

YAHWEH'S "CRUEL SWORD":
THE MANIFESTATION OF PUNISHMENT AND THE
TRAUMA OF EXILE

by

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Abstract

Divine weapons, as powerful rhetorical symbols, play a vital role in religious ritual and wartime rhetoric throughout the ancient world, including the Hebrew Bible. In the context of ancient empires, divine weapons often served as powerful symbols of divinely sanctioned violence and functioned to empower the already powerful. In the Hebrew Bible, the sword serves as Yahweh's most frequently attested weapon. Though one might expect such references to be found in narratives of military victory over enemies, the majority of examples occur in the prophetic books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel amidst descriptions of the impending destruction of Jerusalem and subsequent exile.

This dissertation analyzes four different divine weapon motifs found in the prophetic books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel as part of the complex process of dealing with cultural trauma. The prophets drew upon their culture's own curse language and weapon motifs prevalent among the foreign invaders to portray Yahweh's sword as the embodiment of retribution for covenantal oath-breaking. These four motifs represent the most common divine weapon tropes found in biblical and Mesopotamian texts. Each motif contributes to the image of the king as the sole proprietor of divinely sanctioned violence through reference to the mythological status of divine weapons.

Comparing these biblical motifs with their counterparts in Iron Age Mesopotamian literature (both Assyrian and Babylonian) demonstrates how the biblical authors were familiar with imperial motifs and drew upon them to construct a counter-narrative of their suffering. The prophetic versions of these motifs affirm the imperial narrative connecting rulers with the divine realm, while at the same time changing what the narrative signifies.

In terms of theoretical framework, I employ Jeffery Alexander's sociological model of cultural trauma to demonstrate how divine weapons serve as powerful vehicles for the prophetic narrative because of their association with empire, level of abstraction, and emotionally laden character. This narrative removes the agency of the oppressor, while working to restore a group identity forged through an understanding of collective suffering. This serves to reframe much of the violent rhetoric of the prophets as part of the trauma process, while denying imperial claims to authoritative violence.

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Abbreviations

A	Oriental Institute, museum number
AB	Anchor Bible
<i>ABL</i>	<i>Assyrian and Babylonian Letters Belonging to the Kouyunjik Collections of the British Museum</i> . Edited by Robert F. Harper. 14 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1892–1914.
ADAIK	Abhandlungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Kairo
ADFU	Ausgrabungen der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft in Uruk-Warka
<i>AfO</i>	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
Alt	Wiseman, D.J. <i>The Alalakh Tablets</i> . OPBIAA 2. London: British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, 1953.
ANEM	Ancient Near East Monographs
ANESS	Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement Series
AnOr	Analecta Orientalia
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
<i>AoF</i>	<i>Altorientalische Forschungen</i>
ARM	Archives royales de Mari
AS	Assyriological Studies
<i>BaF</i>	<i>Baghdader Forschungen</i>
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BARIS	BAR (British Archaeological Reports) International Series
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibOr	Biblica et Orientalia
<i>BIWA</i>	Borger, Rykle. <i>Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals: Die Prismenklassen A, B, C = K, D, E, F, G, H, J und T sowie andere Inschriften</i> . Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996.
BM	British Museum
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CAD</i>	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> . Chicago, 1956-2010.
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CDLI	Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
CM	Cuneiform Monographs
CNRS	Centre national de la recherche scientifique
CTMMA	Corpus of Cuneiform Texts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art
<i>CurBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CUSAS	Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology

ErFor	Erträge der Forschung
ETCSL	<i>Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FM	Florilegium marianum
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HS	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
IOS	<i>Israel Oriental Studies</i>
JANES	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JNSL	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSSEA	<i>Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities</i>
JSSS	Journal of the Semitic Studies Supplement
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
K	British Museum in London (Kuyunjik), museum number
KAI	<i>Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften</i> . H. Donner and W. Röllig. 2nd edition. Wiesbaden, 1966-1969.
KTU	<i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> . Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Lorenz, and J. Sanmartin. AOAT 24/1. Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976.
LAPO	Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient
LAS	Leipziger Altorientalistische Studien
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
MAH	Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva, museum number
MARG	Mitteilungen für Anthropologie und Religionsgeschichte
MARI	<i>Mari: Annales de recherches interdisciplinaires</i>
MÄS	Münchener Ägyptologische Studien
MC	Mesopotamian Civilizations
MVAG	Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatisch-ägyptischen Gesellschaft
NABU	<i>Nouvelles assyriologiques breves et utilitaires</i>
NEASB	<i>Near East Archaeological Society Bulletin</i>
Ni	Archaeological Museum, Istanbul (Nippur), museum number
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OIS	Oriental Institute Seminars
OPBIAA	Occasional Publications of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara
Or	<i>Orientalia</i>
ORA	Oriental Religions in Antiquity
OTL	<i>Orientalia lovaniensia analecta</i>

PTMS	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series
<i>RA</i>	<i>Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie Orientale</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RIMA	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods
RIME	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods
RINAP	The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period
<i>RLA</i>	<i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie</i> . Edited by Erich Ebeling et al. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1928–
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAAA	Studies in the Art and Archaeology of Antiquity
SAACT	State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Series
SANER	Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations
<i>SB</i>	<i>Sources bibliques</i>
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLStBL	Society of Biblical Literature Studies in Biblical Literature
SHA	Studies in the History of Art
SHCANE	Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East
<i>StOr</i>	<i>Studia Orientalia</i>
StPohl	Studia Pohl
StSem	Studi semitici
<i>TA</i>	<i>Tel Aviv</i>
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by John T. Willis et al. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006.
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UCPCS	University of California Publications, Classical Studies
UET	Ur Excavations Texts
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
<i>VA</i>	<i>Varia Aegyptiaca</i>
VAB	Vorderasiatische Bibliothek
VAT	Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin, museum number
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WAW	Writings of the Ancient World
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
YOS	Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts
<i>ZA</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
<i>ZAR</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte</i>
<i>ZÄS</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde</i>

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Chapter One: Introduction

Weapons are powerful, polysemous symbolic objects that represent power, authority, violence, prestige, among many other meanings. As physical objects or literary representations, weapons are imbued by societies with cultural capital. Weapon symbolism is both potent and pervasive. This is as true for the modern world as it is for the ancient one, even though many symbolic weapons take the form of weapons no longer useful in modern warfare. As physical objects maces and swords, including the blunted sword of mercy, play a role in the coronation of the English monarch.¹ More recently, in 2016 the king of Bahrain, Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, gave the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, a “sword of victory.”² Not long afterwards, the United States Defense Department unveiled a new design for the medal given to troops serving in Iraq and Syria. On one side, the medal features a scorpion being stabbed with a sword or dagger held in a gauntleted hand.³ In rhetoric, weapons, especially the sword, play significant symbolic roles. In the growing tension between the United States and North Korea, both sides appeal to weapon imagery to signal military might and justified violence. North Korea’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has referred to its military might, including nuclear weapons, as “the sword of justice,”⁴ while Vice President Mike Pence

¹ For an example of unsuccessful weapon symbolism, one could consider Jeb Bush’s tweet of an image of a newly purchased handgun with the phrase “America.” See Hannah Henderson, “Jeb Bush’s gun tweet backfires,” BBC:news, 17 February 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2016-35594007>.

² “Bahrain’s king hands ‘sword of victory’ to Putin after Syria talks,” middleeasteye, 9 February 2016, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/sword-victory-presented-putin-bahraini-king-453188057>.

³ Travis J. Tritten, “New Iraq, Syria medal features sword stabbing a scorpion,” stripes, 31 March 2016, <https://www.stripes.com/news/us/new-iraq-syria-medal-features-sword-stabbing-a-scorpion-1.401866>.

⁴ Felix Kerner and Eugene Scott, “Tillerson, Russia’s foreign minister discuss Syria strike,” CNN, 8 April 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/04/08/politics/tillerson-lavrove-syria-strike/index.html>.

warned North Korea that “the shield stands guard and the sword stands ready.”⁵ In spite of the fact that nuclear armament is at the center of the conflict, the imagery is drawn from Bronze Age military technology.⁶

The weapons of the gods, as mythological concepts and physical objects, played a vital role in religious ritual and royal wartime rhetoric throughout the ancient world, including the Hebrew Bible.⁷ The phenomena of divine weaponry appear across a wide chronological and geographic range from Sargon of Akkad (2334-2279 BCE) to Ptolemy V of Egypt (196 BCE). Examples can be found in the cultures of the major political powers such as Egypt, Hatti, Assyria, and Babylon. In these contexts, divine weapons, as multivalent symbolic objects, often served as powerful symbols of divinely sanctioned violence and functioned to empower the already powerful. The weapon of a god could empower a king to conquer all opponents. Their fearsomeness alone was capable of setting enemies to flight and they could pursue oath breakers to their death. Consideration of literary representations of Yahweh's weapon(s) in scholarship has been dominated by broader discussions of the presence of the *Chaoskampf* myth, the heroic triumph of the divine forces of order over gods and monsters threatening that order. The problem with

⁵ Associated Press, “Mike Pence's warning to North Korea: ‘The sword stands ready,’” *latimes*, 19 April 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/politics/washington/la-na-essential-washington-updates-mike-pence-s-warning-to-north-korea-1492605388-htlstory.html>.

⁶ For other examples, one could include examples in which ISIS is represented by the sword. See Alison Meuse, “Syria's Minorities: Caught Between Sword of ISIS and Wrath of Assad,” NPR, 18 April 2015, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/04/17/400360836/syrias-minorities-caught-between-sword-of-isis-and-wrath-of-assad> and Marwan Hisham, “Living Under the Sword of ISIS in Syria,” *nytimes*, 14 January 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/15/opinion/living-under-the-sword-of-isis-in-syria.html>.

⁷ By weapon, I mean any object used by human combatants whose function during war is to inflict harm and damage. For this reason, I am excluding meteorological or natural phenomena such as lightning and wind, which could also be conceived of as a type of divine weapon. This limitation corresponds to the types of divine weapons that crossed the human-divine boundary in ancient Near Eastern literature.

this approach is that it omits the majority of such weapon references because they do not mention a typical conflict myth combatant (e.g. the sea, Leviathan, Rahab).⁸ Surprisingly, most references to Yahweh's sword, the weapon most frequently associated with him, occur in the exilic books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel and have no connection to rivals for legitimate, divine power. It is in descriptions of the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent exile of its people that Yahweh's sword appears again and again.

Since the majority of these references appear in the context of Judah's struggle and defeat by the Neo-Babylonian empire under Nebuchadnezzar II (604 – 562 BCE), I have focused on divine weapon motifs in exilic texts and their counterparts in Mesopotamian traditions. To this end, I have identified four dominant motifs: the bestowal of the divine weapon, the king as divine weapon, divine weapons in curse traditions, and the personification of the weapon. Having established broad thematic expectations concerning divine weapons, I will endeavor to demonstrate how biblical authors drew upon these common traditions and shaped them to fashion their own narrative concerning the traumatic events of the Exile. Given that divine weapons formed a part of the rhetoric of conquest, it should not be surprising to have similar imagery emerge in the testimony of the conquered. In this way, the sword of Yahweh becomes part of an attempt to address the religious crisis and the traumatic memory of exile.

Drawing upon recent sociological approaches to trauma, I argue that the authors of the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel harnessed the powerful weapon symbolism of empire in order to cast their own compelling and emotionally resonant trauma narrative.

⁸ Debra Scoggins Ballentine, *The Conflict Myth and the Biblical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 186-189.

In this narrative, Yahweh's sword is not only a symbol of Judah's punishment. The adaptation of imperial weapon motifs serves to reframe the narrative in ways that reduce the foreign king's agency and prestige, while magnifying Yahweh's relationship with the Judean community.

This study seeks to change the narrative by demonstrating that in the prophets Yahweh's sword is *not* a justification for war or a battle cry to inspire troops. Instead, it is the embodiment and attempt to cope with the traumatic experience that the exiles suffered at the hands of those wielding unchecked power. As the current Syrian refugee crisis has proved, it is vitally important to give a voice to those marginalized and disenfranchised by war. If that voice is not correctly understood as part of a process of working through trauma, however, then the message is in danger of being used to support the same horrific experiences that the exiles endured.

Chapter Two: History of Scholarship and Methodology

Telling effective stories is not easy. The difficulty lies not in telling the story, but in convincing everyone else to believe it.
-Yuval Noah Harari⁹

History of Scholarship

In the last two decades, the world has seen a proliferation of human migration due to natural disasters, internal conflict, racial and ideological differences, and war.¹⁰ As many are driven from their homes in search of safety, the figure of the refugee looms large in modern discourse. The humanity of those suffering from the atrocities of war and the devastation of natural disasters hurtle to the forefront of our consciousness. The ethics and moral dilemmas associated with war and war narratives are transhistorical and transcultural. There is no more prominent ethical and religious question than that posed by war and its aftermath, of which the crisis in Syria reminds us daily. In such an atmosphere, it is not a surprise that biblical scholars would find striking parallels within the pages of the Bible. The Babylonian exile stands as the most apt and direct parallel to the refugee crisis of the present. Scholars have investigated exilic texts such as Lamentations, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Second Isaiah, taking seriously the cries of anguish found within and providing new interpretations for challenging passages, especially those dealing with divine violence. To this end, many scholars have brought insights from trauma studies, refugee studies, disaster studies, and postcolonial theories to shed light

⁹ Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 31.

¹⁰ The UN's Refugee Agency found that the population of forcibly displaced people has increased from 33.9 million in 1997 to 65.6 million in 2016. See UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2016*, released 21 June 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/5943e8a34.pdf>.

upon biblical texts. Among these approaches, the field of trauma studies has been especially fruitful and prolific.

In addition, recent textual discoveries from the archive of the ancient *āl Yahūdu* “Judah town” and neighboring cities provide insights into the economic life in exile for forcibly displaced Judeans.¹¹ To begin, I will briefly discuss recent scholarship on the Babylonian exile. I will follow this with a short summary of the history of trauma studies, an explanation of the classic model of trauma theory, and a review of its use among biblical scholarship. Next I will draw attention to the shortcomings of the classic model and propose that J. Alexander’s cultural sociological theory of trauma provides a compelling framework to understand collective trauma and trauma’s representation in literature. I will highlight the work of biblical scholars engaging with a cultural sociological theory of trauma; then I will sketch how Alexander’s model might be applied to the Babylonian exile.

The Exile

The years following the fall of the Assyrian empire did not presage a great reversal of fortunes for the put-upon kingdoms of the Levant. With the decline of the empire, rulers may have entertained hopes for self-determination and rule without the burden of imperial tribute. Caught between the machinations of two great powers, Babylonia and Egypt, Judah’s path towards peaceful existence was alarmingly narrow and fraught with difficulties. It is perhaps understandable that the pro-Egyptian Jehoiakim (formerly Eliakim)—placed in power by Pharaoh Neco II on his way north to join the

¹¹ Laurie E. Pearce and Cornelia Wunsch, *Documents of Judean Exiles and West Semites In Babylonia In the Collection of David Sofer* (CUSAS 28; Bethesda, Maryland: CDL Press, 2014).

Assyrians against their enemies after killing Josiah in 609/608 BCE—saw in the heavy Babylonian losses to Neco II in 601 BCE an opportunity to rebel and withhold tribute. But the Babylonian weakness did not last and as Nebuchadnezzar II approached the city of Jerusalem to exact retribution, Jehoiakim mysteriously died. Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin takes the throne and surrenders to Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonian king took Jehoiachin as a hostage and placed Zedekiah (formerly Mattaniah), the uncle of Jehoiachin, on the throne in his place. This was the stage for the first of the Judean forced displacements at the hands of the Babylonians. While the exact number of people sent into exile is uncertain, the sources do agree that most of the elite class of Jerusalem endured forced migration to Babylonia in 597 BCE.¹²

The book of Ezekiel, at least in its narrative presentation, purports to cover the period between the first and second forced migrations. While Zedekiah initially swore loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar, it would not be long before he too decided to revolt, presumably his decision was based in part on assurances of military support he received from Egypt. In 594 BCE, Zedekiah hosted a gathering of local Babylonian vassals, such

¹² For the first exile: 2 Kgs 24:14-16 (10,000 + 7,000 + 1,000); Jer 52:28 (3,023); 2 Chr. For the second exile: 2 Kgs 25:11, 21 (everyone left in Jerusalem; Judah itself); Jer 52:29 (832); 2 Chr 36:20 (all those who survived the siege). For the third exile: Jer 52:30 (745). For a discussion of the various strategies and attempts at synchronizing these figures, see Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.*, trans. David Green (SBLStBL 3; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 81-90. For larger discussions of how large numbers are used in the Hebrew Bible and their veracity, see George E. Mendenhall, "The Census Lists of Numbers 1 and 26," *JBL* 77 (1958): 52-66; John William Wenham, "Large Numbers in the Old Testament," *TynBul* 18 (1967): 19-53; J. B. Payne, "The Validity of the Numbers in Chronicles," *BSac* 136 (1979): 109-128; Collin J. Humphreys, "The Number of People in the Exodus from Egypt: Decoding Mathematically the Very Large Numbers in Numbers I and XXVI," *VT* 48 (1998): 196-213; David Merling, "Large Numbers at the Time of the Exodus," *NEASB* 44 (1999): 15-27; R. Heinzerling, "On the Interpretation of the Census List by C. J. Humphreys and G. E. Mendenhall," *VT* 50 (2000): 250-252; Gary A. Rendsburg, "An Additional Note to Two Recent Articles on the Number of People in the Exodus from Egypt and Large Numbers in Numbers I and XXVI," *VT* 51 (2001): 392-396; David M. Fouts, "The Incredible Numbers of the Hebrew Kings," in *Giving the Sense: Understanding and Using Old Testament Historical Texts*, eds. David M. Howard, Jr. and Michael A. Grisanti (Leicester: Apollos, 2003), 283-299.

as Ammon, Moab, and Tyre to discuss an anti-Babylonian coalition (Jer 27-28). Sometime probably between 591 and 589 BCE, Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon (2 Kgs 24:20; 25:1ff), perhaps encouraged by the recent victory of Psamtik II over Nubia.¹³ The revolt was short lived, as Nebuchadnezzar II again set out with his armies and besieged the city in 589 BCE. He set up camp at Riblah more than 175 miles from Jerusalem. The siege lasted two years until the city's wall was breached in 587 BCE. After some months, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple and took more of the population of Jerusalem to Babylonia to settle areas devastated by past Assyrian conflicts. Then Nebuchadnezzar installed Gedaliah as ruler of the people before he returned to Babylonia. Unlike the Assyrian policy, the Babylonians did not resettle conquered areas, but left them desolate, taking their populations to work the land of Babylonia. D. Vanderhooft, based on archaeological examinations, has echoed L. E. Stager's characterization of the Babylonian program for foreign populations as a "scorched earth policy."¹⁴ The biblical account as exemplified by 2 Chr 36:20-21 paints a picture of complete devastation and subsequent empty land. This notion of the empty land has been countered by scholarship, drawing upon archaeology to demonstrate that certain areas were depopulated, others were left alone.¹⁵ Certainly, from the elite point of view and those who underwent forced migration, the "true" Israel was the one in exile. Albertz notes that the focus on the (nearly) empty land goes hand-in-hand with the

¹³ Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 54.

¹⁴ David Stephen Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 111.

¹⁵ Hans M. Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Archaeology of Judah during the "Exilic" Period* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996), 47-55.

explanation of defeat and exile as God's judgment upon the entire people in 2 Kings.¹⁶ A large group of survivors in the land would contradict that God's punishment was directed at the whole land. As we will see in J. Alexander's cultural sociological view of trauma, this kind of rhetoric would have played a role in the trauma narrative of the exiles. While the entire land was certainly not empty, one should not underestimate the devastating effects of foreign invasion, conquest, and the loss of leadership and skilled classes.

We have very little information on what day to day life would have been like for the Judean forced migrants in ethnic enclaves like Tel Abib and *āl-Yahūdu*. Before the recent discoveries for *āl-Yahūdu*, scholars had to rely upon the later Murashu texts, which date to the Achaemenid period, specifically from the reigns of Artaxerxes I and Darius II (464 – 404 BCE). D. Smith-Christopher has noted the shortcomings of using that archive to understand the early exilic period as well as making extrapolations on a group's inner life based on their not being slaves and their economic standing.¹⁷ The new texts from *āl-Yahūdu* and surrounding areas, which cover the period from 570 – 477 BCE, expand what we can say and are thus invaluable.¹⁸ With these texts, L. E. Pearce and C. Wunsch paint a picture of economic success and rising social standing for certain exilic individuals and families.¹⁹ This portrayal is based on two primary factors, the status of the exiles as settlers on royal land who were protected from being slaves, and their

¹⁶ Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 11.

¹⁷ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 66-68.

¹⁸ Pearce and Wunsch, *Documents of Judean*, 4.

¹⁹ Pearce and Wunsch, *Documents of Judean Exiles*, 5-6; Cornelia Wunsch, "Glimpses on the Lives of Deportees in Rural Babylonia," in *Arameans, Chaldeans and Arabs in Mesopotamia and Palestine*, eds. A. Berlejung and M. P. Streck (LAS 3; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 254-257; Laurie E. Pearce, "How Bad Was the Babylonian Exile?" *BAR* 42/5 (2016): 53-54.

involvement in economic transactions that suggest a certain level of prosperity and status.²⁰ That many Judean families succeeded and even flourished economically in exile is well established by these texts.

Although Pearce and Wunsch make no claims about how the exiles would have viewed their own experience, one should be cautious in taking economic success to be indicative of a more benign or even pleasant exilic experience. First, only two of the documents date from the first generation of exiles.²¹ Secondly, economic prosperity does not guarantee a positive experience, especially when one cannot return to one's home or land of birth. We do not need to succumb to the notion that only those who are in chains or impoverished are suffering and not free. Albertz explains that in spite of their economic position, the hardships that the exiles faced were "primarily political, psychological, and religious."²² The field of refugee studies provides insights on the devastating impact separation from one's land and home can have for a people. Additionally, for the first wave of forced migrants from the elite class, their new status would be diminished if not completely reversed from what it was in their homeland. What does it mean to be a priest of Yahweh when one is divorced from the temple, let alone when the temple is destroyed? Importantly, we do not have to assume that things were difficult in exile. We have Ps 89, Ps 137, and Ezekiel's predictions that at the news of Jerusalem's defeat "every heart shall sink" (Ezek 21:12). We must recognize that

²⁰ Pearce and Wunsch, *Documents of Judean Exiles*, 5.

²¹ Pearce and Wunsch, *Documents of Judean Exiles*, 4.

²² Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 102.

physical safety, if indeed they felt to have such, and even prosperity are not a sufficient index for happiness among refugees and exiles.

While the veracity of exilic suffering is not a necessary component in the cultural sociological model of trauma, I think a good case can be made for the traumatic nature of the events surrounding the exile. Many have commented at length on the hardships the exiled Judeans would have endured.²³ A brief summary would include: enduring the siege of Jerusalem; death, torture, and rape of family members at the hands of foreign soldiers, a long forced-march to Babylonia and the deaths this would cause (most likely among the sick, weak, and elderly); taunts by enemies; the destruction of the temple, the center of spiritual and cultural life; separation from the land; separation from family. In recent years, there has been a surge of studies examining the impact of these horrific events on Judeans through social scientific perspectives. The most notable among these are trauma and disaster studies, psychology, and refugee studies. The most productive of such interpretive frameworks has been trauma studies. Because of this, I will examine the classic model for trauma theory.

