10; 7,5; Est 1,6; 8,5. Tyre was famous in antiquity for its purple dye; see Odell, Ezekiel, 351, for comment and bibliography. Geyer, Ezekiel 27, 119–125, catalogues a number of other connections between the ship and Tabernacle/Temple that I do not need to repeat.

**31** See, e.g., H. McKeating, Ezekiel »The Prophet like Moses«? JSOT 61 (1994), 97–109; R. L. Kohn, A New Heart and a New Soul, JSOTSup 358, 2002.

**32** E.g., Isa 2,10.19.21; 35,2; Mic 2,9; Ps 29,4; 96,6; 104,1; 149,9; Job 40,10; I Chr 16,27.

**33** Although אשכר is rare in Biblical Hebrew, its Akkadian cognate iškaru, which refers to manufacturing and processed materials, is common. Those who utilize the text for reconstructing socio-economic history often render the word as »finished products« returned from manufacturers (cf. Corral, Ezekiel's Oracles, 152–153).

**34** See Geyer, Ezekiel 27, 116–119, for a full discussion of the names and their parallels.

**35** Cf. Rainey/Notley, Sacred Bridge, 28–29.

**36** Geyer, Ezekiel 27, 118–119.

**37** In the cryptic text of Isa 33,17–24, Zion/Jerusalem is described as an immovable tent (בל יצוץ) (v. 20), and perhaps as a ship (cf. vv. 21–23), amidst the mighty rivers of Yahweh.

analysis that the author's use of this imagery was practical: the biblical traditions regarding Jerusalem were what the author knew best, so these are what came to mind when crafting his depiction of the magnificent ship. In my concluding comments below, I will go further, however, and suggest that these striking parallels are essential meaning-makers in the metaphor. Readers in ancient Judah would certainly have recognized the symbolic significance of these references and built upon it in their construction of what Tyre »is like« and »is not«.

## Tyre Is a Sinking Ship (in Yehud)

When literati in ancient Judah/Yehud approached the text of Ez 27, they brought with them an abundance of cultural information that helped them make sense of this metaphorical dirge. Following Clifford Geertz's influential formulation, I understand »culture« as the actions, items, language, et cetera, that express particular and interconnected meanings in a given social context.<sup>38</sup> In the late Persian period, as Jerusalem reestablished its prominence as a cultic center in Yehud, much of this information came from within the available corpus of Judean literature, and I have tried to highlight some of it above. The Hebrew Bible thus gives us access to the cultural matrix that informed the identity of the group(s) that produced, read, and reread its books in the ancient world.<sup>39</sup> So we come to our concluding question: How might readers in ancient Judah have made sense of this symbolic text?

As stated above, scholars have often situated the dirge at the very beginning of the Neo-Babylonian period, during the life of Ezekiel himself. Within this context, just before or perhaps during Babylon's famous siege of Tyre, Reed Lessing argues that the text is meant to be satirical (cf. the comparable wailing [לֵל] over Tyre in Isa 23,1–14)<sup>40</sup> – at present, the prosperous city of trade has yet to fall, but the prophet envisions the beneficiaries of the city's extensive commercial

<sup>38</sup> Cf. C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973, 89: »[Culture] denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life«.

<sup>39</sup> See the essays in L. Jonker (ed.), *Texts, Contexts and Readings in Postexilic Literature*, FAT 53, 2011.

<sup>40</sup> Lessing, *Satire* (see above, n. 8). Lessing follows the lead of Wildberger, *Blenkensopp*, and other commentators: Wildberger calls Isa 23 *Sarkasmus*, while *Blenkensopp* refers to it as *Schadenfreude* (cf. Lessing, *Satire*, 90). Cf. Liverani, *Trade Network*, 79, who ends his study with a reference to the potential sarcasm in Ez 27.

enterprise quaking at the city's downfall to the Babylonians (cf. 26,7–14). Perhaps Ezekiel's initiation into the prophetic office (2,8–3,3; see above) lends some credence to this understanding. Despite the sober content of the consumed scroll (קִימִים וְהִגָּה), its taste is pleasurable to Ezekiel (3,3; cf. Jer 15,16). In the text of Ez 27 at least, the underlying sarcasm of the dirge might prove darkly humorous, and thus to some extent pleasurable (in a cathartic sense) to prophet and reader alike.