²³ Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 65-68; David G. Garber, "Trauma, History, and Survival in Ezekiel 1-24," (PhD diss., Emory University, 2005), 24-34; Brad E. Kelle, "Dealing with the Trauma of Defeat: The Rhetoric of the Devastation and Rejuvenation of Nature in Ezekiel," *JBL* 128 (2009): 483; Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 2011), 15; Ruth Poser, *Das Ezechielbuch als Trauma-Literatur* (Boston: Brill, 2012), 158-248; Brad E. Kelle, *Ezekiel: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (NBBC; Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2013), 29-31; David M. Carr, *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 69-72; Ruth Poser, "No Words: The Book of Ezekiel as Trauma Literature and a Response to Exile," in *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, eds. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 28-29.

The Early History of Trauma Studies

I will give an extremely brief overview on the history of trauma studies, hitting only the high points, since there are many works that cover the history of the discipline in greater detail.²⁴ The term trauma comes from the Greek *trauma* “wound,” which could refer to human injury, individual or corporate, i.e. of an army, or damage done to inanimate objects, such as ships.²⁵ E.-M. Becker reviews ancient examples that push the notion of *trauma* “wound” beyond the literal, such as the wounding due to wine (Od. 21.293), inner wounding in the LXX of Song 5:7-8, and wounding caused by a demon (Acts 19:16), which blurs the line between physical and psychic.²⁶ Interestingly, she notes how Diodorus Siculus employs the verbal form of the root, *titrōskō*, as passive participle to *psychē* “soul” (Hist. 17.112).²⁷ She cautions that the understanding and treatment of trauma as an internal psychic wound derives from modern psychoanalytic perspectives.²⁸

In the LXX of the book of Ezekiel, the substantive adjective form *traumatias* “wounded” appears twenty-five times. In the majority (23) of such cases *traumatias*

²⁴ Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 1-76; Dieder Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*, trans. Rachel Gomme (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

²⁵ LSJ, s.v. *trauma*, 1811.

²⁶ Eve-Marie Becker, “‘Trauma Studies’ and Exegesis: Challenges, Limits and Prospects,” in *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond*, eds. Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Doehorn, and Else Kragelund Holt (Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica 2; Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 17-18.

²⁷ Becker, “‘Trauma Studies’ and Exegesis,” 18.

²⁸ Becker, “‘Trauma Studies’ and Exegesis,” 18.

serves to translate the Hebrew *ḥālāl* “slain.”²⁹ In one case, the Hebrew phrase *ḥallê-ḥereb* “slain by the sword” is translated not with *traumatias* but with *trauma machairas* “wound of the sword.” Although originally referring to physical wounds, the term came to take on the nuance of a wound caused to one’s psyche due to an extreme and overwhelming event. As Luckhurst recounts, the term “trauma” appeared in English first as a medical term in the seventeenth century.³⁰ But the study of trauma as we think of it more or less today took place in the clash between human bodies and the “technological modernity” of the nineteenth century. This took place largely in the medical-legal realms as modern society grappled with notions of legal liability in cases of Railway Spine and Nervous Shock.³¹ In this early history, debates that will continue to be vital and productive for trauma studies first appeared: the source of trauma (physical or psychological) and the extent of trauma’s reach (i.e. how close to the traumatic event does one need to be to be considered traumatized).³²

²⁹ See Ezek 6:4, 7, 13; 11:6; 21:19 (2x), 34; 26:15; 28:8; 30:11; 31:17, 18; 32:20, 21, 22 (2x), 24, 25, 30 (2x), 31, 32. Only twice is *traumatias* used to translate a different term. In Ezek 32:26, *traumatias* translates the Pual from the root *ḥll*. While in Ezek 32:29, *traumatias* seems to take the place of *ʾārēlīm* “the uncircumcised.”

³⁰ Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, 2.

³¹ Railway Spine, a condition outlined by the surgeon John Eric Erichsen, is characterized by symptoms (often delayed), such as nervousness, dizziness, fear, and pain. Erichsen thought these symptoms were brought about by jostling and jerking of a person’s spine as they traveled by railroad. Nervous Shock was an attempt by Herbert Page to explain the same set of railway related symptoms, but Page located the primary problem in the psychological damage instead of physical damage. For more on these early debates, see Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, 22-24 and Nadine Metzger, “Railway Spine, Shell Shock and Psychological Trauma: The Limits of Retrospective Analysis,” in *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond*, eds. Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Doehorn, and Else Kragelund (Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica 2; Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 46-48.

³² Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, 22.

The more modern conception of trauma was deeply influenced by early psychology through the works of Charot, Freud, Janet, and Breuer.³³ Freud's theories of traumatic hysteria and Janet's model of disassociation were especially influential.³⁴ Their work focused primarily on trauma in connection with female hysteria. It was not until the multitude of shellshock cases in the First World War that trauma was extended to male patients. As was the case with the 19th century legal battles surrounding Railway Spine, there was tension between those who saw trauma as a legitimate condition and those who rejected the possibility. For afflicted soldiers there were those, usually military commanders, who accused the soldiers of malingering. Yet, as J. Herman notes, the history of trauma studies is often a forgotten one and very little progress was made between World War I and World War II.³⁵ The shellshock of WWI became "battle fatigue" in WWII. The same tension between treatment and disbelief among those in charge of soldiers continued. The most impactful event of the war, from a trauma studies perspective, was the Holocaust. This catastrophic event would become the iconic example of trauma in the modern west. The experiences of the Holocaust survivors would become central in setting the parameters of how traumatic reactions work. Such experiences, in combination with the repercussions of the Vietnam War, led to the creation of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and its eventual inclusion in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) III in 1980. The inclusion in the DSM provided trauma studies with a wider societal reach and the inclusion of

³³ Leys, *Trauma*, 3-4.

³⁴ Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, 42-48.

³⁵ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 26.

PTSD in the DSM legitimized the phenomenon. This wider cultural impact sets the stage for Caruth and Felman, whose work on trauma and its literary representation would become the classic trauma model.

The Classic Model

While the history described above did much to shape modern conceptions of trauma, it was the work of C. Caruth, S. Felman, Dori Laub, and others that were foundational in shaping the classic model of trauma theory. Even R. Leys, a critic of Caruth, admits that Caruth's ideas have "been so persuasive to many that they have pretty much come to stand for trauma theory as such."³⁶ Caruth's theory is supported by van der Kolk's work on neuro-biology and the nature of traumatic memory.³⁷ Caruth incorporates and builds upon Felman and Laub's focus on the importance and paradoxical impossibility of giving testimony.³⁸ Given the classic model's dependence upon psychoanalysis, it is not surprising that it focuses primarily on how trauma impacts the individual, though in recent years V. Volkan has sought to understand trauma through large-group psychology.³⁹

³⁶ Ruth Leys, "Trauma and the Turn to Affect," in *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel: Essays*, eds. Ewald Mengel and Michela Borzaga (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), 3.

³⁷ Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 158-182; Bessel A. van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

³⁸ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 224.

³⁹ For representative examples, see Vamik D. Volkan, *Psychoanalysis, International Relations, and Diplomacy: A Sourcebook on Large-Group Psychology* (London: Karnac, 2014) and Vamik D. Volkan, *Immigrants and Refugees: Trauma, Perennial Mourning, Prejudice, and Border Psychology* (London: Karnac, 2017).

In the classic model, a traumatic event is “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena.”⁴⁰ A crucial aspect to trauma in this model is the unexpected nature of the traumatic event. Herman characterizes this as a breakdown of the fight or flight response, in which no action is possible.⁴¹ The initial response is one out of time, since the individual does not anticipate it and act in time, and this disconnection from time returns in the belated, repetitious nature of trauma. This defensive response is an inherent reaction to the trauma because of the event’s “unexpectedness or horror.”⁴²

Due to the nature of the mental breach, the episode does not exist in normal or narrative memory. Instead, it is preserved in a literal and nonsymbolic form. For this reason, the traumatic memory is “absolutely true to the event” and not subject to the changes and manipulations to which normal memories are exposed.⁴³ Caruth explains: “In trauma, that is, the outside has gone inside without any mediation.”⁴⁴ This statement is important for two reasons. First, it emphasizes the event itself as the source of trauma, as it is something outside of a person that results in the traumatic reaction. This can also

⁴⁰ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 11.

⁴¹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 47.

⁴² Cathy Caruth, “II. Recapturing the Past: Introduction,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 153.

⁴³ Cathy Caruth, “I. Trauma and Experience: Introduction,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 5.

⁴⁴ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 59.

be seen in Caruth's use of an overwhelming "event" as part of her usual trauma definition.⁴⁵

Second, the statement speaks to the classic model's view of traumatic memory. Unlike normal memory, traumatic memory cannot be accessed directly, but only through dreams and flashbacks, which proceed unbidden causing a person to relive the event repeatedly. Caruth highlights the incomprehensibility of the traumatic event as the cause for this, "And it is this lack of direct experience that, paradoxically, becomes the basis of the repetition of the nightmare."⁴⁶ For this reason, trauma is unrepresentable and exists as a void or gap in knowledge and experience. This is part of the paradoxical nature of trauma in which "the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it."⁴⁷ Because the traumatic event is not stored in normal narrative memory, the identification of an event as traumatic is belated and intrusive repetitions through dreams and flashbacks often come only later.

Drawing on the work of P. Janet, the only treatment for such traumatic memory is to work through it by using narration to re-create the traumatic event in a way that can be incorporated into normal memory.⁴⁸ Herman argues for such a transformation to be truly effective it must combine a factual narrative and an exploration of emotion associated with it.⁴⁹ While Caruth admits that integration is necessary for recovery, she laments that

⁴⁵ Caruth, "I. Trauma and Experience: Introduction," 4; Caruth, "II. Recapturing the Past: Introduction," 153; Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 58.

⁴⁶ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 62.

⁴⁷ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 91-92.

⁴⁸ van der Kolk and van der Hart, "The Intrusive Past," 175-176.

⁴⁹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 177-178.

the transition to narrative memory sacrifices the precision and force. Additionally, once the traumatic memory has been transformed, it becomes susceptible to normal processes of memory, such as distortion, elision, and forgetting.⁵⁰

One final aspect of the classic model of trauma is its transferability and transgenerational potential. Implicated in this notion of trauma is the survival of the individual, which she explains is more than the return to safety from danger, but “the endless inherent necessity of repetition.”⁵¹ The survivor is intimately connected with the suffering and death that they witness; they are compelled to tell about it (Caruth, 102, 105). Caruth comments that both history and trauma are “never simply one’s own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s traumas.”⁵² In this way, trauma is conceived of almost like a pathogen that infects and spreads among people, moving from generation to generation and from victim to witness.

Biblical Scholarship and the Classic Trauma Model

E. Boase and C. Frechette, in their recent collection of papers from the SBL program unit “Biblical Literature and the Hermeneutics of Trauma,” divide trauma approaches into three dominant categories: psychological, literary, and sociological.⁵³ As we saw in our discussion above, since the classic model builds upon the work of psychologists and psychiatrists, the distinction between psychological and literary

⁵⁰ Caruth, “II. Recapturing the Past: Introduction,” 153-154.

⁵¹ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 63.

⁵² Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 24.

⁵³ Christopher G. Frechette and Elizabeth Boase, “Defining ‘Trauma’ as a Useful Lens for Biblical Interpretation,” in *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, eds. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 3-12.

approaches to trauma is often blurred. Additionally, as biblical scholars are primarily engaged in working with ancient texts, at some level most approaches will have a literary dimension. Of the stated approaches, the psychological and literary have received the most attention in biblical studies. Unsurprisingly, the classic trauma model is the most frequently used trauma approach employed by biblical scholars. This is not to say that biblical scholars have not attempted to move beyond the classic model and incorporate other psychological approaches, but that the classic model has played a foundational role in shaping biblical approaches to trauma. Interest in the impact of trauma upon biblical authors, audiences, and texts grew out of investigations into the psychological states of various prophets, especially as a way to explain the strange behavior of Ezekiel. Biblical scholars often draw upon trauma models to explain and explore morally problematic passages, such as those depicting God's violence, misogynistic attitudes (especially to the personified city as woman), and xenophobia (most often in the oracles against the nations). Since there are several excellent and in-depth surveys of biblical scholarship applying the classic trauma model, I will briefly cover seminal developments and treatments involving the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.⁵⁴ After a brief introduction, I will examine such biblical approaches to the books of Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and finally more wide-ranging treatments involving one or both prophetic books.⁵⁵

As we saw above, trauma studies itself developed out of psychological studies of human suffering and the dramatic impact of disastrous events upon the human psyche. As

⁵⁴ For works published up to 2014, see David G. Garber, "Trauma Theory and Biblical Studies," *CurBR* 14 (2015): 24-44. For works published between 2014 and 2016, see Frechette and Boase, "Defining 'Trauma' as a Useful Lens for Biblical Interpretation," 1-23.

⁵⁵ Naturally, the book of Lamentations has also been a productive area for the integration of biblical and trauma studies. For an overview, see Garber, "Trauma Theory and Biblical Studies," 29-31.

early as 1877, A. Klostermann argued that Ezekiel suffered from catalepsy.⁵⁶ E. Broome diagnosed Ezekiel as a paranoid schizophrenic, suffering from catatonia, “narcissistic-masochistic conflict, with attendant phantasies of castration and unconscious sexual regression,” and delusions of grandeur in 1946.⁵⁷ In his commentary on the book of Ezekiel, B. Lang situates Ezekiel’s pathological condition in reaction to emotional impact of the exile and the death of his wife.⁵⁸ D. Halperin, building upon Broome’s work, identifies Ezekiel as suffering from a loathing of female sexuality due to childhood experiences of sexual trauma.⁵⁹ But for Halperin Ezekiel’s trauma is a childhood one and not the trauma resulting from the Babylonian exile. More recently, D. Daschke argues that Ezekiel suffered from PTSD.⁶⁰ Independently, D. Smith-Christopher also thought many of the strange features in the figure of Ezekiel, e.g. his sign acts could be understood through the lens of PTSD and Refugee studies.⁶¹ This type of approach has been roundly criticized for attempting to diagnose an individual across time and culture without the usual recourse to a formal psychological assessment.⁶² Furthermore, many

⁵⁶ August Klostermann, “Ezechiel: Ein Beitrag zu besserer Würdigung seiner Person und seiner Schrift,” *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 50 (1877): 391-439.

⁵⁷ Edwin C. Broome, “Ezekiel’s Abnormal Personality,” *JBL* 65 (1946): 291-292.

⁵⁸ Bernhard Lang, *Ezechiel: Der Prophet und das Buch* (EdF 153; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981), 73-74.

⁵⁹ David J. Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel: Text and Psychology* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 218.

⁶⁰ Dereck M. Daschke, “Desolate among Them: Loss, Fantasy, and Recovery in the Book of Ezekiel,” *American Imago* 56 (1999): 119-120.

⁶¹ Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 89-96.

⁶² Ned H. Cassem, “Ezekiel’s Psychotic Personality: Reservations on the Use of the Couch for Biblical Personalities,” in *The Word in the World: Essays in honor of Frederick L. Moriarty, S.J.*, eds. R. Clifford and G. MacRae (Cambridge, MA: Weston College Press, 1973), 59-70; Stephen Garfinkel, “Another Model for Ezekiel’s Abnormalities,” *JANES* 19 (1989): 39-50; Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 154-160; Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*,

have noted the inherent difficulties in trying to treat the literary figure of the prophet as a direct representation of the real prophet/author's psyche, which itself assumes the text is not the work of multiple authors and/or editors. This criticism has been successful for good reason and there have been few subsequent attempts to diagnose any prophet.

One of the most influential attempts to use social sciences to investigate biblical texts is D. Smith-Christopher's *A Biblical Theology of Exile*. In this work, Smith-Christopher sought to take seriously the traumatic suffering of exile and he argued that the interpretation of exilic and post-exilic writings would benefit from sociological studies of trauma, postcolonial criticism and refugee studies. His use of trauma theory predominantly draws upon PTSD research, which he employs in order to elucidate the experiences of those who endured the Babylonian invasion, siege, and exile.⁶³ He defends the real experience of exile reflected in poetic texts by arguing that stereotypical language, such as lament or curse language, does not mean that the suffering was not real (contra D. Hillers).⁶⁴ Based on the work of A. Memmi and H. L. Nelson, he argues that "colonialist presumptions can be taken up in colonized cultures even as they try to resist those dominant cultures."⁶⁵ Smith-Christopher's work did much to propel trauma studies into the consciousness of academic biblical studies.

83-89; David G. Garber, "Traumatizing Ezekiel, the Exilic Prophet," in *Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures 2 (From Genesis to Apocalyptic Vision)*, eds. J. Harold Ellens and Wayne G. Rollins (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 216-220.

⁶³ Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 89-96.

⁶⁴ Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 103-104. For a contrasting view, see Delbert R. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets* (BibOr 16; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964), 35.

⁶⁵ Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 106.

The Classic Trauma Model and The Book of Ezekiel

D. Garber was one of the first to apply the classic trauma model to the Bible, using the first part of the book of Ezekiel (chapters 1-24) as his study.⁶⁶ Additionally, his 2005 Emory dissertation is one of the first extended treatments of the book of Ezekiel through the rubric of trauma. Unlike previous studies that focused on the historical person of the prophet/author, Garber is interested in a literary dimension of the work and its reflection of the communities experiences in exile. For Garber, the book of Ezekiel is a work of unintentional survival literature. Garber does not think the author(s) of Ezekiel intended to produce a work of survival literature or even created the text in order to help the community survive.⁶⁷ In this way, he draws upon the work of Caruth, Felman, and van der Kolk to argue that the book of Ezekiel bears the hallmarks of trauma: the incomprehensibility of the traumatic event, the insufficiency of language, the intrusive and repetitive nature of flashbacks, and the imperative to narrate the events. Additionally, he uses the work of Erikson to explore the collective dimensions of trauma, in which Ezekiel's individual suffering becomes emblematic for the suffering of the community.⁶⁸

B. Kelle's 2009 article explores Ezekiel's use of the common prophetic motif of the destruction of nature through a combination of three approaches: priestly theology, ecological concerns, and trauma studies.⁶⁹ Yahweh's protection of his holy name (and thereby his reputation) serves to explain the harsh language directed at the Judean people

⁶⁶ Garber, "Traumatizing Ezekiel, the Exilic Prophet," 221-230; David G. Garber, "Trauma, History, and Survival in Ezekiel 1-24," (PhD diss., Emory University, 2005), 42-65, 207-214.

⁶⁷ Garber, "Traumatizing Ezekiel, the Exilic Prophet," 229.

⁶⁸ Garber, "Traumatizing Ezekiel, the Exilic Prophet," 224-225.

⁶⁹ Kelle, "Dealing with the Trauma of Defeat," 469-490.

and their land. At the same time, Yahweh's concern for his name justifies the messages of hope, as the status of his people as exiles impugns his name. Drawing upon the work of Caruth and Herman among others, Kelle argues that trauma resists narrativization, but intrudes unconsciously.⁷⁰ He explains, paradoxically, that the way to treat trauma is to incorporate it into narrative. Ezekiel's use of the destruction of nature motif helps to "emplot" the story of Judah's trauma, a necessary step for trauma recovery. Kelle's article is significant for its focus on the relation of a prophetic motif and the trauma of the Babylonian exile.

N. Bowen's 2010 commentary on the book of Ezekiel is the first of such commentaries to make use of trauma studies as one of the principle approaches to the text.⁷¹ Although she does not reference Caruth, her reliance upon the classic trauma model is made clear through her use of the works of van der Kolk and Herman to explain the effect of trauma on memory, the recursiveness and intrusiveness of traumatic memories, and necessity of creating a trauma narrative for healing. Drawing on cognitive approaches, Bowen explains that trauma can threaten and even destroy a person's assumptive world or core beliefs.⁷² The focus on trauma's impact on an individual's basic assumptions was taken up earlier (though drawing from different sources) by W. Morrow and further developed (again, referencing different sources) by C. Frechette.⁷³ Bowen

⁷⁰ Kelle, "Dealing with the Trauma of Defeat," 483-484.

⁷¹ Nancy R. Bowen, *Ezekiel* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), xv-xix.

⁷² Bowen, *Ezekiel*, xvii.

⁷³ William Morrow, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Vicarious Atonement in the Second Isaiah," in *Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures 1 (From Freud to Kohut)*, eds. J. Harold Ellens and Wayne G. Rollins (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 169; Christopher G. Frechette, "Destroying the Internalized Perpetrator: A Healing Function of the Violent Language against the Enemies in the Psalms," in *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical*

considers some of Ezekiel's symbolic acts, such as his muteness, as well as the fragmented language of the text to be reflections of his own traumatic experience: "Ezekiel's garbled words and tortured syntax have the characteristics of a trauma victim. A reconstructed narrative of trauma may look more like a puzzle with many pieces still missing."⁷⁴ At the same time Bowen characterizes Ezekiel's sign acts as re-enactments of trauma.⁷⁵

R. Poser's monograph, a reworking of her 2011 dissertation, on Ezekiel as trauma literature is invaluable and thorough. Like Garber, she eschews attempts to diagnose or characterize the historical figure of the prophet and focuses, instead, on the text as literature and the literary figure of the prophet. Unlike Garber, Poser employs R. Granofsky's theory of the trauma novel to explore the book of Ezekiel as fiction designed to explore the suffering of exiles and aid in recovery through a process of (re)symbolization throughout the stages of the trauma response: fragmentation, regression, and reunification.⁷⁶ This three stage approach is similar to psychiatrist R. Lifton's model of desymbolization, stasis, resymbolization, as Granofsky himself notes.⁷⁷ Importantly, Poser makes use of Granofsky's notion of symbolization, in which elements

Studies and Beyond, eds. Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dochhorn, and Else Kragelund (Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 75-76; Frechette and Boase, "Defining 'Trauma' as a Useful Lens for Biblical Interpretation," 5; Christopher G. Frechette, "Two Biblical Motifs of Divine Violence as Resources for Meaning-Making in Engaging Self-Blame and Rage after Traumatization," *Pastoral Psychology* 66 (2017): 244.

⁷⁴ Bowen, *Ezekiel*, 123.

⁷⁵ Bowen, *Ezekiel*, 23.

⁷⁶ Ronald Granofsky, *The Trauma Novel: Contemporary Symbolic Depictions of Collective Disaster* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 107-149; and Poser, *Das Ezechielbuch als Trauma-Literatur*, 105.

⁷⁷ Granofsky, *The Trauma Novel*, 112.

of trauma are mediated symbolically in order to create distance and reduce negative emotional impact.⁷⁸ The use of symbolic imagery also aims to construct meaning from traumatic events. Granofsky's work provides a compelling framework through which to understand fictional treatments of trauma.⁷⁹ Significantly, Poser argues that Yahweh himself is characterized as traumatized, especially in his emotional response to infidelity in Ezekiel 16.⁸⁰

Recently, Kelle has come out with a commentary on the book of Ezekiel, which expands upon the ideas he explored in his 2009 article.⁸¹ Again, he draws upon Caruth's model to understand the trauma of exile.⁸² Kelle highlights the importance of cultural conceptions in interpreting Ezekiel's "emplotment" of traumatic events. In this case, he sees the priestly tradition as providing the framework for Ezekiel's trauma narrative.⁸³ He argues that the variety of expressions used by Ezekiel reflect the difficulty of verbalizing trauma, "the book of Ezekiel contains multiple impressionistic images with metaphors

⁷⁸ Granofsky, *The Trauma Novel*, 6.

⁷⁹ While I find Granofsky's approach appealing, I am wary of using a theory so closely connected with modern (post-1945) fiction novels, especially when there are many resources on symbolization (see O'Connor's use of N. Freedman below) without this issue and Lifton's three stage model is so similar. Granofsky locates the type of trauma novel under discussion as arising from the creation of atomic weapons and advances in communication, which led to an atmosphere of anxiety based on a sense that the world was no longer as orderly as before. In fact, Granofsky asserts that "It is my contention that the type of writing found in the trauma novel is inconceivable before 1945." See Granofsky, *The Trauma Novel*, 11. Though Granofsky's understanding of symbolization, of which Poser makes use, is not reliant upon contemporary novels (instead he draws on anthropologist Dan Sperber), it seems to me his common symbolic themes (perverse eating, witnessing, dissolution of four elements, etc) do derive from contemporary fiction novels.

⁸⁰ Poser, *Das Ezechielbuch als Trauma-Literatur*, 409.

⁸¹ Kelle, *Ezekiel*.

⁸² Kelle, *Ezekiel*, 30.

⁸³ Kelle, *Ezekiel*, 50.

and symbols, which give expression to experiences that remain somewhat elusive.”⁸⁴

Kelle presents Ezekiel’s theology as a theology of debate that challenges the pillars of royal ideology of his time (e.g. the inviolability of the temple and Davidic monarchy).⁸⁵

Boase and Frechette’s collection of SBL papers from the Trauma program unit, contain two articles that address the book of Ezekiel. First is an article by Poser, in which she makes use of both psychological and literary trauma models to investigate the literary figure of Ezekiel and literary hallmarks of trauma in the text.⁸⁶ In her view, the elevated language, complex narrative structure, and use of leitmotifs conveys the inability of language to represent the incomprehensible.⁸⁷ She identifies repetition/gaps and more abstract (re)symbolization to be two prominent literary signs of trauma.⁸⁸ Notably, she observes that “trauma is not an inherent element of an event or experience as such; not everyone exposed to a potentially traumatizing event develops traumatic symptoms or syndromes.”⁸⁹ She goes on to explain, however, those who are exposed to war and sexual violence, as well as those who feel personally endangered are more likely to be effected by trauma. In the second article, M. Odell compellingly explores the reference to male images (*šalmê zākār*) and child sacrifice in Ezek 16:15-22 as a fragment of memory calling back to Assyrian royal images (*šalmu*) and the threat of death from treaty

⁸⁴ Kelle, *Ezekiel*, 51.

⁸⁵ Kelle, *Ezekiel*, 51-52.

⁸⁶ Poser, “No Words: The Book of Ezekiel as Trauma Literature and a Response to Exile,” 27-48.

⁸⁷ Poser, “No Words,” 35.

⁸⁸ Poser, “No Words,” 39-42.

⁸⁹ Poser, “No Words,” 29.

infidelity during Jerusalem's subjugation by the Assyrians in the eighth century BCE.⁹⁰

In this, she employs Caruth's notions of trauma and Felman's concept of memory fragments, as well as Granofsky's emphasis on the importance of symbolic expression.

The Classic Trauma Model and The Book of Jeremiah

Turning to the book of Jeremiah, K. O'Connor has contributed much to the investigation of this book in dialogue with disaster studies and the classic model of trauma. In her 2011 *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise*, O'Connor considers the book to be an example of survival literature whose confused and chaotic organization⁹¹ functions as both a reflection of the unspeakability of trauma as well as a tool to lead the audience into becoming meaning-makers themselves.⁹² Like many of the scholars working on Ezekiel, O'Connor depends upon van der Kolk's view of traumatic memory, Caruth's notion of the incomprehensibility of trauma, and Herman's focus on narrativizing as part of the recovery process.⁹³ She considers the violent imagery, especially that of God, to be a way

⁹⁰ Margaret S. Odell, "Fragments of Traumatic Memory: *Šalmê Zākār* and Child Sacrifice in Ezekiel 16:15-22," in *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, eds. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 107-124.

⁹¹ O'Connor notes that most scholars have explained the current state of the book of Jeremiah by appealing to text critical analysis. Though she briefly summarizes some of these approaches, she finds them ultimately unsatisfying, since it is difficult to be certain of anything more than the book in its present form came about over a long period from many different hands. Instead, she employs the classic trauma model to explore what the text "might have meant for its early readers." See O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 30 and also 125-128. E. K. Holt presents a view that seeks to address textual criticism and trauma studies (from the sociological model). Holt's article taken up below. See Else Kragelund Holt, "Daughter Zion: Trauma, Cultural Memory and Gender in OT Poetics," in *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond*, eds. Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Doehorn, and Else Kragelund Holt (Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica 2; Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 162-176.

⁹² O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 125-128.

⁹³ O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 2-4, 68.

to raise “violent destruction into worlds of poetry and symbol where horrible pain and loss can be seen, taken in, and acknowledged without overwhelming its victims anew.”⁹⁴ Not only that, but God’s violence demonstrates that he remains alive and the laws of cause and effect are still operative. Interestingly, she argues that Jeremiah’s war poems (4:5-6:30; 8:16-17; 10:17-22; 13:20-27), although framed as anticipatory by the narrative, cannot be easily dated and they “remember, express, and reframe the nation’s collective, violent past” for readers of the book.⁹⁵

In a later article, O’Connor explores some of the ways trauma and disaster studies can offer insights to biblical studies, by exploring the Book of Jeremiah through Norbert Freedman’s Desymbolisation-Symbolisation paradigm for coping with trauma.⁹⁶ In this framework, desymbolisation represents a state in which “experience cannot be accessed, and mental connections are destroyed, so that people lack meaning and a sense of control.”⁹⁷ In contrast, symbolisation is the regular state in which people are able to narrativize or otherwise represent their experiences. Freedman’s theory outlines three stages for moving between Symbolisation and desymbolisation: Incipient Symbol-Making, Discursive Symbol-Making, and Dynamic Symbol-Making.⁹⁸ Incipient Symbol-

⁹⁴ O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, x.

⁹⁵ O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, 48.

⁹⁶ Kathleen M. O’Connor, “How Trauma Studies Can Contribute to Old Testament Studies,” in *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond*, eds. Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dochhorn, and Else Kragelund Holt (Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 210-222.

⁹⁷ O’Connor, “How Trauma Studies Can Contribute to Old Testament Studies,” 213. For Freedman’s view of symbolization, see Norbert Freedman and Jared Russell, “Symbolization and Analytic Discourse,” *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought* 26 (2003): 39-87. See, also, R. Lasky’s excellent summary of Freedman’s theory, Richard Lasky, “Introduction,” in *Symbolization and Desymbolization: Essays in Honor of Norbert Freedman*, ed. Richard Lasky (New York: Karnac, 2002), 18-23.

⁹⁸ O’Connor, “How Trauma Studies Can Contribute to Old Testament Studies,” 213.

Making is the earliest of the stages. In this stage, language is more allusive in order to avoid re-traumatization. In the Discursive Symbol-making stage, the traumatized individual begins to be able to place what happened into a coherent narrative. Finally, in the Dynamic Symbol-making stage involves the integration of unconscious or previously unknown elements. These stages can overlap and an individual does not always progress from one to the next, as going back a stage is common. She considers the primary purpose of the book of Jeremiah “from the vantage point of trauma and disaster theories is to symbolize the disaster.”⁹⁹ At the same time, O’Connor does question the validity of using Freedman’s paradigm for a biblical text, since it was designed with the individual in mind.

In a recent article, C. Frechette uses the metaphor of “the controlled substance” to model how certain problematic texts can be used by pastors and care-givers to help trauma survivors in recovery.¹⁰⁰ Like a controlled substance, the violent imagery in parts of the Hebrew Bible can provide “limited and provisional capacity to correct distorted core beliefs likely to have arisen in the wake of traumatic events.”¹⁰¹ To this end, he draws on Caruth, Herman, van der Kolk, and even Alexander and applies the insights of trauma theory on the book of Jeremiah as a test case. Jeremiah’s focus on the motif of God’s judgment of Judah is part of a process of restoring the relationship between God and his people. Simultaneously, it also transfers responsibility for the trauma from human

⁹⁹ O’Connor, “How Trauma Studies Can Contribute to Old Testament Studies,” 214.

¹⁰⁰ Christopher G. Frechette, “The Old Testament as Controlled Substance: How Insights from Trauma Studies Reveal Healing Capacities in Potentially Harmful Texts,” *Interpretation* 69 (2015): 20-34.

¹⁰¹ Frechette, “The Old Testament as Controlled Substance,” 29.

agents to the divine, though the punishment of Babylon reinforces divine empathy for Judah.

L. Stulman approaches the prose portions of Jeremiah to demonstrate that they serve as trauma narratives with as much potential for healing as Jeremiah's poetry.¹⁰² Stulman uses Duhm and Mowinckel's chronological division of the poetry (before 587 BCE) and the prose (after 587 BCE) of Jeremiah to consider the prose portions of Jeremiah to be a trauma narrative "at a greater historical distance."¹⁰³ This serves as a master narrative making sense and creating moral order out of the horrific events of military invasion and exile.

The Classic Trauma Model and Works Covering Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel

Many scholars do not limit themselves to one book or prophetic figure when discussing the impact of the Babylonian exile and the insights that trauma and related theories can provide. L. Stulman and H. Kim examine all the Hebrew prophets as trauma literature that also functions as art for the sake of "community survival."¹⁰⁴ Their view of trauma hews closely to the classic model. Trauma is "unspeakable" and it "diminishes agency, numbs the senses, and destroys one's sense of identity; it reduces the world to silence."¹⁰⁵ They also stress the importance of artful narrativization, in this case, that of

¹⁰² Louis Stulman, "Reflections on the Prose Sermons in the Book of Jeremiah: Duhm's and Mowinckel's Contributions to Contemporary Trauma Readings," in *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, eds. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 125-139.

¹⁰³ Stulman, "Reflections on the Prose Sermons in the Book of Jeremiah," 132.

¹⁰⁴ Louis Stulman and Hyun Chul Paul Kim, *You Are My People: An Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁵ Stulman and Kim, *You Are My People*, 1, 12.

written prophecy to create meaning out of the chaos of trauma and to help victims cope. They see in prophecy the return of the voice that trauma has taken away. They depict the book of Jeremiah as a cacophony of voices providing various representations of terror and suffering that the exiles experienced, while also holding out a tempered hope for the future. Like O'Connor's treatment of Jeremiah, they understand the book of Ezekiel as both disaster and survivor literature. Interestingly, they draw attention to Israel and Judah's relation to trauma as deeply connected to empire, characterizing the prophetic voices as the "legacy of the losers."¹⁰⁶ This legacy seeks to challenge imperial monopolies over the construction of reality.¹⁰⁷

Three articles in B. Kelle, F. Ames, and J. Wright's volume, *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts* address the work of both Jeremiah and Ezekiel within the context of trauma studies. In his article, Smith-Christopher questions how we select texts to analyze through a trauma framework, explaining how the situation is more complicated than isolating just the exilic texts and what they say about suffering, since other texts might also bear the impact of trauma without making it clear.¹⁰⁸ As an example, he mentions James Scott's work on hidden

¹⁰⁶ Stulman and Kim, *You Are My People*, 7.

¹⁰⁷ Stulman and Kim, *You Are My People*, 8. For similar approaches to dealing with the relationship between Judah and the Realpolitik of the Neo-Assyrian empire in Isaiah, see Peter Machinist, "Ah, Assyria...? (Isaiah 10:5ff.): Isaiah's Assyrian Polemic Revisited," in *Not Only History: Proceedings of the Conference in Honor of Mario Liverani*, eds. Gilda Bartoloni and Maria Giovanna Biga (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 204-206 and Theodore J. Lewis, "'You Have Heard What the Kings of Assyria Have Done' Disarmament Passages vis-à-vis Assyrian Rhetoric of Intimidation," in *Isaiah's Vision of Peace in Biblical and Modern International Relations: Swords into Plowshares*, eds. Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 90.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "Reading War and Trauma: Suggestions towards a Social-Psychological Exegesis of Exile and War in Biblical Texts," in *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, eds. Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritel Ames, and Jacob L. Wright (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011), 253-274.

transcripts as “intentional misrepresentation as a tactic of the subordinated” in connection to “incorrect” details concerning the Babylonian rulers in the book of Daniel.¹⁰⁹ He also raises the question of the validity of applying insights from psychology based in modern western societies to ancient non-western cultures.¹¹⁰ Though he urges caution, he highlights the fact that we all bring basic assumptions (psychological among them) to the text. Concerning the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, he draws upon feminist studies to discuss the notion of the “imperial gaze” or the “gaze of the nations” and its association with shame and humiliation among the nations (Jer 24:9; 51:51; Ezek 5:14-15; 22:4) and the multitude of eyes featured in the description of the cherubim.¹¹¹

D. Carr highlights the striking absence of a narrative of exilic life in the prophets and historical books, with small exceptions of early years by Jeremiah and Ezekiel.¹¹² He considers this gap to be a result of the trauma of exile, drawing on Caruth’s notion of the incomprehensibility of trauma. He identifies trauma through absence and thus considers the primary trauma not to be the destruction of the temple or the end of Judean self-rule, because they are mentioned in some fashion, but instead it is living in diaspora that is truly traumatic.¹¹³ Noting that guilt and shame are common reactions to trauma, he finds

¹⁰⁹ Smith-Christopher, “Reading War and Trauma,” 257. For J. C. Scott’s work, see James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), esp. 136-182.

¹¹⁰ Smith-Christopher, “Reading War and Trauma,” 268-269.

¹¹¹ Smith-Christopher, “Reading War and Trauma,” 260-263.

¹¹² David M. Carr, “Reading into the Gap: Refractions of Trauma in Israelite Prophecy,” in *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, eds. Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritche Ames, and Jacob L. Wright (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011), 295-308.

¹¹³ Though it should be mentioned that he does not address the *āl-Yahūdu* material, presumably because the major edition was published after submitted his manuscript. Carr, “Reading into the Gap,” 297-298. Carr’s more recent book, however, does make mention of the recently published legal documents from *āl-Yahūdu*. See Carr, *Holy Resilience*, 91.

in Judah's judgment among Jeremiah and Ezekiel an attempt to forestall feelings of shame (focusing on oneself as the problem) with guilt (a focus on poor decisions from which one can learn).¹¹⁴ Drawing from refugee studies, Carr finds the "othering" of outside groups, that are cultivated in refugee camps to help explain some unique features to Israelite prophecy, especially the themes of communal guilt and hostility to foreign groups.¹¹⁵

In the third article, Garber aims to bridge the gap between modern trauma theory and ancient conceptions or reactions to trauma (emic perspective) through an exploration of ancient trauma vocabulary, specifically the use of the roots *hll* I-II in the books of Lamentations, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.¹¹⁶ He concludes that each book uses *hll* in accordance with its own themes and agenda; Jeremiah and Ezekiel use *hll* I to "reinforce the culpability of the community in the trauma they experienced" and employ *hll* II against foreign nations.¹¹⁷ Thus, the treatment of other nations in the prophets should be examined through the lens of a traumatized community seeking some accountability for their suffering and not as a case of xenophobia.¹¹⁸

In his 2014 book, *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins*, Carr applies insights from the classic trauma model to the texts of ancient Israel, nascent Judaism, and

¹¹⁴ Carr, "Reading into the Gap," 299-300.

¹¹⁵ Carr, "Reading into the Gap," 302-304.

¹¹⁶ David G. Garber, "A Vocabulary of Trauma in the Exilic Writings," in *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, eds. Brad E. Kelle, Frank Rithel Ames, and Jacob L. Wright (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011), 309-322.

¹¹⁷ Garber, "A Vocabulary of Trauma in the Exilic Writings," 318.

¹¹⁸ Garber, "A Vocabulary of Trauma in the Exilic Writings," 320.

the early church to show how crisis and suffering shaped their identities.¹¹⁹ He expands the purview of trauma studies beyond the exilic prophets, demonstrating how the Abraham and Moses stories, though dependent upon older sources, were shaped by the trauma of exile. In fact, Carr argues that “[v]irtually every book shows the impact of the Babylonian exile.”¹²⁰ Carr identifies the development of monotheism to be an indirect reflection of trauma in Israel’s worldview and writings due in part to a disenchanting view of the world.¹²¹ He considers Deuteronomy, initiating Josiah’s reforms, to represent the traumatic impact of Assyrian domination on Judah through the book’s adoption of the Assyrian *adê* in its form.¹²² Concerning the book of Ezekiel, he characterizes it as thematically focusing on self-blame, despair, and doubt. Like other scholars, Carr sees in Ezekiel’s sign acts a symbol of “the broader trauma that Babylonian exiles suffered.”¹²³ In the book of Jeremiah, Carr sees the figure of the prophet and his own suffering as a way for a traumatized community to envision and put into a narrative the stories of their own suffering in a safe way. Additionally, of use to any biblical scholar interested in trauma studies is Carr’s appendix, which provides a succinct history of trauma studies, including scholarship critical of the Classic trauma model along with benefits and difficulties in applying trauma theory to ancient cultures.

¹¹⁹ Carr, *Holy Resilience*.

¹²⁰ Carr, *Holy Resilience*, 76.

¹²¹ Carr, *Holy Resilience*, 56.

¹²² Carr, *Holy Resilience*, 59-60. Though I take up the topic of the *adê* agreement in more detail in chapter five, it is worth mentioning here that the term *adê* is both part oath, part treaty, and yet not fully one or the other. More accurately, according to J. Lauinger, the *adê* is an obligation or duty elevated to the status of divine destiny. For thorough explanation of this view, see Jacob Lauinger, “The Neo-Assyrian *adê*: Treaty, Oath, or Something Else?” *ZAR* 19 (2013): 99-115.

¹²³ Carr, *Holy Resilience*, 78.

T. M. Lemos analyses the anger of Yahweh in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel as an aspect of post-traumatic stress that results in what she calls a “theology of distance,” in which Yahweh’s wrath eliminates the possibility for sympathy for the plight of exilic Judeans.¹²⁴ After demonstrating that anger is one of the most common symptoms of PTSD especially after some time has passed, she examines cases of divine anger in Ezekiel 16 and 23 as a way to create distance from powerful emotions and cut off sympathy. In this way, the prophet takes on the role of the deity projecting his anger outward.¹²⁵ This anger serves to move one from helplessness to increased agency. In this role, Lemos highlights anger’s status as a “mobilizing emotion.”¹²⁶ She contrasts Ezekiel’s treatment of horror and blame, with that found in Lamentations, in which Israelites direct their feelings toward themselves, thus eliciting sympathy. In the book of Jeremiah, Lemos finds both types of response. Jeremiah 2-3 falls into the same anger-blame category as Ezekiel, while Jeremiah 8-9 contains a more sympathetic response like Lamentations. Like O’Connor, Lemos sees in Jeremiah’s chaotic response to trauma, the resistance to incorporation into narrative typical of the classic trauma model.¹²⁷ Based on the anger’s increased frequency over time, she charts the chronological relation of the three books as proceeding from helplessness and sorrow (Lamentations), to both sorrow and anger (Jeremiah), to mostly anger (Ezekiel).

¹²⁴ T. M. Lemos, “The Apotheosis of Rage: Divine Anger and the Psychology of Israelite Trauma,” *BibInt* 23 (2015): 103.

¹²⁵ Lemos, “The Apotheosis of Rage,” 114.

¹²⁶ Lemos, “The Apotheosis of Rage,” 107.

¹²⁷ Lemos, “The Apotheosis of Rage,” 116.

Conclusion

Most of the biblical scholars seeking to apply the insights of trauma studies to the Hebrew Bible make use of the classic model of trauma. In one way or another they appeal to trauma's unique relation to memory in which the traumatic events are simultaneously etched directly onto the brain, but not accessible to conscious thought. This results in gaps, absences, and a resistance to incorporation into normal memory in the form of narrative. The individual's experience of the traumatic event, then, takes the form of flashbacks and dreams, which intrude upon a person's life. This view of traumatic memory popularized by Caruth depends heavily on the work of Herman and van der Kolk. Caruth considers the incorporation of the traumatic memory into narrative, causes the "loss, precisely, of the event's essential incomprehensibility, the force of its *affront to understand*" (italics original).¹²⁸ Most biblical scholars, however, depart from Caruth's view here, preferring along with Herman and van der Kolk to stress the beneficial aspects of narrativizing the trauma for recovery.¹²⁹ While scholars draw attention to notions of communal trauma, usually citing Erikson, as standing behind the production of texts such as the books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Lamentations, and Second Isaiah, their understanding of trauma's pathology (its impact and common reactions) primarily come from psychological studies of individual trauma. This same process is at

¹²⁸ Caruth, "II. Recapturing the Past: Introduction," 154.

¹²⁹ A notable counter-example is D. Janzen in his exploration of the traumatic underpinnings of the Deuteronomistic History, who describes the relation of traumatic memory and narrative as follows: "The traces of trauma are not themselves truly narrative, as we shall see, but rather eruptions into the master narrative of the History that have not been integrated into this narrative, just as trauma is not integrated into personal narrative yet intrudes uncontrollably in the lives of survivors and their descendants." See David Janzen, *The Violent Gift: Trauma's Subversion of the Deuteronomistic History's Narrative* (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 34.

work in Caruth's work, as she compares Freud's reluctance to speak of his own trauma in his flight from Vienna before the Nazis and the trauma at the heart of the Jewish community, in its murdering of Moses, as explained in his *Moses and Monotheism*.¹³⁰

Criticism of the Classic Model

In spite of the classic model's ubiquity, there is a growing body of criticism in recent years.¹³¹ While it is not necessary to reproduce every criticism leveled at the classic theory, it is worth addressing the most salient critiques that undermine the core assumptions of the model: the inherent pathological nature of trauma, the existence of traumatic memory as distinct from normal memory, and the transmissibility of trauma. This seems particularly necessary since the classic model is the most commonly used trauma model in biblical studies.¹³² Beginning with the inherent pathological nature of trauma, which in the classic model always results in dissociation, many have noted that there is no consensus concerning this in the psychological community.¹³³ Certainly, a dissociative reaction is possible and even common, but not an automatic reaction to

¹³⁰ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 20-21.

¹³¹ Leys, *Trauma*, 229-297; Richard J. McNally, *Remembering Trauma* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003); Richard J. McNally, "Debunking Myths about Trauma and Memory," *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 50 (2005): 817-821; Susannah Radstone, "Trauma Theory: Contexts, Politics, Ethics" *Paragraph* 30 (2007): 9-29; Michelle Balaev, *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 3-40; Michelle Balaev, "Literary Trauma Theory Reconsidered," in *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*, ed. Michelle Balaev (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1-14; Amir Khadem, "Cultural Trauma as a Social Construct: 9/11 Fiction and the Epistemology of Communal Pain," *Intertexts* 18 (2014): 181-197; Joshua Pederson, "Speak, Trauma: Toward a Revised Understanding of Literary Trauma Theory," *Narrative* 22 (2014): 333-353.

¹³² Janzen, *The Violent Gift*; Ruth Poser, *Das Ezechielbuch als Trauma-Literatur* (Boston: Brill, 2012); Carr, *Holy Resilience*; Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette eds, *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016).

¹³³ Leys, *Trauma*, 200-228; Radstone, "Trauma Theory," 17-19.

trauma. S. Radstone cites British researchers at the Tavistock Clinic who explain that the traumatic nature of any memory does not reside in the event itself, but in the meaning given to a memory afterwards.¹³⁴ Additionally, there is a cultural element involved in assigning trauma. Based on the work of several psychologists and psychiatrists, M. Balaev argues that although a traumatic event is undoubtedly disruptive for a person's sense of self and reality, reactions to trauma differ based on social and cultural factors.¹³⁵ She explains: "The experience of suffering, no matter how private the experience, is situated in relation to the context of a culture that ascribes different value to the experience and to the individual's feelings about the experience."¹³⁶ This is similar to J. Alexander's criticism of the psychoanalytic view of trauma that suffers from what he calls the "naturalistic fallacy," which assumes that trauma resulting from an event is an inevitable and automatic response.¹³⁷ Additionally, the classic view, by emphasizing the inherent pathological nature of trauma excludes other reactions, such as those that highlight adaptation and resiliency.¹³⁸ For Balaev, responses to trauma can lead to new knowledge that "may create a perspective of the world that views the self and/or world as sick, diseased, balanced, redeemed, resilient, transcendent, or mystical."¹³⁹

¹³⁴ Radstone, "Trauma Theory," 17.