In any case, *ex eventu* we know of course that Tyre's fate at the hands of Babylon was not nearly as devastating as Jerusalem's; it certainly was not reduced to a bare rock in the Mediterranean, plundered by the nations (26,3–5).<sup>41</sup> The extensive network of commerce established during the Neo-Assyrian period<sup>42</sup> continued to thrive after Babylon's ascension to power and into the subsequent Persian period. The Tyrians were able to dodge both the Assyrian and Babylonian bullets, so to speak, unlike the Judean capital Jerusalem. Whatever damage Nebuchadnezzar might have caused to the Phoenician coast, its effects did not last long, because in the latter half of the sixth century BCE the Phoenician cities were still highly regarded for their prowess at sea, and they eventually helped to build the strength of the Persian navy.<sup>43</sup>

John Strong makes an important observation with regard to the dirge that is pertinent to our discussion, especially given this historical context: Tyre's offense to Judah was not political, nor was it economic;<sup>44</sup> it was theological. He contends that, for the historical Ezekiel of the sixth century BCE, Tyre's survival of the Babylonian onslaught and its continued prominence in the ancient Near Eastern world threatened Zion theology.<sup>45</sup> For Judean priests and scribes in the Neo-Babylonian and early Persian periods, the restoration and renewal of Jerusalem was of central concern. In their hands, the dirge was ironic, and painfully so. While God's chosen city – with its demolished temple and devastated countryside – struggled to regain its footing, the vast world of Tyrian trade thrived, business as usual.

Yet on another, less apparent level, Ez 27 – read within the context of the emergent prophetic books in Persian Yehud – makes Jerusalem preminent, placing the Judean capital and its cult at the center of an imagined imperial

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<sup>41</sup> Ez 29,18 is aware of this fact.

<sup>42</sup> See Kuhrt, *Ancient Near East*, 2, 408–410.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. P. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander* (trans. P. T. Daniels), 2002, 53.

<sup>44</sup> Corral, *Ezekiel's Oracles*, passim, considering the period between 626 and 573 BCE, argues that Tyre's offense against Judah was indeed economically rooted. See Strong's sharply critical review of Corral in *CBQ* 65 (2003), 431–432.

<sup>45</sup> See Strong, *Ezekiel's Oracles*, 179–184; idem, *God's Kābôd*, in: Odell/Strong (eds.), *The Book of Ezekiel*, 91.

world, and subverting the irony on the surface of the text. In the fourth century BCE, after Egypt escaped the rule of the Persian Achaemenids, Judean literati (re)formulated their understandings of Jerusalem and Judah past, present, and future, thus (re)constituting their identity on the outskirts of the Persian empire.<sup>46</sup> Communities subsumed under imperial or »worldwide« socio-political systems – this includes Yehud – tend to think, consciously and unconsciously, in ways that mimic the systems in which they find themselves, appropriating external socio-cultural elements and fusing them with internal cultural frameworks.<sup>47</sup> The proto-»canonization«/standardization of the pentateuchal, historiographical, and prophetic books in fourth-century Jerusalem was an essential aspect of Judean socio-cultural memory and identity formation. By connecting the symbolic world of the Israelite Tabernacle and Temple and that of the Tyrian ship, as highlighted above, the text helps imagine a system in which Jerusalem ultimately receives and utilizes Tyre's precious cargo – thus Tyre is merely the middleman between the periphery and center. Indeed, throughout the Judean prophetic corpus, a world is imagined in which Jerusalem is the center of the universe and Yahweh is its emperor-king.<sup>48</sup> The splendor provided by Tyrian trade in the Iron Age and later – imagined as a ship in Ez 27 – its cedar and its fine fabrics, was on full display in Yahweh's past dwellings, as they are described in the Pentateuch and in the historiographical books of Kings and Chronicles. And, in the imagined world of the Judean texts, one day mighty Yahweh will return to Jerusalem and his splendid Temple to reign forever over the righteous of the earth, while the haughty merchant ship of Tyre will sink in the seas.

With this in mind, we can return to Ricoeur's thoughts on metaphor, which I mentioned at the outset. Making sense of a metaphor involves both the writer, who makes the metaphor in the first place, and the reader, who unpacks the metaphor with the aid of myriad positive and negative associations in context. So what »is-like« and »is-not« statements might the ancient Judean reader have applied to this metaphor? I close with a few suggestions:

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**46** See Fantalkin/Tal, Canonization.