¹³⁵ Balaev, *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels*, 10.

¹³⁶ Balaev, *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels*, 17.

¹³⁷ Jeffery C. Alexander, "Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, eds. Jeffery C. Alexander et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 8-10.

¹³⁸ Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, 210-211.

¹³⁹ Balaev, *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels*, 37.

Another central claim under criticism is that the memory of a traumatic event is not registered in “normal” memory, but exists in pristine condition, available only through repeating flashbacks. This, of course, is central to the classic model’s assertion that trauma is “incomprehensible.”¹⁴⁰ R. J. McNally, a psychologist at Harvard, has reviewed many studies on traumatic memory and challenges van der Kolk’s and Herman’s view of traumatic memory and by extension Caruth’s.¹⁴¹ McNally offers several rebuttals to common assertions concerning the relationship between trauma and memory. He argues that it is not a special kind of memory nor stored in a special way. He explains that “[n]o memory, traumatic or otherwise, is ever frozen and immune from the vicissitudes of time.”¹⁴² Flashbacks and nightmares of traumatic events do not operate independently from normal memory and do not function as a literal reproductions.¹⁴³ Nor do traumatic events interfere with memory according to McNally. Quite the contrary, they sharpen events and make them more memorable. He explains that this works because the “[r]elease of stress hormones during aversive or traumatic events strengthens memory for the traumatizing experience. Intense arousal enhances memory for the core features of the arousing event; it does not attenuate it.”¹⁴⁴ Additionally, McNally highlights the fact that the belief that one has been traumatized produces responses identical to those suffering from PTSD.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 58.

¹⁴¹ McNally, *Remembering Trauma*, 125-228.

¹⁴² McNally, “Debunking Myths about Trauma and Memory,” 818.

¹⁴³ McNally, “Debunking Myths about Trauma and Memory,” 818.

¹⁴⁴ McNally, *Remembering Trauma*, 125; McNally, “Debunking Myths about Trauma and Memory,” 818.

¹⁴⁵ McNally, “Debunking Myths about Trauma and Memory,” 819.

Similarly, Balaev rejects any theory of memory that treats memory as a kind of “storehouse.” Instead, she draws upon the work of several psychologists and psychiatrists to argue for a view of memory that is far more plastic and in which traumatic memories are susceptible to the same changes and influences as “normal” memory.¹⁴⁶ In this way, traumatic memory, like all memory, is accessible and subject to interpretation through cultural and individual frameworks. She suggests that “multiple factors of an individual's mode of functioning in the present influence how a person relates to a traumatic event, further suggesting that the individual can alter the initial meaning of the experience.”¹⁴⁷ The silence so characteristic of the response to trauma in the classic model, in this view by contrast, is not an inevitable symbol of traumatic memory, but a rhetorical tool with many different uses based on context. For example, silence can be used to create intentional ambiguity or suspense. McNally also argues that there are many factors that can explain silence without recourse to traumatic amnesia, such as nondisclosure, everyday forgetfulness, and intentional avoidance.¹⁴⁸

LaCapra also notes the shortcomings of the classic model's view that traumatic memory is unrepresentable. He explains two central issues: 1) the emphasis on unrepresentability shifts attention away from what can be represented; 2) it often results in homogenized, generalized accounts prone to hyperbole and sacralization.¹⁴⁹ He further

¹⁴⁶ Balaev, *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels*, 30-36.

¹⁴⁷ Balaev, *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels*, 34.

¹⁴⁸ McNally, *Remembering Trauma*, 212; McNally, “Debunking Myths about Trauma and Memory,” 820-821.

¹⁴⁹ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 90-92. For a similar critique of the classic model's penchant for mystifying horrific events, see Khadem, “Cultural Trauma as a Social Construct,” 188.

expands that the reason for silence concerning trauma may be due to the fear that “one might, of course, suggest other reasons for a survivor's reluctance to speak, for example, the sense that one will not be understood, the pain and feeling of shame attached to the event, the sense that one's symptoms are memorials to the dead, and the belief that, by working through those symptoms, one may somehow be betraying those who did not survive a shared experience.”¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, Balaev highlights the contradiction that an unknowable and unspeakable experience can be passed on to witnesses or future generations.¹⁵¹

This brings us to the final point of criticism, that of the transmissibility of trauma. Scholars have noted that the conception of trauma as unrepresentable is contradictory with the claim that trauma can be passed on to others, since transmitting the trauma through speech or writing renders it no longer “unspeakable.”¹⁵² Not only is this assumption contradictory, but at its worst it devalues the experience of the victim by making everyone exposed to it, regardless of time and space, into victims (including the perpetrators). In this way, all of history becomes traumatic and everyone traumatized. While LaCapra concedes that a certain amount of transference, an affective implication in the object of one's study, is unavoidable, he emphasizes that this is not the same as experiencing specific historical losses.¹⁵³ These criticisms do not negate the positive aspects of the classic theory, which include reflections on the nature of human pain and

¹⁵⁰ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 185 n. 3.

¹⁵¹ Balaev, *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels*, 12 and 16.

¹⁵² Leys, “Trauma and the Turn to Affect,” 5; Balaev, *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels*, 15-16.

¹⁵³ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 64.

suffering and the difficulties for language to convey these experiences. Additionally, it gives scholars tools to address the continuing importance of a traumatic event to a group of people associated with it.

The Cultural Sociological Model of Trauma

Although trauma has been historically associated with the fields of medicine and psychology, J. Alexander and the sociologists of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences (CASBS) at Stanford University have pioneered a cultural sociological interpretation of trauma. As part of the wider field of cultural sociology, this model is inspired by the later works of E. Durkheim and M. Weber's cultural ideas. Alexander and R. Gao explain the contrast between cultural sociology and the sociology of culture, which employs statistical and experimental models to understand cultural phenomena as reflections of structures and mechanisms.¹⁵⁴ In contrast, cultural sociology is focused upon the meaning created by the interweaving of external cultural phenomena and their representations. The methods of cultural sociology are primarily semiotic and interpretive.

The cultural model of trauma is concerned with cultural trauma in contrast to individual trauma. Alexander and E. B. Breese see individual trauma as the domain of psychologists and psychiatrists, while cultural trauma is a sociological phenomenon.¹⁵⁵ It

¹⁵⁴ Jeffery C. Alexander and Rui Gao, "Remembrance of Things Past. Cultural Trauma, the 'Nanking Massacre,' and Chinese Identity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cultural Sociology* eds. Jeffery C. Alexander, Ronald N. Jacobs, and Philip Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 584.

¹⁵⁵ Jeffery C. Alexander and Elizabeth Butler Breese, "Introduction: On Social Suffering and Its Cultural Construction," in *Narrating Trauma: On the Impact of Collective Suffering*, eds. Ron Eyerman, Jeffery C. Alexander, and Elizabeth Butler Breese (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2011), xii-xiii.

builds upon and advances K. Erikson's distinction between collective and individual trauma as well as his notion that trauma could create communities.¹⁵⁶ One of the advantages of this view is its focus on cultural trauma, how it is created and maintained. In contrast with the classic model that holds that certain events are inherently traumatic, Alexander's cultural sociological model of trauma takes a constructivist approach. In this view trauma is not an innate attribute of an event but is a social construct. Alexander observes that

First and foremost, we maintain that events do not, in and of themselves, create collective trauma. Events are not inherently traumatic. Trauma is a socially mediated attribution. The attribution may be made in real time; as an event unfolds; it may also be made before the event occurs, as an adumbration, or after the event has concluded, as a post-hoc reconstruction. Sometimes, in fact, events that are deeply traumatizing may not actually have occurred at all; such imagined events, however, can be as traumatizing as events that have actually occurred.¹⁵⁷

It is worth emphasizing, again, that what is in view here is a collective trauma and not necessarily individual trauma.¹⁵⁸ For collective trauma, what is important is less of what happened, but how what happened was perceived and interpreted. Alexander illustrates this by pointing to events that contained massive, widespread suffering and death, but which never reached the level of cultural trauma, such as the firebombing of Dresden or the Nanking Massacre.¹⁵⁹ Another example, but one not mentioned by Alexander, can be found in the migration of Ethiopian Jews to Israel during the late 1970s and 1980s.

¹⁵⁶ Kai Erikson, *A New Species of Trouble: The Human Experience of Modern Disasters* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 231-232.

¹⁵⁷ Alexander, "Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 8.

¹⁵⁸ Though this distinction is made difficult by Alexander's habit of referring to cultural trauma in a shorthand fashion as just "trauma."

¹⁵⁹ Alexander and Breese, "Introduction," xiv-xvii.

Though they faced many hardships and individual traumas, such as humiliations, rape, torture, imprisonment, and high death tolls (approximately one fifth of the 20,000 migrants died), the narrative of their journey is one of suffering, but suffering overcome by strength and heroism.¹⁶⁰ They saw their migration to Israel as divinely mandated and understood it through the cultural framework of the Exodus from Egypt. G. BenEzer explains that “the meaning of the journey served as an ideological protective layer during their traumatic passage.”¹⁶¹ At the other extreme, he isolates Hitler’s narrative of a vast Jewish conspiracy as an example of a trauma built upon an event that did not occur.

While an extreme version of this view might argue that any event, no matter how banal, could become traumatic, R. Eyerman and N. Smelser argue that certain events, such as war, famine, and disease have conditions that lend themselves to the cultural trauma process.¹⁶² Smelser observes that “A society emerging from a major war, suffering from diminished economic resources, experiencing rampant internal conflict, or having shaky social solidarity is more trauma prone than others that are more solid in these respects.”¹⁶³ Significantly, he goes on to explain that “The exposure of migrating groups to the cultures of the host societies into which they migrate” furnishes more

¹⁶⁰ Gadi BenEzer, “Trauma, Culture, and Myth: Narratives of the Ethiopian Jewish Exodus,” in *Understanding Trauma: Integrating Biological, Clinical, and Cultural Perspectives*, eds. Laurence J. Kirmayer, Robert Lemelson, and Mark Barad (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 383, 387-389.

¹⁶¹ BenEzer, “Trauma, Culture, and Myth,” 395.

¹⁶² Ron Eyerman, “Cultural Trauma: Emotion and Narration,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Cultural Sociology* eds. Jeffery C. Alexander, Ronald N. Jacobs, and Philip Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 570; and Neil J. Smelser, “Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma,” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, eds. Jeffery C. Alexander et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 37.

¹⁶³ Smelser, “Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma,” 36.

examples of cultural trauma.¹⁶⁴ That said, Smelser makes clear that even in events prone to traumatic interpretation, this is not an automatic response and still requires cultural work to be categorized as a trauma by a society.

One important aspect to this model is that cultural or collective trauma is not just individual psychological trauma writ large.¹⁶⁵ Alexander observes: “Trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity.”¹⁶⁶ Smelser echoes this when he argues that the methods that establish and sustain trauma differ dramatically between psychological and cultural traumas. He further differentiates the two by noting that “[t]he mechanisms associated with psychological trauma are the intrapsychic dynamics of defense, adaptation, coping, and working through; the mechanisms at the cultural level are mainly those of social agents and contending groups.”¹⁶⁷ He further explains that mass coping is not the same as collective coping, which requires “collective memory work.”¹⁶⁸ This model does not deny the physicality and reality of individual suffering. In fact, Alexander explains: “The cultural construction of collective trauma is fueled by individual experiences of pain and suffering, but it is the threat to collective rather than individual identity that defines the suffering at stake.”¹⁶⁹ The focus is upon how events

¹⁶⁴ Smelser, “Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma,” 38.

¹⁶⁵ Erikson makes this distinction, though his view of what constitutes collective trauma hews closer to the psychological understanding than it does to the cultural sociology model, since he still views the collective trauma as a result of an external source, such as disastrous event or series of events. See Erikson, *A New Species*, 233.

¹⁶⁶ Alexander, “Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” 10.

¹⁶⁷ Smelser, “Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma,” 39.

¹⁶⁸ Smelser, “Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma,” 48.

¹⁶⁹ Jeffery C. Alexander, “Introduction,” in *Trauma: A Social Theory* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2012), 2.

become encoded as dangerous to the group's social identity through the mediation of a process of trauma creation.

The Trauma Process

In direct contrast to the classic model, in the cultural-sociological model of trauma, cultural trauma is eminently representable, for otherwise there would be no collective or social trauma. For Alexander, an event becomes traumatic through what he terms the "trauma process." This involves carrier groups, who are cultural agents putting forth claims about the injurious and destructive nature of the event. Carrier groups can be composed of any collective subgroup, such as various elites, religious authorities, and the marginalized. Often successful carrier groups are cultural specialists with recourse to positions of authority within the society, such as priests.¹⁷⁰ These claims of trauma, which Alexander later calls "trauma drama," function as a new master narrative, whose successful adoption by the group depends on a variety of factors including cultural influence of carrier groups, performative power, and audience demographics. Alexander notes that the claims concerning the traumatic nature of an event are often contentious, with different groups seeking to have their own interpretation become the classic one. In this regard, Alexander highlights four vital questions that a compelling trauma narrative must answer: What happened? Who were its victims? Who were its perpetrators? What can be done?¹⁷¹ For the cultural sociological model, the answers to these questions can be

¹⁷⁰ Smelser, "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma," 38.

¹⁷¹ Alexander and Breese, "Introduction," xxvii.

based on imagined or real phenomena.¹⁷² The carrier group itself usually serves as the first audience for the trauma claim and if the message is successful, the carrier group extends its reach to the greater society.

In addition to these basic questions, the success of the trauma process depends on the persuasiveness of the trauma narrative. To this end, a strong negative emotional association with the event is vital. Smelser considers it one of the key elements necessary for an event to be qualified as traumatic. He goes on to assert that “if a potentially traumatizing event cannot be endowed with negative affect (e.g., a national tragedy, a national shame, a national catastrophe), then it cannot qualify as being traumatic.”¹⁷³ Not only is strong emotional resonance necessary for the creation of a trauma narrative, the fading of strong emotional reactions is a part of the routinization of trauma spelling its effective end.¹⁷⁴ Emotional connections are made by carrier groups through the trauma process. Alexander emphasizes that the trauma process is cultural work and thus “requires speeches, rituals, marches, meetings, plays, movies, and storytelling of all kinds.”¹⁷⁵ In this process carrier groups draw upon myths, stories, and other symbolic resources to create the most compelling narrative possible. The connection between powerful cultural symbols and powerful emotional response is no accident. As D. Kertzer explains: “[s]ymbols can have a strong emotional impact on people, rallying them around the organizational flag, in spite of the fact that each participant interprets the symbols

¹⁷² Alexander, “Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” 9-10.

¹⁷³ Smelser, “Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma,” 40.

¹⁷⁴ Alexander, “Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” 23.

¹⁷⁵ Alexander and Breese, “Introduction,” xiii.

differently.”¹⁷⁶ Alexander reflects this view when he refers to collective traumas as “complex symbolic-cum-emotional constructions.”¹⁷⁷ Similarly, R. Granofsky considers symbolism to be the primary tool, which the trauma novelist employs.¹⁷⁸ Although Granofsky’s primary concern is with post-1945 fiction, he is correct in identifying the importance of symbolic representation in communicating trauma.

The construction of cultural trauma by a society serves several purposes. By engaging in the trauma process, a group encourages solidarity with those suffering, creates community, and repairs collective identity. No matter how wide of an effect a disastrous event may have on a society, not every member will experience pain and suffering in the same way. Since one of the goals of the trauma process is to create an identification with the suffering in the wider group, Alexander explains “that by refusing to participate in what I will describe as the process of trauma creation, social groups restrict solidarity, leaving others to suffer alone.”¹⁷⁹ Erikson was one of the first to note that trauma contains within it both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies.¹⁸⁰ Alexander characterizes this same tension as the propensity for the trauma process to either be polarizing or reconciling. At its best, he argues, “[i]t stabilizes not only collective memory but also the contemporary sense of social reality, pointing the way forward in a

¹⁷⁶ David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 69.

¹⁷⁷ Jeffery C. Alexander and Shai M. Dromi, “Holocaust and Trauma: Moral Restriction in Israel,” in *Trauma: A Social Theory* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2012), 99.

¹⁷⁸ Granofsky, *The Trauma Novel*, 5.

¹⁷⁹ Alexander, “Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” 1.

¹⁸⁰ Erikson, *A New Species of Trouble*, 232.

confident way.”¹⁸¹ Of course, it is not difficult to find certain traumatic events at the center of a group's sense of self and identity. A. Neal finds several traumatic events, or founding traumas in LaCapra's terms,¹⁸² in American history, such as the Great Depression and the attack on Pearl Harbor.¹⁸³ If Neal were writing now, 9/11 would take center stage. For our purposes, the exodus narrative comes to mind for some ancient Israelite groups.

Types of Trauma Narrative

In his discussion of the changing characterization of the Holocaust as trauma, Alexander identifies two different types of trauma narrative: the progressive narrative and the tragic narrative. The progressive trauma narrative is a future-oriented narrative in which present and past traumatic suffering are counterbalanced by a future renewal and redemption. The horror of traumatic events is acknowledged but set within a framework in which there exists the possibility of overcoming trauma and “the ability to leave trauma-drama behind, and press ahead toward the future.”¹⁸⁴ He points to early American and Zionist characterizations of the Holocaust to be examples of the progressive trauma narrative, since they focused on the redemption that would follow the Nazi's defeat or the return to Jerusalem, respectively.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Alexander and Breese, “Introduction,” xxx.

¹⁸² LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 161.

¹⁸³ Arthur G. Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Major Events in the American Century* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 41-78.

¹⁸⁴ Jeffery C. Alexander, “Holocaust and Trauma: Moral Universalism in the West,” in *Trauma: A Social Theory* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2012), 72.

¹⁸⁵ Alexander, “Holocaust and Trauma: Moral Universalism,” 45 and 51.

In contrast, the tragic trauma narrative presents no opportunities for overcoming it. The only redemption possible, is to repetitively experience the tragedy, but there is no getting over it.¹⁸⁶ This type of narrative requires the victims to be considered “good” in order that their plight be one of identification and sympathy. The horrific nature of the traumatic events becomes universalized beyond a particular nation, people, time, or place. This universalization means that everyone is implicated in the trauma becoming both victim and perpetrator at the same time. This is identical to much of the classic model of trauma, especially in its representation of the Holocaust.¹⁸⁷ The difference, however, in Alexander’s tragic model is that it is still a culturally created trauma and the universalism of the traumatic is just one way the narrative can be encoded and is not an innate or automatic response to trauma.

Cultural Sociological Trauma and Biblical Scholarship

While Alexander’s cultural sociological approach to trauma has not escaped the notice of biblical scholars, it has only recently gained in popularity, though primarily in studies concerning late antiquity and early Christianity.¹⁸⁸ Carr and Frechette and Boase

¹⁸⁶ Alexander, “Holocaust and Trauma: Moral Universalism,” 93.

¹⁸⁷ Holocaust studies is an especially relevant field to the study of trauma, ancient or modern. Yet, this specialized field is beyond the scope of my present work on trauma. For an excellent survey of trauma and its relation to the Holocaust (along with the relevant literature), see Janzen, *The Violent Gift*, 31-45. See, also, Laurence L. Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁸⁸ When Alexander’s theory appears in various works on biblical trauma, it most often takes the form of a brief reference in a footnote discussing cultural or collective trauma. For examples, see Becker, “‘Trauma Studies’ and Exegesis,” 15 n. 1; Boase, “The Traumatized Body,” 194 n. 4; Philip Browning Helsel, “Shared Pleasure to Soothe the Broken Spirit: Collective Trauma and Qoheleth,” in *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, eds. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 89 n. 16; Odell, “Fragments of Traumatic Memory,” 113 n. 17; Samuel E. Balentine, “Legislating Divine Trauma,” in *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, eds. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 162 n. 6; L. Juliana M. Claassens, “Trauma and Recovery: A New Hermeneutical Framework for

each mention this approach in their summaries of developments within trauma studies.¹⁸⁹ Less commonly, Alexander's theory is used in tandem with the classic model. Stulman and Kim, while primarily working with the classic model, occasionally cite Alexander, R. Eyerman, and B. Giesen without a discussion of how the cultural sociological model differs from the classic model.¹⁹⁰ In his discussion of violent imagery in the Hebrew Bible as kind of "controlled substance," Frechette discusses both individual and collective trauma. For the individual he draws on Herman, van der Kolk, and the DSM V, while he uses Erikson and Alexander to establish the meaning of collective trauma.¹⁹¹ Frechette weaves these two approaches together in describing how certain problematic texts in the Hebrew Bible, like Jeremiah, were born out of trauma and serve in a limited capacity to help people suffering today.¹⁹²

There are only a few attempts to pair texts from the Hebrew Bible with the cultural sociological model of trauma.¹⁹³ E. K. Holt takes up the books of Jeremiah and

the Rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13)," in *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, eds. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 179 n. 5; Robert J. Schreiter, "Reading Biblical Texts through the Lens of Resilience," in *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, eds. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 200.

¹⁸⁹ Carr, *Holy Resilience*, 264; Frechette and Boase, "Defining 'Trauma' as a Useful Lens for Biblical Interpretation," 8-10.

¹⁹⁰ Stulman and Kim, *You Are My People*, 43, 54, 65.

¹⁹¹ Frechette, "The Old Testament as Controlled Substance," 23-25.

¹⁹² Though I do have some concerns on how to apply psychological insights (whose subject is the individual) to collectives, especially those mediated entirely through texts, the value of such insights in explaining the effectiveness of symbolic representation is tantalizing. Recently, however, D. Janzen proposed similar caution in mixing Caruth's psychological and literary model with Alexander's sociological model. See David Janzen, "Claimed and Unclaimed Experience: The Anti-therapeutic Effects of Social Narratives of Trauma" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of SBL, Boston, MA, 18 November 2017).

¹⁹³ J. Dietrich engages with Alexander's constructivist model but rejects it because it lacks recourse to the unconscious. Instead, he uses P. Sztompka's concept of cultural trauma, which includes a psychoanalytic component. I will engage with Dietrich's criticism below. See, respectively, Jan Dietrich, "Cultural

Lamentations as cultural trauma work, drawing on Alexander's theory of cultural trauma and J. Assmann's view of collective memory.¹⁹⁴ She interacts with O'Connor's work on Jeremiah, noting the difficulties posed by the various chronologies of the redactional layers to the notion of the book's status as a testimony to trauma. She considers Alexander's theories useful for bridging the gap between the events of Babylonian exile and the redactional history of books like Jeremiah that speak to it.¹⁹⁵ She identifies the later (postexilic) authors and editors as the carrier groups undertaking the trauma process for the sake of "building or rebuilding of a national identity in the post-exilic centuries."¹⁹⁶ In this way she argues that the dramatic language, such as found in Jeremiah 9, re-creates the collective trauma for later audiences.

E. Boase, in her further explorations of the book of Lamentations, applies Alexander's model of trauma in order to argue that the text serves to unite the community, creating new meaning and identity.¹⁹⁷ She demonstrates how Lamentations answers Alexander's four fundamental elements necessary for the trauma process: the nature of the pain; the nature of the victim; the relation of victims to the group; and

Traumata in the Ancient Near East," in *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond*, eds. Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dochhorn, and Else Kragelund Holt (Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica 2; Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 145-161; Piotr Sztompka, "The Trauma of Social Change: A Case of Postcommunist Societies," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, eds. Jeffery C. Alexander, et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 155-195.

¹⁹⁴ Holt, "Daughter Zion," 162-176.

¹⁹⁵ Holt, "Daughter Zion," 169.

¹⁹⁶ Holt, "Daughter Zion," 171-172.

¹⁹⁷ Elizabeth Boase, "Fragmented Voices: Collective Identity and Traumatization in Lamentations," in *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, eds. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 49-66.

attribution of responsibility. She highlights the affective qualities of Lamentations and its literary sophistication through the use of metaphor, personification, and multiple voices all of which serve to promote collective identity.¹⁹⁸ She draws attention to its ongoing success in its continued liturgical use to commemorate the destructions of 586 BCE and 70 CE.

J. Dietrich has offered criticisms of aspects of Alexander's trauma model that I will address these here. Dietrich engages with Alexander's constructivist model but rejects it because it lacks recourse to the psychological conception of the unconscious and its accompanying coping mechanisms.¹⁹⁹ With only a constructivist approach, Dietrich argues, there is no difference between disaster and trauma, since both are socially constructed. This lack of distinction threatens to make the term less meaningful and prone to overuse. For him the difference between disaster and trauma is in perspective, disaster focuses on the event and how it impacts the community (an outside perspective), while trauma focuses on the psychic and mental problems that disasters create (inside perspective). Instead, Dietrich uses P. Sztompka's concept of cultural trauma, which includes a psychoanalytic component.²⁰⁰ Drawing on Caruth, he also offers the incomprehensibility of trauma to be one of its distinguishing characteristics.²⁰¹

Dietrich is correct in his concern over how the term "trauma" can be (mis)used due to imprecision in categories, however, this is not a problem unique to the cultural

¹⁹⁸ Boase, "Fragmented Voices," 63.

¹⁹⁹ Dietrich, "Cultural Traumata in the Ancient Near East," 148.

²⁰⁰ Sztompka, "The Trauma of Social Change," 155-195.

²⁰¹ Dietrich, "Cultural Traumata in the Ancient Near East," 148.

sociological model. First, Dietrich's concern over the consequences of blurring of the categories disaster and trauma is extreme. In Alexander's model, the trauma process is a long, intensive affair requiring much social work to create meaning that is constantly contested. This process does not lend itself to trivialization, in which any inconvenient event is capable of bearing the label "trauma." Secondly, while clear categories for classification are beneficial, both terms serve as heuristic tools to explore the impact of catastrophic events on individuals and groups of people. Dietrich's inside (trauma) versus outside (disaster) view is one way to explore the relation, but there are others. Eyerman draws a distinction between natural disasters and traumatic occurrences based on the presence of human responsibility and blame.²⁰² Similarly, Smelser's differentiation between social and cultural traumas offers another way to think about the relation of disaster and trauma. For Smelser, social trauma describes the catastrophic events that threaten a society's social structures and its effect is delimited to parts of a society.²⁰³ He offers the Great Depression of the 1930s to be an example of a social trauma. In contrast, a cultural trauma is one in which the fundamental values or identity of a society are felt to be threatened.²⁰⁴ He also highlights the importance of strong affectual reactions as one of the defining elements of cultural trauma. Incidentally, this could be one way to approach an inside perspective of trauma without relying upon the unconscious.

²⁰² Eyerman, "Cultural Trauma," 567.

²⁰³ Smelser, "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma," 37.

²⁰⁴ Smelser, "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma," 38.

Biblical Application of the Sociological Model

While it is outside the scope of this dissertation to undertake a complete application of the cultural sociology model of trauma to the Babylonian exile, it is worth briefly showing how various parts of the biblical narrative, especially the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, fit within this model.²⁰⁵ As has been noted by many scholars, the prophets say very little about the first forced migration of the elites of Jerusalem in 598 BCE.²⁰⁶ We do not hear about Ezekiel's experiences during the siege of Jerusalem, nor of his conceivably arduous travels from Jerusalem to the Judean settlement of Tel Abib. We do not know much about what life was like in the Judean ethnic communities in Babylon. From the book of Ezekiel, we know that some of the institutional structures remained intact, since a group of elders still seems to have authority in exile (Ezek 8:1; 14:1; 20:1-3). The book of Ezekiel speaks to the continuing presence of prophetic authority among the exiles in the voice of Ezekiel and even the false prophets with which he contended (Ezek 13:9). This view is supported in Jeremiah's letter to the exiles not to be deceived by prophets and diviners in their community (Jer 29:8). Instead of focusing on the events of the first exile, Jeremiah and Ezekiel predominantly focus on the impending fate of Jerusalem. The classic trauma model explains this gap in narrative as the natural and expected reaction to a traumatic event, which is bound to be experienced only later through involuntary repetition.

²⁰⁵ For the application of the cultural sociology model to the book of Lamentations, see Boase, "Fragmented Voices," 49-66.

²⁰⁶ Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 3; O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 14; Carr, "Reading into the Gap," 296; Carr, *Holy Resilience*, 74.

For the cultural sociology model, it is a matter of social construction. The selection of Jerusalem's fate over the experiences of the first wave of exiles fits the need for the trauma to be associated with "some fundamental injury, an exclamation of the terrifying profanation of some sacred value."²⁰⁷ Certainly the future of the city of Jerusalem and Yahweh's temple were of great importance to the political and religious elites of Judah. D. Carr identifies two core Judean beliefs that the Babylonian siege of exile threatened: the inviolability of Jerusalem as the city of God and the endurance of a Davidic king in Jerusalem.²⁰⁸ In this model, the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel serve as carrier groups engaged in the trauma process. As Alexander notes, the trauma process is highly contentious and elicit struggles over the meaning of certain events. We can see evidence of this contest over meaning in Jeremiah and Ezekiel's condemnation of prophets promising peace and safety as being false and liars.²⁰⁹

To achieve their end, the exilic prophets drew upon "the symbolic resources at hand" in order to craft a trauma narrative. One such resource was the related motifs of sin and punishment and divine abandonment, the latter of which had a long history in the ancient Near East, going back to Sumerian city laments.²¹⁰ This motif draws upon the

²⁰⁷ Alexander, "Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 11.

²⁰⁸ Carr, *Holy Resilience*, 69.

²⁰⁹ To this one could add another carrier group, the deuteronomistic writers who saw Manasseh as the one responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem because of his great sin (1 Kgs 24:3-4).

²¹⁰ Peter Machinist, "Literature as Politics: The Tukulti-Ninurta Epic and the Bible," *CBQ* 38 (1976): 462-464; Piotr Michalowski, *The Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 13; F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1993), 45-51. For a more recent examination of Ezekiel (especially chapters 8-11) in particular, see Donna Lee Petter, *The Book of Ezekiel and Mesopotamian City Laments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2011), 18-21, 89-104. For an exploration of the city lament in relation to the classic trauma model, see Stefan Sperl, "'O City Set Up Thy Lament': Poetic Responses to the Trauma of War," in *Warfare and Poetry in the Middle East*, ed. Hugh Kennedy (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 1-37.

fundamental ancient truth that nothing happens outside of the command of god(s). Thus, any disaster must be a result of humans running afoul of the divine (this can be due to humans trespassing known divine statutes or the capricious nature of the gods). Related to this, as we will see in chapter five, is the curse traditions of Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 provided powerful symbolic resources for exilic prophets to draw upon in order to frame their trauma narrative. While this recourse to sin and punishment is often connected to a typical modern reaction to trauma in self-blame, it is less a reaction to trauma in specific and more a part of the fabric of cause and effect in the ancient world.²¹¹ As such, it provides a framework for action that allows those suffering greater agency. They can undertake actions (prayer, sacrifice, etc.) to placate the divine world in order to effect real change in their situation. Another powerful symbolic resource available to the prophets was the powerful imagery associated with imperial propaganda. In this way, Jeremiah and Ezekiel stand in the tradition of Isaiah, who challenges and subverts Neo-Assyrian royal rhetoric. The prophetic use of the imagery of empire becomes especially clear in chapters three and four, in which the weapon motifs are closely connected with royal ideology.

Their messages concerning the invasion of Jerusalem and subsequent forced migration do cover Alexander's four key questions for trauma narratives. What happened, or better yet, what will happen (at least from the point of view of the narrative) is clearly spelled out as the destruction of Jerusalem and Yahweh's temple and the exile of its people to Babylonia. The identity of the victims is made abundantly clear. The people of Judah, especially those in Jerusalem, are the victims. It is the people of

²¹¹ Carr, *Holy Resilience*, 77.

Jerusalem who will be invaded and forced to live in exile. The identity of the perpetrators, however, is more complicated, owing to the framework of sin and punishment used to structure the understanding of these events. On one level, the perpetrators are the Babylonians led by Nebuchadnezzar II. Yet the agency of the Babylonian king and his army is greatly reduced, as they are commanded and directed by Yahweh, who is characterized as the aggrieved party. On another level, it is the sword of Yahweh that is responsible for Judean punishment. The selection of a weapon as a symbol of Yahweh's wrath and judgment by the exilic prophets is no accident. E. Scarry argues that in the attempts to transform an individual's wordless pain into words, the analogy with a weapon that gives rise to a wound is one of the first and most common representational strategies.²¹² Scarry explains the unique position of the weapon as a symbol for pain:

That the sign of the weapon has an elementary place in the transformation of pain into projected image was suggested earlier...there are many outwardly visible indications that the image of the weapon is not just one among thousands of signs but is a sign occupying a primal place in the original moment of transformation.²¹³

²¹² Scarry's theory of the unrepresentability of pain bears a striking resemblance to Caruth's notion of the inexpressibility of trauma. Although Caruth does not cite Scarry, biblical scholars such as O'Connor draw upon her work to supplement Caruth's theory of the incomprehensibility of trauma. Two distinctions, however, can be drawn. First, Scarry's pain is exclusively in the realm of the individual and their body. Secondly, for the individual experiencing the pain, that pain is understood "effortlessly". This is much different from Caruth's view in which trauma defies understanding, even for those who endured it firsthand. Thirdly, pain's destruction of language takes place during the moment(s) of pain. Afterwards, she does allow for language to grasp and attempt to represent the pain through common "verbal strategies," even if it must do so through analogy and metaphorical language. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 13-15 (the importance of weapons) and 4-6, 13 (her understanding of representation and pain).

²¹³ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 172.

Additionally, S. Noegel argues that the cultures of ancient Near Eastern often regarded words as having performative power.²¹⁴ In this way, casting the foreign king and his army as the sword of Yahweh transforms their very nature. On yet another level, it is the people of Judah who are responsible for what is happening to them. Ultimately, it is their great iniquity (Jer 13:22) and violations of the covenant (Ezek 16:59), as characterized in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, that functions as the inciting reason for the looming trauma. Finally, the prophetic trauma narratives provide a plan for what can be done about the disaster. Repent and endure Yahweh's punishment and afterwards Yahweh will restore them, making them better than they were before. For example, Yahweh promises to return the people to the land (Jer 29:10-14) and give them a new spirit and a new heart (Ezek 11:19; 36:26-28). This hope for the future places the prophetic message firmly in Alexander's progressive trauma narrative.

Imperial Rhetoric: Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Influence

Each of the four divine weapon motifs that I will explore below are connected with Mesopotamian royal ideology in some aspect. Yet, many scholars have noted that Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian ideologies of kingship differ, especially in connection to the king's role as a military leader and one charged with the expansion of the empire.²¹⁵ In this way, Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions emphasize the king's military

²¹⁴ Scott B. Noegel, "Sign, Sign, Everywhere a Sign": Script, Power, and Interpretation in the Ancient Near East," in *Divination and Interpretation of Signs in the Ancient World*, ed. Amar Annus (OIS 6; Chicago, IL: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2010), 143–162; Scott B. Noegel, "The Ritual Use of Linguistic and Textual Violence in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East," in *State, Power, and Violence*, vol. 3 of *Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual*, ed. Margo Kitts, et al (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 33-46; and Scott B. Noegel, "'Literary' Craft and Performative Power in the Ancient Near East," in *Approaches to Literary Readings of Ancient Jewish Texts*, ed. Karolien Vermuelen (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 19-38.

²¹⁵ Vanderhooff, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets*, 49-51;

prowess and martial accomplishments, while Neo-Babylonian inscriptions portray the king as the caretaker of Babylon and the gods through many building projects. This difference in rhetoric becomes important when discussing imperial motifs and their impact on Judean prophets. For two of the four divine weapon motifs, the weapon bestowal and the personification of the weapon, we have several Neo-Babylonian examples.²¹⁶

What about the remaining tropes, the king as weapon and weapons in curses, whose representation appears primarily in Neo-Assyrian texts? Certainly, it is possible that such motifs continued to be used by Neo-Babylonian kings and due to the accident of preservation, we just do not have them.²¹⁷ This view is less than ideal. Instead, I prefer D.

²¹⁶ It should be noted that there are fewer Neo-Babylonian examples than Neo-Assyrian, though this is partly due to a smaller corpus of royal inscriptions and the shorter duration of the Neo-Babylonian empire. I do not consider the representation of such motifs, when they appear in NB sources, to be less characteristic of the Babylonian material in comparison with the Assyrian evidence. As an example, the weapon bestowal motif occurs once in the royal inscriptions of Nabopolassar (Nab C31) and twice in those of Neriglissar (Ner C22 and Ner C23). The trope also appears in the Nabû Accrostic. The motif is absent from the extant inscriptions of Amēl-Marduk and Nabonidus. While the motif appears in some number for each of the Sargonid kings (though the references in the texts of Sargon II and Aššurbanipal are far fewer), it is less consistently represented among earlier kings. Of the eight kings between and including Shalmaneser III and Shalmaneser V, only the inscriptions of the first two kings (Shalmaneser III and Šamšī-Adad V) contain the weapon bestowal motif.

²¹⁷ There is some evidence that the Neo-Babylonian kings saw themselves as the inheritors of the Assyrian empire and adopted Assyrian motifs, especially in the west. For example, the iconography of Nebuchadnezzar II's Brisa inscription contains the king fighting a lion, which was a clear Neo-Assyrian royal motif. See Rocío da Riva, "A Lion in the Cedar Forest: International Politics and Pictorial Self-Representations of Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 BC)," in *Studies on War in the Ancient Near East: Collected Essays on Military History*, ed. Jordi Vidal (AOAT 372; Münster, Ugarit Verlag, 2010), 165-191; Rocío da Riva, *The Twin Inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar at Brisa (Wadi esh-Sharbin, Lebanon): a Historical and Philological Study* (AfOB 32; Horn, Berger & Söhne, 2012), 94-95; Rocío da Riva, "Nebuchadnezzar II's Prism (EŞ 7834): A New Edition," *ZA* 103 (2013): 206; Michael Jursa, "The Neo-Babylonian Empire," in *Imperien und Reiche in der Weltgeschichte: Epochenübergreifende und globalhistorische Vergleiche*, eds. M. Gehler and R. Rollinger (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014), 126; Rocío da Riva, "Assyrians and Assyrian Influence in Babylonia (626-539 BCE)," in *From Source to History: Studies on Ancient Near Eastern Worlds and Beyond Dedicated to Giovanni Battista Lanfranchi on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday on June 23, 2014*, ed. Salvatore Gaspa, et al (AOAT 412; Münster, Ugarit Verlag, 2014), 109.

Vanderhooft's notion that for many Judean prophets, especially the ones active at the beginning of the exile, the Neo-Assyrian empire served as a model through which the prophets understood their new Babylonian rulers.²¹⁸ D. L. Petersen support's Vanderhooft's position arguing that "the prophets were construing what would happen based on past precedent. Prophetic rhetoric about exile in the Neo-Babylonian period was forged on the anvil of experiences under the Neo-Assyrians."²¹⁹ The juxtaposition between various Mesopotamian empires, at least from a Judean point of view, finds explicit expression in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, in which Judah/Israel's relationship with Babylon is compared to the relationship with Assyria (Jer 50:17-18; Ezek 16:28-29; 23:5-23). Thus, Babylon would be seen as just another empire in the mould of the Assyrians that came before. Concerning the difference in royal ideology between the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian kings, Vanderhooft insightfully notes that "[s]uch subtleties would no doubt have been lost on Babylon's military victims."²²⁰

Semiotics

Semiotics provides a compelling framework, not only because it is one of the approaches employed in cultural sociology, but the nature of the biblical evidence concerning Yahweh's sword is at once textual and focused on the web of meanings associate with, conveyed by, and embodied in the term. Semiotics furnishes tools which serve to categorize and establish the various ways that meaning is encoded in signs.

²¹⁸ Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets*, 207.

²¹⁹ David L. Petersen, "Prophetic Rhetoric and Exile," in *The Prophets Speak on Forced Migration*, eds. Mark J. Boda, Frank Ritzel Ames, John Ahn, and Mark Leuchter (AIL; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 18.

²²⁰ Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets*, 49.

Additionally, it provides a way to conceptualize and categorize the polysemous nature of signs and their various encoded meanings. To this end I will employ Charles Peirce's theory of semiotics. Peirce understood all signs to be triadic in nature, being composed of a representamen, an object, and an interpretant. He explains that

A sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the representamen.²²¹

The representamen, hereafter referred to as the sign vehicle, serves as the representation or form of the sign. In Saussurean terms the sign vehicle is the signifier.²²² The object is the referent, which the sign vehicle represents. It serves as the signified in Saussure's system.²²³ The last element, the interpretant, is the most difficult of the three and refers to the meaning of the sign as mediated between the sign vehicle and the object. It should be noted that the interpretant does not refer to a human interpreter. The interpretant is itself a sign, which has its own object and interpretant, creating an infinite chain of semiosis. For

²²¹ Charles S. Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (repr., New York: Dover Publications, 2016), 99.

²²² Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, eds. Perry Meisel and Haun Saussy, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 65-70. For a brief overview of Saussure's sign theory and how it compares with Peirce's view of signs, see Thomas A. Sebeok, *Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 5-6.

²²³ When trying to understand Peirce via Saussure's terminology, there seems to be some disagreement on how the terms map onto each other. It seems generally agreed upon that the representamen (sign vehicle) corresponds to Saussure's signifier. How the object and interpretant relate to Saussure's signified is less unanimous. The prevailing view, when it is mentioned, is that the object functions as the signified, while the interpretant is a unique feature to Peirce. See Sebeok, *Signs*, 6; Floyd Merrel, "Charles Sanders Peirce's Concept of the Sign," in *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics and Linguistics*, ed. Paul Copley (New York: Routledge, 2001), 31; Theo van Leeuwen, *Introducing Social Semiotics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 49. For a contrasting view in which the interpretant is characterized as roughly equivalent to the signified, see Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics*, 2nd ed. (New York, Routledge, 2007), 31.

Peirce, signs grow and change over time, taking on new meanings (interpretants) and objects.²²⁴

Perhaps Peirce's most productive contribution to semiotics was his division of signs into three modes based on the relationship of the sign vehicle to its object. He explains that signs can be designated as an Icon, an Index, or a Symbol. Peirce defines an icon as "a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes merely by virtue of characters of its own, and which it possesses, just the same, whether any such Object actually exists or not."²²⁵ The relationship between the sign vehicle and the object is one of similarity. The most basic example of an iconic sign is a portrait picture. It is important to note that iconic signs are not limited to visual media, but can be sounds, in the case of mimicry, or text. Significantly for our purposes, Peirce categorizes metaphor as a type of iconic sign.²²⁶ The iconic similarity, in the case of metaphor, is not based on resemblance, but rather through parallelism of certain features.²²⁷ An indexical sign is one that "a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that Object." Peirce characterizes the relation between sign vehicle and object for an index as one of contiguity, such as cause and effect, special relation, and temporal sequence. Indexical signs can be thought of as pointing back to their object. As an example, smoke serves as an indexical sign for fire. Additionally, in language, any deictic, such as a demonstrative pronoun, could be considered an indexical sign. Metonymy, because of the

²²⁴ Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, 101.

²²⁵ Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, 102.

²²⁶ Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, 105.

²²⁷ Victorino Tejera, *Semiotics from Peirce to Barthes: A Conceptual Introduction to the Study of Communication, Interpretation and Expression* (New York: Brill, 1988), 131.

relation between its elements, functions as a type of indexical sign. Lastly, a symbolic sign is “a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas, which operates to cause the Symbol to be interpreted as referring to that Object.”²²⁸ In symbolic signs, the relation between the sign vehicle and the object is one governed by arbitrary social convention. Words serve as quintessential examples of symbolic signs, since there is no particular reason for certain collections of letters to be associated with various concepts, ideas, or entities. Another example of a symbolic sign is a flag, which comes to represent a nation or group.

Although Peirce’s classification of different signs functions as a useful heuristic tool in and of itself, an important aspect of his system is often overlooked, namely, his focus on the polysemous nature of signs. I highlighted this above when mentioning Peirce’s view that signs grow and change over time. Additionally, he argues that signs are capable of having many objects, or referents.²²⁹ Furthermore, Peirce’s tripartite classification of signs is not a matter of exclusive trichotomy, but one of gradation. Put simply, most signs display more than one mode (icon, index, symbol). T. Sebeok explains that “A given object can, depending on the circumstance in which it is displayed, momentarily function, to a degree, in the role of an icon, an index, or a symbol.”²³⁰ As an example, he demonstrates how the American flag can be a symbol (its typical mode), an icon in its reference to the thirteen colonies and fifty states, and an index in a cavalry

²²⁸ Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, 102.

²²⁹ Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, 101.

²³⁰ Sebeok, *Signs*, 89.

charge.²³¹ Thus, it should be of little surprise that the Hebrew term *hereb* is nested in a web of signification.

Hereb as a Sign

In the ancient Near East, weapons served as meaning-rich signs of various kinds (index, symbol, and icon). Weapons could be prestige objects marking one's elevated status,²³² symbols of power representing divine presence in oaths and on boundary stones,²³³ mythological instruments used to defeat monstrous evil,²³⁴ gods themselves (e.g. Šarur and Šargaz),²³⁵ and icons of divine authority given to the king.²³⁶ At the most fundamental level, as a word, *hereb* serves as a symbolic sign for a “sword,” “dagger,” or more accurately “a bladed implement meant for cutting animate beings whose handle and blade are on the same axis.”²³⁷ As stated above, signs are polysemous and multivalent.

²³¹ Sebeok, *Signs*, 89-90.

²³² Jordi Vidal, “Prestige Weapons in an Amorite Context,” *JNES* 70 (2011): 247-252.

²³³ Rivkah Harris, “The Journey of the Divine Weapon,” in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on his Seventy-fifth Birthday*, ed. Hans G. Güterbock and Thorkild Jacobsen (AS 16; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 217-224.

²³⁴ Out of the numerous possible examples, one can readily think of Ninurta's many weapons in Lugale and Angim, Marduk's bow from the Enūma Eliš, Baalu's two maces received from Kothar, and Yahweh's sword against Leviathan (Isa 26:1).

²³⁵ One could add the Sebetu here as well (Erra i 7-8, 17-18, 39-40, 44, 98). See, Gina V. Konstantopoulos, “They are Seven: Demons and Monsters in the Mesopotamian Textual and Artistic Tradition” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2015).

²³⁶ There are countless examples, but for a few representative examples, see Hammurabi (*CH* xlvi 22-25); Zimri-Lim (*FM* 7 38 2'-4'); Tiglath-pileser I (A.0.87.1 i 46-51; RIMA 2, 13); of Assurbanipal (SAA 3 11 r.1-2, 5-6, 17-18); and Nebuchadnezzar II (*PSBA* 20 ll.39-40).

²³⁷ Aaron J. Koller, *The Semantic Field of Cutting Tools in Biblical Hebrew: The Interface of Philological, Semantic, and Archaeological Evidence* (CBQMS 49; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2012), 176.

They rarely express just one mode. Thus, it will not be surprising to find other modes and meanings associated with *hereb* as a sign vehicle.