**47** Cf. E. Ben Zvi, *The Yehudite Collection of Prophetic Books and Imperial Contexts*, forthcoming. Prof. Ben Zvi kindly shared a draft of this essay with me.

**48** E.g., Isa 2,2–4; 33,20–22; Mic 4,1–5. This imagery is also prevalent in Psalms (e.g., Ps 29; 93; 96). See, e.g., E. S. Gerstenberger, »World Dominion« in Yahweh Kingship Psalms, *HBT* 23 (2001), 192–210. Note, however, that these visions are balanced with visions of an ideal David-like ruler who will serve as Yahweh's king regent over the just and righteous people of the earth (e.g., Isa 11,1–10; Jer 23,5–6; Ez 37,24–28).

– Tyre is like Jerusalem, a beautiful city that once possessed divine-like splendor; but Tyre is not Zion, the mountain that will rise above all mountains, providing Torah and peace for all nations (cf. Isa 2,2–4//Mic 4,1–4).

– Tyre is like Moses' Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple, constructed of juniper and cedar, clothed in fine fabrics of blue and purple; but Tyre is not the future Temple, to which Yahweh will return and in which he will dwell forevermore (cf. Ez 40–43).<sup>49</sup>

– Tyre even seems to be like Yahweh, in that it distributes the cedar of Lebanon to the world and traverses the mighty seas (cf. Ez 28,2); but ultimately Tyre is not Yahweh, who thunders over the mighty waters, whose voice can shatter the cedars of Lebanon (cf. Ps 29).

Of course, this represents the view from only one historical perspective. The arrival of Alexander in 333 BCE and his conquest of Tyre surely inspired different takes on the dirge, as Judean literati continued reading the text generation after generation.

**Abstract:** This essay offers a close reading of the dirge in Ez 27, the metaphorical description of the famed and sinking Tyrian ship. The analysis pays close attention to the symbolic world of the text, situating it within the literary and historical milieu of fourth-century BCE Judah, when Jerusalemite literati began codifying their authoritative texts into the collections of »books« that eventually became the Hebrew Bible. The essay argues that the symbolic text of Ez 27 contributed to late Persian-period understandings of the past, present, and future cities of Tyre and Jerusalem within an imagined Yahwistic empire.

**Résumé:** Cette étude présente une lecture détaillée de la complainte d'Ez. 27, description métaphorique du célèbre navire de Tyr sombrant dans la mer. L'analyse

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<sup>49</sup> Pace Odell, Ezekiel, 346–347, who tries to downplay the »sacral connections«, stating, »All of these products were highly prized as building materials and were often described in imperial accounts of conquest«. This is true, and I have commented on some of the parallels above. But Judean readers of the text in antiquity would draw from what they knew best (cf. Geyer, Ezekiel 27, 118–119), namely, local traditions that informed their identity and contributed to their own historiographical and theological discourses. In my opinion, the allusions to priestly traditions would certainly inform their readings long before Assyrian annals, e.g., would ever cross their minds.

s'intéresse au monde symbolique de ce texte, situé dans le milieu littéraire et historique du 4<sup>ème</sup> siècle av. J.-C. en Juda; c'est alors que des lettrés de Jérusalem commencèrent à codifier des textes de référence en collections de »livres«, qui furent à l'origine de la Bible hébraïque. L'A. comprend le texte d'Ez. 27 comme une clé d'interprétation, à la période perse tardive, de la relation – passée, présente et à venir – entre les villes de Jérusalem et de Tyr dans le cadre d'un royaume yahviste imaginaire.

**Zusammenfassung:** Dieser Aufsatz bietet eine synchrone Lektüre der Totenklage von Ez 27, der metaphorischen Beschreibung des berühmten, sinkenden Tyroschiffes. Die Analyse legt Wert auf die symbolische Welt des Textes, der innerhalb des literarischen und historischen Milieus des 4. Jh. v. Chr. in Juda verortet wird, als Jerusalemer Schriftgelehrte begannen, ihre autoritativen Texte in Sammlungen von »Büchern« zu kodifizieren, die schließlich zur hebräischen Bibel führten. Der Vf. argumentiert, dass der symbolische Text von Ez 27 in der spätpersischen Periode zum Verständnis der vergangenen, gegenwärtigen und zukünftigen Städte Tyrus und Jerusalem innerhalb eines imaginierten jahwistischen Reiches beigetragen hat.