The next most commonly cited meaning of *hereb* is “war.”²³⁸ This meaning is usually arrived at through a metonymic use of the term *hereb* (though it is more precisely an example of synecdoche).²³⁹ G. Lakoff and M. Johnson define metonymy as “using one entity to refer to another that is related to it,” while synecdoche, a subtype of metonymy, uses a part to refer to the whole.²⁴⁰ In this case, the sword, as an instrument of war, comes to represent war or warfare as a whole. As an example of synecdoche and thus an indexical sign, *hereb* points to the presence of war. In the same way, *hereb* can also serve as a metonymic index for “soldier/warrior,” “army” (as examples of the metonymic type object for user), and “death” (cause for effect). These associations are more than just cultural convention, Lakoff and Johnson demonstrate that metonyms help to understand and quantify more abstract ideas: “Symbolic metonymies are critical links between everyday experience and the coherent metaphorical systems that characterize religions and cultures. Symbolic metonymies that are grounded in our physical experience provide an essential means of comprehending religious and cultural concepts.”²⁴¹ Metaphors and metonyms do this by selectively emphasizing certain connections and associations, while

²³⁸ O. Kaiser, “*hereb*,” *TDOT* 5:157, 163; Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-14* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 215-216; Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21B; New York: Doubleday, 2004), 421.

²³⁹ Tamar Sovran, “Metonymy and Synecdoche,” In *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, 4 vols., ed. Geoffrey Khan (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 2:636.

²⁴⁰ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 35.

²⁴¹ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 40.

concealing others. Metaphoric and metonymic concepts not only help a culture understand its world, it can shape the very way a culture perceives it.²⁴²

The mode of a sign is often hybrid in nature and the meaning of *ḥereb* as “war” can take on a more iconic mode as a metaphor. In Lakoff and Johnson’s system of metaphors, the metaphor “war is a sword” would be classified as an ontological metaphor, in which events, actions, activities, and states are represented by objects. The benefit of such metaphors is that conceptualizing a more abstract notion as an entity “allows us to refer to it, quantify it, identify a particular aspect of it, see it as a cause, act with respect to it, and perhaps even believe that we understand it.”²⁴³ In this mode parallels between the sword and war are emphasized. For example, the notion of the sword’s unsheathing not to be sheathed again (Ezek 21:10) highlights the durative nature of warfare. The deadliness of the sword’s blade mirrors war’s efficiency at taking life. The multifaceted nature of signs will come into play as we explore the various weapon related tropes that the exilic prophets employed to structure their trauma narratives. As we will see, the sword of Yahweh provides an emotionally charged sign, variously symbol, icon, and index, that provides the trauma narrative with performative force as well as helping to provide meaning to ease suffering.

Conclusion

The burgeoning field of trauma studies provides many interpretive tools for biblical scholars who take seriously the impact the Babylonian exile on Judean lives and

²⁴² Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 39.

²⁴³ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 26.

literature in the sixth century BCE and beyond. Understandably, many scholars have adopted the classic trauma model in their investigation into trauma's influence upon biblical texts. As I have demonstrated above, the classic model has limitations and shortcomings that have not been fully addressed in its application to group trauma and ancient trauma communicated primarily through narrative. For these reasons, I have adopted Alexander's cultural sociological trauma model, which avoids the problems of the classic model. Furthermore, a cultural sociological approach to trauma casts the authors and audience of the trauma narrative not as helpless victims, but as actors exerting agency in creating and controlling their own trauma stories. To this end, we will see that the exilic prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, drew upon the powerful imagery of divine weapons taken from the cultural motifs of their captors as well as their own curse traditions in order to craft a persuasive and ultimately successful trauma narrative.

Excursus – The Meaning of Ḥereb

A. Koller, drawing upon later Semitic languages and Rabbinic usage, argues that the Hebrew *ḥereb* should be divided into *ḥereb* I “sword” and *ḥereb* II “war.”²⁴⁴ For example, Koller notes that in the triad *ḥereb*, *rā'āb* “famine,” and *deber* “plague,” “it seems reasonable to claim that the reference is to warfare.”²⁴⁵ While this may be the case, it is not clear to me that ancient Israelites made such a distinction. Even when they intended *ḥereb* as “war” the image of the sword is not lost. For example, in Ezekiel 5, Yahweh instructs the prophet to cut his hair with a *ḥereb*, clearly a sword, and divide it into thirds (Ezek 5:1). Yahweh then commands Ezekiel to burn one third, strike one with

²⁴⁴ Koller, *The Semantic Field of Cutting Tools in Biblical Hebrew*, 162-163.

²⁴⁵ Koller, *The Semantic Field of Cutting Tools in Biblical Hebrew*, 164.

the *ḥereb*, again a sword, and scatter one third to the wind while Yahweh unsheathes the *ḥereb*, a sword, after it (Ezek 5:2). This prophetic act is then followed by an explanation involving the aforementioned triad:

*šālīšītēk baddeber yāmūtū ūbārā ‘āb yiklū bəṭōkēk wəḥaššālīšīt baḥereb
yippəlū səbībōtāyik wəḥaššālīšīt ləkōl-rūaḥ ‘ēzāreh wəḥereb ‘ārīq
'aḥārēhem*

A third of you will die by plague, and they will perish by famine in your midst. One third will fall by the sword around you, one third I will scatter to every wind and I will unsheathe the sword after them.
(Ezek 5:12)

Not only is Ezekiel’s striking the hair with the sword paralleled by the one third falling by *ḥereb* “war/sword,” Yahweh unsheathes (his?) sword after them. While the first reference to *ḥereb* in v.12 could be Koller’s *ḥereb* II “war,” the second reference must be to a sword, since one does not unsheathe war. This seems to me to strengthen the case for the notion that even if a separate lexeme *ḥereb* II meaning “war” was developing, it had not yet lost its associations with *ḥereb* I “sword.” This seems to be an example of what R. Barthes considered the mythic semiotic (or metasemiotic in Hjelmslev’s terminology). For Barthes, myth exists on a different level of signification, a level above the normal sign. Myth uses a complete sign as its signifier (representamen in Peircean terms). One of the essential characteristics of myth is that it does not lose or suppress the basic “original” meaning.²⁴⁶ Thus even when functioning as a synecdoche for “war,” *ḥereb* never entirely loses its sense as “sword.”

²⁴⁶ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Noonday Press, 1972), 118.

Chapter Three: The Weapon Bestowal Motif

Then he noticed what was written on the sword: that whoever could draw the sword from the stone would be king by the choice of Jesus Christ.

-Perceval by Robert de Boron²⁴⁷

Introduction

The weapon bestowal motif is perhaps the most ubiquitous and widespread of all the references to divine weapons in ancient literature.²⁴⁸ The motif has a long history in

²⁴⁷ Nigel Bryant, *Merlin and the Grail. Joseph of Arimathea, Merlin, Perceval: The Trilogy of Prose Romances Attributed to Robert de Boron* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 107.

²⁴⁸ In addition to the West Semitic and Mesopotamian examples that will be taken up in this chapter, the weapon bestowal motif also appears in Egyptian textual and iconographic sources as well as in Hittite texts. It is outside the scope of this dissertation to address all the Egyptian and Hittite examples, though it is worth mentioning a few.

In Egypt, the motif first appears in the late Second Intermediate Period in the second Kamose Stele (ca. 1555-1550 BCE). The motif is, perhaps, most productive in the New Kingdom period, appearing in a wall relief of Sety I at the Hypostyle Hall at Karnak, in Merneptah's so-called "Israel Stele," in reliefs of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu, on an ivory arm ornament of Thutmose IV found at Amarna, and in two stelae of Amenhotep III found near Aswan. After the New Kingdom, the motif appears in the inscriptions of the 22nd dynasty (Sheshonq I) and later in the Greek and Roman periods at Philae and Edfu. For these sources, see, respectively, Labib Habachi, *The Second Stela of Kamose and His Struggle Against the Hyksos Ruler and his Captial* (ADAIK 8; Glückstadt, 1972), 42-43; Emma Swan Hall, *The Pharaoh Smites his Enemies: A Comparative Study* (MÄS 44; München: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1986), 45-46 (Sety I) and 22 and figs. 45-46 (Amenhotep III); Miriam Lichtheim, *The New Kingdom*, vol. 2 of *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 76; Alan Schulman, "Take for Yourself the Sword," in *Essays in Egyptology in Honor of Hans Goedicke*, ed. Betsy M. Bryan and David Lorton (San Antonio, TX: Van Siclen Books, 1994), 268-269; Othmar Keel, "Powerful Symbols of Victory: The Parts Stay the Same, the Actors Change," *JNSL* 25 (1999), 208; Robert Ritner, *The Libyan Anarchy: Inscriptions from Egypt's Third Intermediate Period* (WAW 21; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 202; and Paul Edmund Stanwick, *Portraits of the Ptolemies: Greek Kings as Egyptian Pharaohs* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 7-11.

For general treatments of the motif in Egyptian sources, see K. A. Kitchen and G. A. Gaballa, "Ramesside Varia II," *ZÄS* 96 (1969): 23-28; Othmar Keel, *Wirkmächtige Siegeszeichen im Alten Testament: Ikonographische Studien zu Jos 8, 18-26; Ex 17, 8-13; 2 Kön 13, 14-19 und 1 Kön 22, 11* (OBO 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), 51-76, figs. 21a-b, 22, 25-27, 29-30a, 31-37, 47, 69, 72; Scott M. Morschauer, "The Mighty Sword of Pharaoh," *VA* 4 (1988): 151-164; Alan R. Schulman, *Ceremonial Execution and Public Rewards: Some Historical Scenes on New Kingdom Private Stelae* (OBO 75; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 23, 34-39, 61-62; Schulman, "Take for Yourself the Sword," 265-295; Keel, "Powerful Symbols of Victory," 205-214; and Carola Vogel, "Icon of Propaganda and Lethal Weapon: Further Remarks on the Late Bronze Age Sickle Sword," in *Warfare and Society in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean: Papers arising from a colloquium held at the University of Liverpool, 13th June 2008*, eds. Stephen O'Brien and Daniel Boatright (BARIS 2583; Oxford: Archaeopress, 2013), 71-87.

We also find Hittite examples of gods bestowing weapons, especially in the prayers to the sun goddess Arinna (CTH 376.A §11; CTH 377 iii 9'-15'; CTH 384 §2 3-33; CTH 385.10 §6' ii 4-11). See, respectively, Itamar Singer, *Hittite Prayers* (WAW 11; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2002), 26, 53, 55, 102.

the ancient Near East from Sargonic to Ptolemaic periods. This should not be surprising given its association with the institution of kingship. At its most basic, the literary motif involves a deity giving a weapon to a human king in order to empower him for rule and conquest. The motif can occur in the context of royal coronation or in the midst of a description of battle. Although it is reasonable to assume that a ritual enactment lies behind the literary motif, we have no extant descriptions of such a ritual, let alone when, where, and how often it might have been performed or how such a ritual might have changed over time. Instead we are left with its reflections in literature, most frequently royal inscriptions, but also in prophecy and hymns. Though royal inscriptions are composed with certain aims in mind and therefore should not be accepted uncritically, with the weapon bestowal motif we are interested in how kings portray and legitimize themselves. To this end, royal inscriptions are very much reflections of the image of kingship that rulers wanted to present. In the case of the weapon bestowal motif, it simultaneously emphasizes the king's piety and his heroic martial expertise.

Given the ubiquity of the motif throughout the ancient Near East, one would expect to find it similarly represented in the literature of ancient Israel. Yet there are only three such passages within the entire biblical Hebrew corpus: 2 Samuel 22 || Psalm 18, Ezekiel 21 and Ezekiel 30.²⁴⁹ With the exception of 2 Samuel 22 || Psalm 18, which is a

²⁴⁹ Two other texts that are occasionally mentioned as examples of the weapon bestowal motif are Exod 4:17, 20 and Josh 5:13-15; 8:18, 26. In the former, Moses is commanded to take "this staff" (*maṭṭeh hazzeḥ*) and the narrative continues by explaining that Moses took the "staff of God" (*maṭṭeh hā'ēlōhīm*) when he went back to Egypt. W. H. C. Propp compares this to various examples of the weapon bestowal motif in other ancient Near Eastern sources. The staff, however, does not fit the definition of weapon set out in this study. While an investigation of the staff/rod as a weapon and its greater symbolic significance would be fruitful, it is outside the scope of this study. For more about the implications of Exod 4:17, 20, see: William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 2; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 227-229.

royal psalm attributed to David and comes at the end of his story, it is conspicuously missing from the narratives of Saul, David, Solomon, or any of the kings that followed them. Instead it is an unnamed psalmist and a Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar II, upon whom Yahweh bestows his weapon.

In order to provide a framework through which to understand the biblical examples, it is necessary to establish the wider Near Eastern context for the motif. In this chapter I will examine the evidence for the weapon bestowal motif among Israel's neighbors starting with Mesopotamia before moving onto Levantine examples. On the basis of these examples, I will outline the three primary characteristics of the motif: the worthiness of the recipient; the recipient's role as unparalleled warrior, and the legitimation of violence. Having established the general aspects of the motif, I will demonstrate how pre-exilic 2 Samuel 22 || Psalm 18 fits the patterns established in the broader Near Eastern examples. In contrast, the examples from Ezekiel deviate from the established pattern. In Ezekiel's counternarrative, the tone shifts from heroic to horrific, the agency of the king is denied, and the endpoint is submission to Yahweh in place of the king. These differences result from a combination of Ezekiel's current condition as an exile living in captivity and his creative adaptation of a motif as part of what Alexander calls the "trauma process." Ezekiel's version flips the perspective from the wielder of the

In the latter example, Joshua meets the commander of the host of Yahweh and then in the battle of Ai he stretches out his scimitar (*kidôn*) to achieve victory. T. Römer argues that Joshua might have received this scimitar from the commander of Yahweh's host, since the text does not otherwise explain how he got it. See Thomas Römer, "Joshua's Encounter with the Commander of YHWH's Army (Josh 5:13-15): Literary Construction or Reflection of a Royal Ritual?" in *Warfare, Ritual, and Symbol in Biblical and Modern Contexts* (eds. Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritche Ames, and Jacob L. Wright; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 49-63. While it is certainly possible that the bestowal scene became lost to history through misfortune, it seems more likely that Joshua's weapon is not explained because he is a soldier and would be expected to have a weapon. Additionally, there is no description of the weapon bestowal itself and as such it does not fit within the purview of this chapter.

divine weapon to his victims, turning the symbolic power of royal rhetoric against those in power.

Mesopotamia: The Early Period

The literature of Mesopotamia provides the most abundant source of examples of the weapon bestowal motif along with the longest duration, with texts stretching from Sargon of Akkad (2334-2279 BCE) to the Neo-Babylonian kings (626-539 BCE). The earliest reference to an implied weapon bestowal scene occurs in an Old Babylonian (ca. 2000-1595 BCE) copy of an inscription relating Sargon's victory over Uruk and its king Lugal-zagesi among other cities. Sargon's victory is attributed to the weapon of Ilaba:

16. 50 ENSI₂
17. in ŠITA₂
18. il₃-a-ba₄
19. u₃
20. URU.KI
21. [S]AG.GIŠ.[RA]

He (Sargon) struck 50 city rulers and the city (of Uruk) with the weapon of Ilaba.
(E2.1.1.2 16-21)²⁵⁰

Although the passage does not explicitly describe Ilaba's giving his weapon to Sargon, the implication must be that Sargon received the weapon of Ilaba from the god himself. In this way, Sargon's reception of Ilaba's weapon would parallel Ilaba's receiving a weapon from the god Enlil (E2.1.1.3 caption 1'-6').²⁵¹ The nature of the weapon is left

²⁵⁰ RIME 2, 13.

²⁵¹ Ni 3200 viii 3-8; RIME 2, 16-17; CDLI P227510. The text records an inscription found on a statue from Nippur dealing with a weapon bestowal. Due to the mix of Akkadian and Sumerian (lacking case markers on the nouns), it is not entirely clear who is giving the weapon to whom. Frayne understands the caption as describing Enlil's giving a weapon to Sargon, see Frayne, RIME 2, 242. In contrast, I. J. Gelb and B. Kleinast consider this to be a description Enlil's giving a weapon to Ilaba. See Ignace J. Gelb and Burkhart Kienast, *Die altakkadischen Königsinschriften des dritten Jahrtausends v. chr.* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990), 169. Here I find myself in agreement with Gelb and Kleinast based upon the general

ambiguous since it is referred to as ^{giš}TUKUL, which is a generic term for “weapon.”

This ambiguity in the terminology is the predominate pattern in Mesopotamian examples, though in some cases the weapon is specified.²⁵² The gift of a divine weapon is meant to communicate the support he received from Ilaba, who appears as his personal god in the text. Similarly, Enlil, who is absent in this text but he features in many other texts, gives Sargon the scepter (^{giš}GIDRU) and instructs him (*kullumu*) in E2.1.1.15.²⁵³ It is not until the inscriptions of Narām-Sîn that we begin to see when such a weapon might be given to the king and in what context. Sargon's grandson, Narām-Sîn (2254-2218 BCE), provides additional information that suggests that the reception of a divine weapon might be part of the coronation process. The year name for his ascension reads:

[mu] *na-ra-am*-^dEN.ZU e₂ ^den-^lil₂-^t[a] tukul an-na [š]u ba-ti-a

The year Narām-Sîn received the weapon of heaven from the temple of Enlil.
(E2.1.4)²⁵⁴

The year name is tantalizingly suggestive. Unfortunately, evidence describing the details of Mesopotamian coronation ceremonies are lacking before the Middle Assyrian period (1430 - 934 BCE).²⁵⁵ B. Pongratz-Leisten notes that allusions to elements of the

structure of the Akkadian period inscriptions and emphasis in royal rhetoric. These inscriptions, especially the captions, often front the stressed element, which in cases of giving is usually the dative recipient. The pattern usually follows the order: IDO-Subject-DO-VERB (e.g. E2.1.1.6 caption 1 and E2.1.1.15 12-17). In addition, it seems strange that Sargon (or any king) would miss the opportunity to have his name prominently mentioned in the weapon bestowal motif, if he was meant to be the recipient.

²⁵² For example, Šulgi E 191-201 (*ETCSL* 2.4.2.05) and Sennacherib, Senn 22 v 71-73; RINAP 3.1, 183.

²⁵³ RIME 2, 33-34.

²⁵⁴ RIME 2, 85.

²⁵⁵ The most famous source is the so-called Middle Assyrian coronation ritual. Due to its reference to the gods of Kār Tukultī-Ninurta dwelling in Aššur, it must be dated to a period after Tukultī-Ninurta I's reign. See Karl F. Müller, *Texte zum assyrischen Königsritual* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs Verlag, 1937). There is also an earlier MA reference in the royal inscriptions of Shalmaneser I. The inscription describes his

coronation ritual can be found in administrative and literary texts from the Ur III period as well as an Old Babylonian hymn.²⁵⁶ In some of these references, such as Šulgi E, divine weapons, along with crowns and thrones, are associated with kingship itself.²⁵⁷ Though we cannot be sure that the weapon of An given to Narām-Sîn was part of a coronation ritual, it is significant that he chose this event to mark his first year as king.²⁵⁸ This year name provides evidence that the divine weapons given to the king were physical objects that spent at least some of their time in temples.²⁵⁹ Not only did Narām-Sîn receive a weapon of heaven/An during his first regnal year, in another inscription he credits his victory over Armanum and Ebla to the weapon of Dagan:

30. *in* ^{gis}TUKUL-*ki*
 31. ^d*da-gan*
 32. *mu-sa₂-ar-bi₂-i₃*

receiving royal insignia during his first year: *e-nu-ma aš-šur EN a-na pa-la-hi-šu ki-niš₂ u₂-ta-ni-ma a-na šu-šur SAG.GE₆.GA.A ^{gis}GIDRU ^{gis}TUKUL u₃ ši-bir-ra id-di-na a-ga-a ki-na ša₂ be-lu-ti iš-ru-ka i-na u₄-me-šu-ma i-na šur-ru ŠID-ti-ia* “When Aššur, the lord, truly selected me to serve him, for the prosperity of the black-headed people he gave me the scepter, the weapon, and the staff (and) the true crown of rulership he gave me, at that time, at the beginning of my sangu-ship...” (A.0.77.1 22b-27a; RIMA 1, 183).

²⁵⁶ Beate Pongratz-Leisten, *Religion and Ideology in Assyria* (SANER 6; Bosten: de Gruyter, 2015), 436-437. Similarly, A. Annus sees in *Lugal-e*, especially for our purposes Enlil’s giving divine weapons to Ninurta, a model for the investiture of the kings of the Ur III dynasty. For more, see Amar Annus, *The God Ninurta in the Mythology and Royal Ideology of Ancient Mesopotamia* (SAAS 14; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2002), 18.

²⁵⁷ Šulgi E 191-201 (*ETCSL* 2.4.2.05).

²⁵⁸ J. Töyräänvuori’s argument that the weapon bestowal of Narām-Sîn’s first year represents a “special case of amassing as much symbolic patronage of the gods for his kingship as he could muster,” seems to confuse the issue while also ignoring later evidence. She claims that Narām-Sîn received weapons from Enlil, Dagan, and Nergal at his coronation, however, only Enlil is mentioned in the year name. The weapon bestowal of Dagan, takes place in a different text (E2.1.4.26 i 30 – ii 7; RIME 2, 133) in the context of a campaign and is not likely to refer to a coronation event. Additionally, Narām-Sîn does not act with the weapon of Nergal, but Nergal uses his own weapon to Narām-Sîn’s benefit (E2.1.4.26 i 11-16). Cf. Joanna Töyräänvuori, “Weapons of the Storm God in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Traditions,” *StOr* 112 (2012): 154.

²⁵⁹ This is further supported by examples from the Ur III and Old Babylonian periods. In Šulgi E, the king receives a weapon (šita₂) and a mace (^ēesmitum) from Ninurta’s temple, the Ešumeša (*ETCSL* 2.4.2.05 191-201). A letter from Mari (A.1858) alerts the king to the fact that Adad’s weapons had arrived at Dagan’s temple in Terqa. Further, Harris gives many examples in which divine weapons were rented out by temples. See Harris, “The Journey of the Divine Weapon,” 217-224.

1. *šar-ru₉-ti-su₄*
2. *^dna-ra-am-^dEN.ZU*
3. *da-num₂*
4. *ar-ma-nam^{ki}*
5. *u₃*
6. *eb-la^{ki}*
7. *en-ar*
8. *u₃*
9. *iš-tum-ma*
10. *pu-ti*
11. BURANUN.I₇
12. *a-di₃-ma*
13. *u₂-li-si-im^{ki}*
14. *ni-si₁₁¹*
15. *ša-at*
16. *^dda-gan*
17. BIL₂-iš
18. *i-qi₂-su-šum*
19. *u-ra-iš-ma*

With the weapon of Dagan, who makes his kingship great, Narām-Sîn, the mighty, conquered Armānum and Ebla. And he struck the people, whom Dagan gave to him recently, from the front side of the Euphrates up to Ulišum.

(E2.1.4.26 i 30 – ii 7)²⁶⁰

The implication of this passage seems to be that the bestowal of a god's weapons upon a person gives the recipient power over that god's earthly domain and people. Thus not only did Narām-Sîn receive Dagan's weapons, Dagan's people were given to him and Dagan delivered Rīd-Adad into Narām-Sîn's hands. Significantly, this is an example of a god giving a foreign king the authority and power to conquer his own people. However, it should be noted that this message of support of a foreign king comes from that king's

²⁶⁰ RIME 2, 133. Here I take my transliteration from *UET* 1, 275. The correction to line ii 14, which reads ni-ab₂, is taken from Benjamin R. Foster, "The Siege of Armanum," *JANES* 14 (1982): 29.

own inscription and thus should be viewed with some suspicion.²⁶¹ Likewise, in a prayer to Iškur for help against the Gutians, Utu-ḫegal (? – 2112 BCE)²⁶² says:

88. ^diškur ^{giš}tukul ^den-lil₂-^lle^l ma-an-šum₂
89. a₂-daḫ-ḡu₁₀ ḫe₂-me

“O Iškur, Enlil gave me (his) weapon, be my ally!”
(E2.13.6.4 88-89)²⁶³

This structure is repeated with a slight change in his prayer to Utu:

95. ^dutu gu-ti-um^{ki}
96. ^den-lil₂-le ma-an-sum
97. a₂-daḫ-ḡu₁₀ ḫe₂-me

“O Utu, Enlil gave me the Gutium, be my ally!”
(E2.13.6.4 95-97)²⁶⁴

As we have seen, being given the weapon of a god can be considered parallel to being given dominion over those under the god’s dominion. In the same inscription, Enlil is called “the lord of foreign lands” (^den-lil₂ lugal kur-kur-ra-ke₄), which may explain why Enlil's weapon is able to give Utu-ḫegal power over the Gutians.²⁶⁵ This trend would continue into the Ur III period, when Ur-Namma (2112-2095 BCE) claims to have received an exalted weapon (udug₂ maḫ) from Nunamir (Enlil) in order to subdue foreign and rebellious lands.²⁶⁶ Šulgi (2094-2047 BCE), the son of Ur-Namma, boasts that he

²⁶¹ A similar scene plays out for Narām-Sîn’s grandfather, Sargon, who bows before Dagan in Tuttul before receiving from the deity the upper land, including Mari and Ebla. In this instance, however, there is no mention of Dagan’s weapon playing a role. See E2.1.1.11 20-28 and E2.1.1.12 6’-21’ in RIME 2, 28-29 and 30.

²⁶² The exact dates for Utu-ḫegal, who may have been Ur-Nammu’s brother, are uncertain. For a recent survey, see M. P. Streck, “Utu-ḫeḡal,” *RLA* 14:522-523.

²⁶³ RIME 2, 286.

²⁶⁴ RIME 2, 286.

²⁶⁵ E2.13.6.4 15, RIME 2, 285.

²⁶⁶ Ur-Namma B 52-57 (*ETCSL* 2.4.1.2).

was given the sceptre of kingship (*ĝidru nam-lugal-la₂*) by Enlil and both a weapon (*šita₂*) and the mitum-weapon (*ĝes^{es}mitum*) by Ninurta from the Ešumeša temple.²⁶⁷ Like the reference to the temple of Enlil in Narām-Sîn's ascension year name, the association of a temple location with certain divine weapons suggests that they may have been physical objects.

Mesopotamian Mythological Literature: Enūma Eliš

The weapon bestowal motif appears in a few Mesopotamian mythological texts.²⁶⁸ Most important for our purposes is the motif's expression in the Enūma Eliš due to the text's influence on Mesopotamian culture and scribal training into the Neo-Babylonian period.²⁶⁹ After Ea and Anu are unsuccessful at subduing Tiamat and her monstrous forces, Marduk offers to fight Tiamat if he is given the ability to ordain destinies by the assembly of the gods. In the divine assembly, the gods agree to Marduk's request and give him an unparalleled destiny, kingship over all, and the power of destruction and creation. Afterwards, they bestow upon him emblems of kingship, including a weapon:

28. *iḥ-du-u₂ ik-ru-bu* ^dAMAR.UTU-*ma* LUGAL
29. *uṣ-ṣi-bu-šu* ^{giš}PA ^{giš}GU.ZA *u₃ BAL-a*
30. *id-di-nu-šu ka-ak la maḥ-ra da-'i-i-pu za-a-a-ri*
31. *a-lik-ma ša₂ ti-amat nap-ša₂-tuš pu-ru-u'-ma*
32. *ša-a-ru da-mi-ša₂ a-na pu-uz-ra-tum li-bil-lu-ni*

²⁶⁷ Šulgi E 191-201 (*ETCSL* 2.4.2.05).

²⁶⁸ See also *Lugal-e* 685-695 (*ETCSL* 1.6.2), in which Ninurta is rewarded by Enlil after defeating the Asag demon with the storm of heaven (*ud an-na*), the flood weapon (*ĝes^{es}tukul mar-urus*), and the weapon of heaven (*šita₂ an-na*).

²⁶⁹ For example, BM 36387 described in Petra D. Gesche, *Schulunterricht in Babylonien im ersten Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001), 248-250.

They rejoiced, they proclaimed, ‘Marduk is king!’ They added to him scepter, throne, and rod. They gave him a weapon without rival, which knocks down enemies. (They said) ‘Go! Cut off the life of Tiamat! Let the winds carry her blood as tidings!’ (EE iv 28-32).

As part of his elevation to kingship, Marduk receives a “weapon without rival,” among other royal emblems, from the divine assembly. Given that the weapon bestowal is followed by an injunction to end the life of Tiamat, one might think that the weapon bestowal here has more to do with defeating the enemy than kingship in the abstract. Of course, kingship in the ancient Near East was always tied up with notions of martial aggression in the name of defense and peace. As we have seen, the weapon bestowal can appear in the context of royal ascension and battle preparation. Here both contexts are combined, since Marduk is both proclaimed king and enjoined to defeat the enemy.

The weapon bestowal here, however, functions more symbolically than as a functional plot motivation to give Marduk the weapon he needs. This becomes clear when considering what weapons he actually uses to defeat Tiamat. After he receives the weapon “without rival” from the assembly of gods, he goes on to create a bow, net, and seven winds. These created weapons are the ones that play a role in Tiamat’s defeat. He encircles her with his net, fills her belly with the evil wind, and pierces her with an arrow (EE iv 95-102). Marduk’s “weapon without rival” plays no explicit role.²⁷⁰ To this author, this signals that the weapon bestowal scene is not a plot element that enables Marduk the necessary equipment to defeat Tiamat, but it is an echo of the literary

²⁷⁰ This may be another example of the author of the Enūma Eliš following the “pattern of Ninurta,” who received weapons from Enlil in *Lugal-e*. For the author of the Enūma Eliš borrowing of elements from Ninurta mythology, see W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths* (MC 16; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 225.

representation of kingship, which involves the giving of a weapon. Therefore, since any legitimate king will receive a divine weapon among other royal insignia, it is paramount for Marduk, the divine king par excellence, to also receive such a weapon.

Mesopotamia: The Neo-Assyrian Period

During the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods, references to the weapon bestowal motif proliferated among royal inscriptions. This is especially true of the Neo-Assyrian period for which we have many extant royal inscriptions. With so many examples it is possible to discern different patterns among the references. Unsurprisingly, the king most frequently receives a weapon from Aššur, the national god. Other gods, however, also lend their support to the Assyrian king in the form of divine weapons, including: Ištar,²⁷¹ Ninurta,²⁷² a divine standard (*uriggallu*),²⁷³ and the great gods.²⁷⁴ Additionally, the weapon bestowal motif also occurs in several different contexts: at the time of his selection as king, before battle, and before a hunt. To be clear, with the exception of Assurbanipal's coronation, it is not necessary to assume that each of these literary motifs reflects a real ritual weapon bestowal, though we should also not err in the opposite direction by assuming that there is no realia behind the literary reference either. For example, whether Sennacherib physically received the bow and arrows that Aššur

²⁷¹ Senn 38 5-7 (RINAP 3.1, 238-239), Esar 1 ii 38-39 (RINAP 4, 15), Esar 98 rev. 28 (RINAP 4, 185), Rasam cylinder iii 50-53 and the Hunting reliefs of Assurbanipal slab D in Pamela Gerardi, "Epigraphs and Assyrian Palace Reliefs: The Development of the Epigraphic Text," *JCS* 40 (1988): 27-28.

²⁷² Tiglath-pileser I, A.0.87.1 vi 58-60 (RIMA 2, 25) and Esar 48 53 (RINAP 4, 106).

²⁷³ Shalmaneser III, A.0.102.2 ii 96-97 (RIMA 3, 23-24).

²⁷⁴ Tiglath-pileser I, A.0.87.1 i 49-51 (RIMA 2, 13); Aššur-nāsir-pal II, A.0.101.1 i 26-27 (RIMA 2, 195), A.0.101.17 i 23-25 (RIMA 2, 239), A.0.101.20 30-32 (RIMA 2, 264); and Esar 98 rev. 7-8 (RINAP 4, 184).

used to defeat Tiamat before the battle of Halulê is uncertain. For our purposes, however, the distinction is not important. The literary description of divine support through bestowal of a god's weapon was part of the arsenal of royal legitimation. Given the abundance of such references, I will limit myself to a few representative samples from the Sargonid kings since they are much closer chronologically with the biblical texts.

Sargon II

In his Khorsabad annals, Sargon II (721 – 705 BCE) mentions the defeat and deportation of several Arabian tribes in his seventh regnal year:²⁷⁵

- 120b. ^{lu2}ta-[m]u-di ^l[^{u2}i-ba]-a-di-di
 121. [^{lu2}]mar-si-ma-[{ni}] ^{lu2}ḥa-ia-pa-a ^{kur}ar-ba-a-a ru-u₂-qu-ti a-ši-bu-ut
 mad-ba-ri^l ^{lu2}ak-lu ^{lu2}ša₂-pi-ru la i-du-ma
 122. ša a-na LUGAL ia-im-ma bi-lat-su-un la iš-šu-ma i-na ^{gis}TUKUL
^daš-šur be-l[_{i2}]-ia u₂-šam-qit-su-nu-ti-ma si-it-ta-te-šu₂-nu as-su-ḥa-am-
 ma
 123a. i-na ^{uru}sa-me-ri-na u₂-še-šib

The Tamudi, Ibadidi, Marsimani, Hayappa, distant Arabia, inhabitants of the steppe, who knew neither overseer nor commander, those who had not brought tribute to any king, I struck down with the weapon of Aššur. I deported the remainder. I settled (them) in Samaria.
 (Annals, ll. 122-123a)²⁷⁶

In this instance, we have an indirect reference to the weapon bestowal. The inscription does not describe how Sargon II came to wield the weapon of Aššur, only that he used it to defeat his enemies. This is similar to Sargon of Akkad's usage of the weapon of Ilaba.

²⁷⁵ There has been some debate on when the deportation actually took place, since it is followed by a reference to tribute from Egypt, Samsi, queen of the Arabians, and Ita'amra the Sabaeen, which is dated to Sargon's fifth regnal year in the prism texts. For more on this and the likely 715 BCE date of the Arabian deportation, see Nadav Na'aman and Ran Zadok, "Sargon II's Deportations to Israel and Philistia (716-708 B.C.)," *JCS* 40 (1988): 43.

²⁷⁶ Andreas Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons II aus Khorsabad* (Göttingen: Cuvillier Verlag, 1994), 110.

This reference serves a dual purpose of portraying the king's empowered state as he already has the divine weapon in his possession, as well as demonstrating his suitability to be king, since he was given, at least according to the logic of the narrative, Aššur's weapon. For a more explicit reference to the weapon bestowal motif, we will turn to Sargon II's son, Sennacherib.

Sennacherib

Perhaps the most well-known battle from Sennacherib's (704 – 681 BCE) campaigns is his eighth campaign, specifically the battle at Halulê against a coalition of Babylonian and Elamite forces in 691 BCE. E. Weissert has noted that the scribe of this passage in the Chicago Prism uses references to the Enūma Eliš to cast the battle onto the cosmic plane.²⁷⁷ The citizens of Babylon are characterized as “wicked *gallû*-demons,” a reference to Tiamat's forces in the Enūma Eliš.²⁷⁸ The text describes these overwhelming forces as “like a swarm of locusts” (*kīma tibût aribi*).²⁷⁹ In the face of these forces, he prays to the gods for victory and they hear and come to support him. He subsequently describes equipping himself for battle. This entails: putting on his helmet, getting in his chariot, and taking up the bow and arrows, that Aššur had given him:

- 62b. *a-na-ku a-na* ^d*aš-šur*
 63. ^d30 ^dUTU ^dEN ^dMUATI ^dU.GUR ^dINANNA *ša* NINA^{ki}
 64. ^dINANNA *ša* ^{uru}LIMMU₂-DINGIR DINGIR.MEŠ *ti-ik-li-ia*
 65. *a-na ka-ša₂-di* ^{lu₂}KUR₂ *dan-ni am-ḥur-šu₂-nu-ti-ma*
 66. *su-pe-e-a ur-ru-ḥi-iš iš-mu-u₂ il-li-ku*

²⁷⁷ Elnathan Weissert, “Creating a Political Climate: Literary Allusions to Enūma Eliš in Sennacherib's Account of the Battle of Halule,” in *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten. XXXIX^e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Heidelberg 6-10. Juli 1992*, eds. H. Waetzold and H. Hauptmann (Heidelberg: Heidelberg Orientverlag, 1997), 192-195.

²⁷⁸ Weissert, “Creating a Political Climate,” 193.

²⁷⁹ Senn. 22 v 56; RINAP 3.1, 182.

67. *re-šu-ti la-ab-biš an-na-dir-ma at-tal-bi-ša₂*
68. *si-ri-ia-am hu-li-ia-am si-mat ši-il-ti*
69. *a-pi-ra ra-šu-u₂-a i-na* ^{giš}GIGIR ME₃-ia
70. *šir-ti sa-pi-na-at za-’i-i-ri i-na ug-gat*
71. *lib-bi-ia ar-ta-kab ha-an-ṭiš* ^{giš}PAN *dan-na-tu₂*
72. *ša* ^daš-šur *u₂-šat-li-ma i-na ŠUⁱⁱ-ia aš-bat*
73. ^{giš}šil-ta-hu *pa-ri-i’ nap-ša₂-ti at-muḥ rit-tu-u-a*
74. *še-er gi-mir um-ma-na-te na-ki-ri lem-nu-ti*
75. *u₄-mi₃-iš šar-piš al-sa-a* GIM ^dIŠKUR *aš₂-gu-um*
76. *i-na qi₂-bit* ^daš-šur EN GAL EN-ia *a-na šid-di u pu-ti*
77. GIM *ti-ib me-ḥe-e šam-ri a-na* ^{lu₂}KUR₂ *a-zi-iq*
78. *i-na* ^{giš}TUKUL.MEŠ ^daš-šur EN-ia *u₃ ti-ib ME₃-ia ez-zi*
79. *i-rat-su-un a-ne₂-e’-ma suḥ-ḥur-ta-šu₂-nu aš₂-kun*
80. ERIM.ḪI.A *na-ki-ri i-na uš-ši mul-mul-li*
81. *u₂-ša₂-qir-ma gim-ri ADDA.MEŠ-šu₂-nu u₂-pal-li-ša₂*
82. UD-zi-zi-iš ...

I myself prayed to Aššur, Sîn, Šamaš, Bēl, Nabû, Nergal, Ištar of Nineveh, Ištar of Arbela, the gods, my helpers, in order to defeat the strong enemy. Quickly, they heard my prayers (and) came to my aid. I went on a rampage like a lion. I put on leather armor. I put a helmet suitable for battle on my head. In the rage of my heart, I rode in my exalted battle chariot, which flattens my enemies. Quickly I took the strong bow, which Aššur placed in my hands (and) I grasped the arrow that cuts off life (in) my hand. Like a storm, I shouted caustically against the entire army of the wicked enemy. Like Adad, I roared. By the command of Aššur, the great lord, my lord, I blew like the onset of a furious storm against the enemy on the flanks and front lines. With the weapons of Aššur, my lord, and the onset of my furious battle I put them to flight. I made them retreat. I pierced the army of the enemy with *uššu*-arrows and *mulmullu*-arrows. I punctured all their corpses like pin-cushions^(?).²⁸⁰
(Senn 22 v 62-82a)²⁸¹

Although the weapon bestowal is not presently enacted in the drama of the narrative, it is still described as a past event from the perspective of the moment of grasping. Whether the bestowal is meant to refer back to the king’s coronation, the beginning of the campaign, or between the moment of prayer and preparation for battle is

²⁸⁰ Here I am following George’s translation of the hapax legomenon UD-*ziziš* as “pin-cushions.” The exact form of this word is not yet known. For a summary of options, see *CAD T*, s.v. *tamziziš*, 168.

²⁸¹ RINAP 3.1, 182-183.

uncertain. Regardless, its appearance at this point in the narrative serves to confirm the king's divine support.²⁸² Not only does Sennacherib have the bow of Aššur, but as Weissert notes, the description of the arrow as one that “cuts off life” (*pāri' napšāti*) is a reference to the divine assembly's injunction to Marduk, or more likely to Aššur in the assyrianized version, to “Go! Cut off the life of Tiamat!” (*alikma ša Tiāmat napšatuš puru'ma*).²⁸³ In addition to being equipped with divine weaponry, Sennacherib acts like a god as he roars like Adad and blows like a storm. After a reference to the weapon bestowal, the king goes into action and defeats his foes. The king is the primary acting agent. When we do hear from the perspective of the enemy it is to show their hopeless position and to contrast their cowardice with the king's courage.²⁸⁴ As we have seen, the bestowal of divine weapons upon a king serves both to mark him as chosen and legitimate by the gods as well as empowering him for combat, in this case against forces characterized as mythological evil. The tone of such passages is invariably heroic, as the king is armed in order to defeat his and, by extension, the gods' enemies. Turning to two examples from Esarhaddon, we will see that references to the weapon bestowal motif could occur in the context of royal accession as well as propaganda meant to intimidate.

²⁸² A few scholars have seen in this and other references to received divine weapons in the Neo-Assyrian texts indication that such weapons were ritually bestowed upon the king before each battle. See Anna Maria G. Capomacchia and Marta Rivaoli, “Peace and War: A Ritual Question,” in *Krieg Und Frieden Im Alten Vorderasien: 52e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, International Congress of Assyriology and Near Eastern Archaeology, Münster, 17.-21. Juli 2006*, eds. Manfred Dietrich and Hans Neumann (AOAT 401; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 176. This seems unnecessary. Such references may refer to a bestowal before a campaign or more likely they harken back to weapons that the king would receive at his ascension, such as the weapon given during Assurbanipal's Coronation Hymn (SAA 3 11: 27).

²⁸³ EE iv 31; Weissert, “Creating a Political Climate,” 194.

²⁸⁴ The text describes Sennacherib slaughtering his enemies like animals, mutilating their corpses, and terrifying them so much that they lost control over their bowels. See Senn. 22 vi 2-12 and 29-35; RINAP 3.1, 183-184.

Esarhaddon

Esar 98, also referred to as Mnm A, is engraved on a basalt stele with the image of Esarhaddon discovered in Sam'al (modern Zincirli). The stele depicts the Assyrian king, flanked by his two sons, standing before a series of divine symbols with two captives at his feet, likely Abdi-Milkutti and Ushanahuru son of Taharqa.



Fig. 3.1. Esarhaddon's Monument A (Mnm A)²⁸⁵

²⁸⁵ "The Neubauer Expedition to Zincirli: Inscriptions," The University of Chicago, <https://zincirli.uchicago.edu/page/inscriptions>.

The stele, a massive 3.46 meters in height, was erected in the gate leading to the citadel and stood upon a stone pedestal, itself 1.11 meters in height.²⁸⁶ The stele was inscribed on both the front and back and records the king's prowess in battle and his victory over Taharqa. B. Porter argues persuasively that the purpose of the stele was to emphasize Esarhaddon (680 – 669 BCE) as the punisher of rebellion in order to cow Sam'al into remaining loyal.²⁸⁷ To this end, Porter demonstrates that both the stele's iconography and text work together to drive home the point that those who cross the Assyrian king will suffer the consequences. In addition to the many textual motifs noted by Porter, which serve as a warning to those considering revolt, I would add two instances of the weapon bestowal motif that also serve this purpose. The first reference to a weapon bestowal occurs amidst a list of Esarhaddon's laudable attributes, including his piety (ll. 34 – r. 7) and his martial excellence (ll. r. 7b – r. 14). Here, the description of Esarhaddon's warrior attributes begins with the weapon bestowal:

r. 7b. ^{giš}TUKUL.MEŠ-š_u2-nu la pa-du-u-ti a-na š_i-rik-ti
 r. 8. EN-ti-š_u2 iš-ru-ku LUGAL [ša] EN EN.MEŠ ^dAMAR.UTU
 r. 9. UGU LUGAL.MEŠ-ni ša kib-rat LIMMU₂-ti u₂-ša₂-te-ru u₂-šar-bu-u
 r. 10a. EN-u-su

(the one) to whose lordship they [the great gods] gave their pitiless weapons as a present; the king, whom the lord of lords, Marduk, made surpass the kings of the four corners; he made his lordship great. (Esar 98 r. 7b-10a)²⁸⁸

In the lines above, the weapon bestowal is followed by a description of how Marduk made his kingship the greatest (ll. r. 8b – 10b). These lines set the stage for the king's

²⁸⁶ Barbara Nevling Porter, "Assyrian Propaganda for the West: Esarhaddon's Stelae for Til Barsip and Sam'al," *ANESS* 7 (2000): 156.

²⁸⁷ Porter, "Assyrian Propaganda for the West," 175.

²⁸⁸ RINAP 4, 184.

warrior persona to be detailed. Having been equipped with weapons from the great gods and with the most exalted kingship, the king is now empowered to dispense divine justice, making all bow down and destroying all his enemies. For those who could read the inscription, this would have served as a frightful reminder to anyone considering rebellion.²⁸⁹ If Esarhaddon wields the weapons of the gods themselves what chance do mortals have against him in battle?

The second reference to a weapon bestowal comes after a series of assertions of Esarhaddon's exceptional qualities, including being skilled at combat. The reference to a divine weapon again comes connected with the very notion of kingship, as was the case with ll. r. 7b – r. 8a, this time with the items in reversed order:

- r. 25b. AN.ŠAR₂ dUTU dAG u₃ dAMAR.UTU
r. 26. EN.MEŠ-ia MAḪ.MEŠ ša la in-nen-nu-u qi₂-bit-su-un LUGAL-u-ut
la ša₂-na-an
r. 27. a-na šim-ti-ia i-ši-mu dīš-tar be-el-tum ra-a`-i-mat SANGA-ti-ia₂
r. 28. gišPAN dan-na-tu giššil-ta-ḫu geš-ru mu-šam-qit la ma-gi-ri tu-šat-
me-ḫa
r. 29. rit-tu-u-a bi-ib-lat lib₃-bi-ia tu-šak-ši-da-an-ni-ma nap-ḫar mal-ki
r. 30a. la kan-šu₂-ti tu-šak-ni-ša₂ še-pu-u-a

Aššur, Šamaš, Nabû, and Marduk, my exalted lords, whose command cannot be altered, they decreed a kingship without rival as my fate. Ištar, lordess who loves my priestly office, caused my hand to grasp a strong bow (and) a powerful arrow, which strikes down the insubmissive. She caused me to obtain the desire of my heart. She made all the insubordinate kings bow at my foot.
(Esar 98 r. 25b-30a)²⁹⁰

²⁸⁹ Of course, who exactly would have been able to read this is a matter of some debate. Porter considers the inscription to be available to Assyrian officials, foreign dignitaries, and the city's elite who could afford to pay a scribe. Cf. Porter, "Assyrian Propaganda for the West," 175. In contrast, I. Eph'al thinks the inscription was intended to be read by future generations (as per the end of the inscription, ll. r. 56b – r. 57, "May a future ruler look upon a stele written in my name, read (it) aloud (while standing) in front of it, anoint (it) with oil, make an offering, (and) praise the name of the god Aššur, my lord."). See Israel Eph'al, "Esarhaddon, Egypt, and Shubria: Politics and Propaganda," *IEJ* 57 (2005): 108.

²⁹⁰ RINAP 4, 185.

This passage also gives an indication of the purpose of such weapons, i.e. to make those refusing to bow to the king, and by extension the gods, submit to his rule. The bow is even described as that which “strikes down the insubmissive” (*mušamqit lā māgiri*). For a city with a recent history or rebellion, the message would have been clear to those who could read it.²⁹¹ Not only is the Assyrian king supported by the gods and charged with maintaining order, he has been given divine weapons whose purpose is to put down revolt. Though the gods and Ištar in particular cause other kings to bow before him, the role of the Assyrian king is not a passive one. The passage above was followed by a passage emphasizing the king’s divine duty to punish those who sinned against Aššur (ll. r. 30b – r. 37a) and then the example of Egypt’s demise at Esarhaddon’s hands (ll. r. 37b – 50a). Though the tone of this passage may be frightening, at least to the people of Sam’al, the king and his actions are understood within the heroic framework. The king’s actions are supported by the gods themselves and those whom the king fights are rebellious and have committed offences against Aššur. The king’s victory is never in question. While the exact context of the weapon bestowal is not mentioned in these passages, the association with being given kingship may place the reference during the king’s ascension along with other royal insignia or before his campaign against Egypt.

Esar 48, or Aššur-Babylon A (AsBbA), principally deals with the restoration of divine statues, especially those of Babylonian gods carried away during Sennacherib’s sack of the city. After the introduction (ll. 1-51), the narrative begins by describing how in his very first year he received good signs for restoring the gods and their temples.

²⁹¹ Porter, “Assyrian Propaganda for the West,” 143.

Esarhaddon's first year is depicted as the time when he received the insignia of kingship, including a divine weapon:

52. *ina* SAG LUGAL-*ti-ia* *ina maḥ-re-e* BALA-*ia* *ša*₂ AN.ŠAR₂ LUGAL
DINGIR.MEŠ *ina* ^{giš}GU.ZA <AD>-*ia* *ṭa-biš* *u*₂-*še-ši-ban-ni*
53. ^da-num AGA-*šu*₂ ^dEN.LIL₂ ^{giš}GU.ZA-*šu*₂ ^dnin-urta ^{giš}TUKUL-*šu*₂
^dU.GUR *ša*₂-*lum-mat-su* *u*₂-*šat-li-mu-in-ni-ma*

At the beginning of my kingship, in the first (year) of my reign, in which Aššur, king of the gods, sat me on the throne of my <father> graciously, Anu bestowed upon me his crown, Enlil his throne, Ninurta his weapon, (and) Nergal his radiance.
(Esar 48 52-53)²⁹²

Here, like Shalmaneser I's ascension year, the reception of the divine weapon is tied to royal inauguration and the bestowal of other royal insignia. Here the notion of king as warrior is not in focus (though his status as warrior is expressed briefly in the introduction, ll. 44-46). Instead, the weapon among other insignia demonstrates that Esarhaddon is a true king and capable of fulfilling the gods' commands, in this case their restoration. As Porter notes, the subject (restoration of Babylonian gods) and the inclusion of prominent Babylonian gods among those who have selected Esarhaddon is meant to appeal to his Babylonian subjects.²⁹³ This "unifying approach" may also explain the selection of Ninurta as the one to bestow his weapon upon Esarhaddon.²⁹⁴ Most commonly, it is Aššur who bestows his weapon upon the king at the start of his reign.²⁹⁵

²⁹² RINAP 4, 106.

²⁹³ Barbara Nevling Porter, *Images, Power, and Politics: Figurative Aspects of Esarhaddon's Babylonian Policy* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1993), 123.

²⁹⁴ It is possible this is less a conciliatory gesture with Babylon and more to do with the identification of the king with Ninurta, as in the ritual text SAA 3 39. See Annus, *The God Ninurta*, 27 and 99.

²⁹⁵ For example, Shalmaneser I A.0.77.1 24-25 (RIMA 1, 183); Shalmaneser III A.0.102.1 11-13 (RIMA 3, 8); and Sennacherib Nr. 43 6 (RINAP 3.2, 57).

A more detailed description of the ascension year weapon bestowal (also by Ninurta) comes from the reign of Assurbanipal.

Aššurbanipal

Perhaps the best example of the weapon bestowal motif occurring in connection with the king's ascension is the so-called "Coronation Hymn of Assurbanipal."²⁹⁶ Though it is rightly characterized as a hymn, Pongratz-Leisten notes that the reference to a cultic official and the spoken blessing argue for a cultic setting.²⁹⁷ The great gods are invoked to bless Assurbanipal (668 – 627 BCE) with many good fortunes (including a strong weapon). As with Esar 48, there is a description of the royal insignia given to the king by various gods. The hymn ends by enjoining the great gods to place a "weapon of battle and combat" in the king's hands in order that he might rule:

21. [UD].MEŠ GID₂.DA.MEŠ MU.AN.[N]A.MEŠ *ma-a'-ra da¹-[ti]*
 22. [^{gis}TU]KUL *daⁿ-nu* BALA GID₂.^{ra}DA¹ M[U.AN.N]A.MEŠ *tuḥ-di*
 M[U] DUG₃.GA [0]
 r.1. [*ni-ib* MU] DUG₃.GA ŠA₃-*bi hu-ud* ŠA₃-*bi ge-er-ra¹* SIG₅ *u₃ a-ša₂-*
rid-du-t[u]
 r.2. UGU LUGAL.MEŠ *a-na maš-šur-DU₃-A* MAN KUR-*aš-šur* EN-*ni*
di-na-niš-šu₂
 (...)
 r.5. ^d*a-num it-ta-[d]in* AGA-^{[š}*u₂* ^d+EN.LIL₂ *it-ta-din* ^{gis}GU.ZA-^š*u₂*
 r.6. ^dNIN.URTA *it-ta-din* ^{gis}TUKUL-^š*u₂*
 r.7. ^dU.GUR *it-ta-din* *ša₂-lum-mat-ra¹su¹*
 r.8. *um-ta-i-ir-ma* ^dPA.TUG₂ *ma-li-ki ma-ḥar-šu₂ ul-ziz*
 (...)
 r. 17. *ka-ak* MURUB₄ *u* ME₃ *mul-la-a qa-tuš-šu₂*
 r. 18. *in-na-niš-šu-ma* UN.MEŠ *šal-mat-SAG.DU le-pu-ša₂ re-u-u₂-sin*

Give to Assurbanipal, king of Assyria, our lord, long days, many years, a strong weapon, a long reign, years of abundance, a good name, renown, satisfaction, happiness, good campaign(s) and leadership over kings! (...)

²⁹⁶ SAA 3, 11.

²⁹⁷ Pongratz-Leisten, *Religion and Ideology in Assyria*, 214.

Anu has given his crown, Enlil has given his throne, Ninurta has given his weapon, Nergal has given his radiance, and Nusku appointed and caused advisors to stand before him. (...) Set the weapon of battle and combat in his hand! Give him the black-headed people so that he may shepherd them!
(SAA 3 11 21-22, r. 1-2, 5-8, 17-18)²⁹⁸

The common theme connecting divine weapons with the very notion of kingship, appears again with the final blessing. The request for a “weapon of battle and combat” is paralleled with a request that the black-headed people also be given to Assurbanipal.

Though the majority of examples of Assyrian portrayals of the weapon bestowal motif are textual, there is one established example of the iconographic representation of this motif.²⁹⁹ The Broken Obelisk of Aššur-bēl-kala (1073-1056) dates to the Middle Assyrian period. The limestone obelisk was discovered between the palaces of Sennacherib and Aššurbanipal at Nineveh near the Ištar temple and features a carved panel, in which the king stands before divine symbols holding two prisoners via a rope.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁸ SAA 3, 27.

²⁹⁹ There is a problematic and contentious potential iconographic example, in a bronze helmet with the depiction of a coronation scene dating to around the time of Aššurnasirpal. See Hermann Born and Ursula Seidl, *Schutzwaffen aus Assyrien und Urartu*, vol. 4 of *Sammlung Axel Guttman*, ed. Hermann Born (Mainz, von Zabern, 1995), 1-47. The first, and most significant problem is that some scholars have suggested that this unprovenanced helmet is a modern forgery. See Oscar White Muscarella, *The Lie Became Great: The Forgery of Ancient Near Eastern Cultures* (SAAA 1; Groningen: Styx, 2000), 184-186. The second issue, for our purposes, is the nature of the object that Aššur presents to the king. H. Born and U. Seidl take the object to be a diadem. C. Ambos considers it the tasseled crown-binding and O. Muscarella thinks it is a poorly carved axe. So, for this object to be relevant to the weapon bestowal motif, it would have to be genuine and depict the bestowal of a divine axe. This is not impossible, since Aššur sends his axes to go at Sargon II's side in Sargon's Letter to Aššur. That said, the difficulties with authenticity and interpretation are significant enough to warrant its exclusion. For more on this object and its interpretation, see Angelika Berlejung, “Die Macht der Insignien: Überlegungen zu einem Ritual der Investitur des Königs und dessen königsideologischen Implikationen,” *UF* 28 (1996): 19, 35; Claus Ambos, *Der König im Gefängnis und das Neujahrsfest im Herbst: Mechanismen der Legitimation des babylonischen Herrschers im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr. und ihre Geschichte* (Dresden: ISLET, 2013), 103; and Pongratz-Leisten, *Religion and Ideology in Assyria*, 216, 446.

³⁰⁰ BM 118898; Jutta Börker-Klähn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen und vergleichbare Felsreliefs*, 2 vols. (*BaF* 4; Mainz: von Zabern, 1982), 178, fig. 131.

Text flanks the image on either side and details victories campaigns, a hunting expedition at the command of Ninurta and Nergal, and building projects (A.O.89.7).³⁰¹



Fig. 3.2. The Broken Obelisk³⁰²

In the image, two hands emerge from a winged sun-disk. One of the hands holds a down-turned bow, which is position right above the king's open palm. Although the text does not contain a reference to the weapon bestowal motif, most scholars read this as an

³⁰¹ RIMA 2, 99-105.

³⁰² "Broken Obelisk," The British Museum, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?partid=1&assetid=269323001&objectid=277955.

example of a god (either Aššur or Šamaš) giving the bow to the king.³⁰³ In this way, Aššur-bel-kala would be like Tiglath-pileser I (A.O.87.1 vi 58-60),³⁰⁴ who received a bow from Ninurta and Nergal for hunting, or Sennacherib and Esarhaddon, who received a powerful bow from Aššur (Senn 22 v 71-73, 78-81; Esar 8 ii 8'-13') and Ištar (Esar 1 ii 38-39).

Throughout the Neo-Assyrian examples, we have seen the bestowal of a divine weapon upon a king associated with empowerment for conquest and delivering justice, from the Assyrian perspective, through violence. Additionally, the presentation of a divine weapon is associated with the very notion of kingship and legitimacy, as references to the royal insignia demonstrate. Only the true king is qualified to and will receive a divine weapon. This is, perhaps, unsurprising for an empire with such a bellicose reputation. The tradition of associating royal legitimacy with martial prowess, however, is long established in Mesopotamia and hardly an Assyrian innovation. As will become clear from the examples below, the same themes of conquest empowerment and royal legitimation continue into the Neo-Babylonian period.

³⁰³ Tallay Ornan, "Idols and Symbols: Divine Representations in First Millennium Mesopotamian Art and Its Bearing on the Second Commandment," *TA* 31 (2004), 108; Tallay Ornan, "Who Is Holding the Lead Rope? The Relief of the Broken Obelisk," *Iraq* 69 (2007): 60; Beate Pongratz-Leisten, "Divine Agency and Astralization of the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism*, ed. Beate Pongratz-Leisten (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 172; Christopher G. Frechette, *Mesopotamian Ritual-prayers of "Hand-lifting" (Akkadian Šuillas): An Investigation of Function in Light of the Idiomatic Meaning of the Rubric* (AOAT 379; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012), 72; Römer, "Joshua's Encounter with the Commander of YHWH's Army," 58-59; and Mattias Karlsson, *Relations of Power in Early Neo-Assyrian State Ideology* (SANER 10; Boston: de Gruyter, 2016), 116 n. 141. For a contrasting view, in which the king is returning the divinely given weapon to the god, see Capomacchia and Rivaroli, "Peace and War," 180-181.

³⁰⁴ RIMA 2, 25.

The Neo-Babylonian Period: Nabopolassar

Nabopolassar's Etemenanki Inscription (C31), which was found in the Etemenanki itself, celebrates his victory over Assyria and his restoration of the Etemenanki.³⁰⁵ It is only after Nabopolassar (626 – 605 BCE) defeats the Assyrians that Marduk could commission him to rebuild.³⁰⁶ In order to achieve this Nabopolassar is given the weapon of Erra:

19. *e-nu-ma i-na qi₂-bi₂-a-tim*
20. *^dna-bi-um u₃ ^dAMAR.UTU*
21. *na-ra-am šar-ru₄-ti-ia*
22. *u₃ ^{giš}TUKUL-ki₂ da-num₂*
23. *ša ^dir₃-ra ra-šu-ub-bu*
24. *mu-uš-<ta>-ab-ri-qu za-a₃-ri-ia*
25. *su-ba-ru-um a-na-ru*

When by the commands of Nabû and Marduk who love my kingship and (with) the strong weapon of awesome Erra, who constantly strikes my enemies with lightning, I struck the Subarean (Assyria).
(C31/1 19-25)³⁰⁷

This passage serves as an indirect reference to the weapon bestowal, since the actual giving of Erra's weapon is not described. It is with the divine weapon, however, that Nabopolassar conquers the Assyrians. This reference would be at home among any of the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions. That Erra gives the Babylonian king his weapon for conquest and, as we will see, to protect the land is evident from two texts from Neriglissar (559 – 556 BCE).

³⁰⁵ Rocío Da Riva, *The Inscriptions of Nabopolassar, Amēl-Marduk and Neriglissar* (SANER 3; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 77-92.

³⁰⁶ Hanspeter Schaudig, "The Restoration of Temples in the Neo- and Late Babylonian Periods: Royal Prerogative as the Setting for Political Argument," in *From the Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible*, eds. Mark J. Boda and Jamie R. Novotny (AOAT 366; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010), 151.

³⁰⁷ Da Riva, *The Inscriptions of Nabopolassar, Amēl-Marduk and Neriglissar*, 80-81.

Neriglissar

In an inscription of Neriglissar (560 – 556 BCE), the king explains how he improved the eastern canal of Babylon, named Lībil-ḫegalla, with walls of bitumen and baked brick. As part of the inscription, Neriglissar, who had usurped the throne from Nebuchadnezzar II's son and successor, Amel-Marduk, justifies selection for kingship by virtue of his great piety and his favor among the gods. This favor is expressed, in part, by his receiving of a just scepter (NIG₂.GIDRU *išarti*) by Nabû and the weapons of Erra. The just scepter is given so that the king's people will prosper, while the weapons empower the king to defeat his enemies:

12. [ša za]- 'i-ri na-a-ri a-a-bi ka-ša-dam
13. [^d]ir₃-ra ša-ga-pu₂-ru DINGIR.DINGIR
14. [id]-di-nu-šu ka-ak-ku-šu

(the one to) whom Erra, mighty one of the gods, gave his weapons to strike the enemy (and) conquer the foe.
(C22 i 12-14)³⁰⁸

Similarly, in an inscription found in the South Palace at Babylon, Neriglissar explains how he renovated his palace and invokes his patron god, Marduk, to bless him and his palace for generations to come. Again, as part of the king's worthiness to rule, the inscription begins by describing how he received a just scepter from Nabû and weapons from Erra. In this case, however, the function of both symbolic objects is focused on their benefit to the people of Babylonia. The scepter allows the king to fulfill the role of shepherd for the people, while the weapons of Erra enable him to protect the land and the people:

³⁰⁸ Da Riva, *The Inscriptions of Nabopolassar, Amēl-Marduk and Neriglissar*, 121.

12. *a-na e-ti-ri ni-šim ga-ma-lu ma-a-ti*

13. ^d*ir₃-ra ša-ga-pu₂-ru* DINGIR.DINGIR *id-di-nu-šu ka-ak-ku-šu*

(the one to) whom Erra, mighty one of the gods, gave his weapons to save the people (and) favor the land.

(C23/1 i 12-13)³⁰⁹

Both the Lībil-hegalla Inscription (C22) and the Royal Palace Inscription (C23) of Neriglissar begin with his being chosen by Marduk for kingship. The king's selection involves being given weapons from Erra as instruments of violence against his enemies and powerful objects to help protect the people over which the gods had given him charge. The examples above highlight the dual martial responsibilities associated with the divine weapons. They are meant to invest the king with the power to crush his enemies and by extension to protect his people.

Nebuchadnezzar II

The final Neo-Babylonian reference comes from Nebuchadnezzar II's Nabû acrostic, which praises Nabû and describes the king's divine selection. The final lines of the acrostic describe how Nebuchadnezzar is equipped for his position:

38. [*u₂-ša-at-m*] *i-iḫ ri-it-tu-uš-šu* ^{giš}NIG₂.GIDRU *i-ša-ar-tum mu-rap-pi-ša₂-at ma-a-[tu₄]*

39. [*u₂-ma²-al²-li²?*] *i-na i-di-šu* ^{giš}TUKUL.MEŠ *da-an-nu-tu ka-mu-u₂ na-ki-ri-šu*

40. [*u₂-ša-at*]-*li-im-šu* ^{giš}TUKUL.AN *la pa-du-u₂ ka-ši-du a-a-bi u₃ za-ma-a-nu*

³⁰⁹ Da Riva, *The Inscriptions of Nabopolassar, Amēl-Marduk and Neriglissar*, 128.

[He made] his hand [grasp] the just scepter, which makes the land wide;
[He gave] him strong weapons, which defeat his enemies; [He bestowed]
on him the pitiless mace, which conquers foes and hostile forces.
(BM 55469 38-40)³¹⁰

Because of the broken nature of the beginning of the lines, it is not entirely clear which god or gods should be the subject. Although the hymn is dedicated to Nabû, the subject shifts to Marduk in l. 34, after which there is no extant switch to another subject. George and Oshima argue that it was normally Nabû's responsibility to bestow the scepter, not Marduk's. Therefore, even though there does not appear to be enough room in the break to add a new subject, according to their view we should understand Nabû as the implicit subject. To this, I might add that it is not Nabû but Erra who normally bestows the weapon upon the Babylonian king, and thus we should understand Erra (or even Ninurta) as the implied subject of lines 39-40.

One unusual feature of this bestowal reference is the specification of the weapon. As is often the case, the weapon given to the king is the generic ^{giš}TUKUL / *kakku* in line 39. However, the following line gives a more specific reference, ^{giš}TUKUL.AN or *mittu* "mace."

Summarizing the Mesopotamian evidence, we see a focus on the worthiness of the recipient, an emphasis on the recipient's role as warrior, and the legitimation of imperial violence. Among the Mesopotamian examples, the weapon bestowal motif is restricted to the king. The bestowal and subsequent possession of the weapon was tied to the very notion of kingship. For example, in Esar 98 mentioned above, the Esarhaddon's receiving of weapons takes place after a description of how the gods decreed his fate to

³¹⁰ The text is based on Oshima's reading of a new hand copy. See Takayashi Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers: Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi and the Babylonian Theodicy* (ORA 14; Tübingen: Mohr Siebek, 2014), 475-476.

be a kinship without rival (Esar 98 r. 25b-27a). As the human with the closest relationship to the gods, the king is uniquely worthy to receive such weapons.

It is no surprise to find that divine weapons were connected to the king's role as unparalleled warrior, both punishing his enemies and protecting his people from external threats. In this way, the weapon bestowal served to both mark the king as the one selected by the gods and empower him through supernatural armament. Given the motif's frequent appearance in royal inscriptions, the tone and setting of the motif in Mesopotamia is invariably heroic. The king takes the role of valiant warrior. The king receives the help of the gods by means of divine weapons and thus is empowered to defeat his enemies. The king represents the gods and is the primary actor who punishes their enemies and brings such wicked men to justice.

Finally, the bestowal of divine weapons not only empowers the king for battle, but legitimates his use of violence against his enemies. In some texts the possession of a divine weapon is linked with permission to rule or conquer the people of that god. The king's enemies are portrayed in every case as evil and in rebellion against the gods. His use of violence is justified not just by their wickedness but through receiving the very instrument with which he is to deal out punishment from the gods themselves. The gods not only commission the king to violence, they give him necessary tools to accomplish this task. Additionally, the portrayal of the king armed with divine weapons like heroic warrior gods from mythology (e.g. Enūma Eliš) casts the king's enemies in the role of mythological evil.

West Semitic: Mari

Turning to the Old Babylonian period, the city of Mari provides three very informative letters concerning divine weapons and their continuing use. Though these texts come from a Mesopotamian context, they represent western traditions emanating from Aleppo.³¹¹ The first letter, FM 7 38, from a royal representative named Nur-Sin conveying the words of an *apilum*-prophet (named Abiya) of Addu of Aleppo to Zimri-Lim of Mari explains how Addu had once supported Yaḥdun-Lim but now supports Zimri-Lim now. Addu wants Zimri-Lim to uphold justice and consult him before going on a military campaign. This letter dates to late in Zimri-Lim's reign, though the events it purports to describe his transition of power.³¹² After a brief introduction, the prophet gives the word of the deity:

5. *um-ma-a-mi* ^dIM-*ma ma-a-tum ka-la-ša*
6. *a-na ia-ah-du-li-im ad-di-in*
7. *u₃ i-na* ^{giš}TUKUL.MEŠ-*ia ma-ḥi-ra-am u₂-ul ir-ši*
8. *i-ia-tam i-zi-ib-ma ma-a-tam ša ad-di-nu-šu[m]*
9. *a-na ša-am-ši-*^dIM *ad-[di-i]n*
10. [ⁱ]*ša-am-ši-*^dIM
- (...)
- 1'. *lu-t[e-e]r-ka a-na* ^{giš}G[U.ZA E₂ *a-bi-ka*]
- 2'. *u₂-te-er-ka* ^{giš}TUKUL.[MEŠ]
- 3'. *ša it-ti te-em-tim am-ta-aḥ-šu₂*
- 4'. *ad-di-na-ak-kum* I₃ *ša nam-ri-ru-ti-ia*
- 5'. *ap-šu-uš₂-ka-ma ma-am-ma-an a-na pa-ni-ka*
- 6b'. *u₂-ul iz-z[i-iz]*

³¹¹ For example, Alt 456, a legal acquisition of settlement text, describes how Abba-el, the king of Yamḥad, seized the city of Irride from the mercenary Mušni-Addu, by means of the “great weapon of Addu” (*[ka-ak]-ki-im ra-bi-im ša* ^dIM). For a recent discussion of this text, including its genre, transliteration, translation and previous literature, see Jacob Lauinger, *Following the Man of Yamḥad: Settlement and Territory at Old Babylonian Alalah* (CHANE 75; Leiden: Brill, 2015), 134-135 (translation) and 373-390 (edition and commentary).

³¹² Jack M. Sasson, *From the Mari Archives: An Anthology of Old Babylonian Letters* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 257 n.68.

Thus (said) Adad, “I gave all the land to Yaḥdun-Lim and with my weapons he had no equal. (But) he abandoned me (so) I gave the land, which I had given to him, to Šamši-Adad. Šamši-Adad ... Let me restore you. I restored you to the th[rone of the house of your father.] I gave you the weapon[s] with which I fought the sea. I anointed you with the oil of my awe-inspiring radiance-ship.³¹³ Nobody stood against you. (FM 7 38 5-10, 1’-6b’)³¹⁴

In Nur-Sin’s letter to Zimri-Lim concerning Abiya’s words, he reminds the king that Adad of Aleppo and his weapons were responsible for Yaḥdun-Lim's success. Thus the king’s worthiness to hold weapons and rule Adad’s land is directly connected to his obedience to the god. The topic of Zimri-Lim’s suitability is thus implied in the context, which begins by setting out an example to be avoided (Yaḥdun-Lim) and ends by enjoining Zimri-Lim to provide justice for his people and always consult Adad before going to war. The implication being that if the king fails at this he will lose his land, just as Yaḥdun-Lim did. Adad’s weapons are connected with notions of military superiority. When the weapons were in Yaḥdun-Lim’s possession, he had “no equal.” Similarly, the deity claims that no one could stand against Zimri-Lim after he received the weapons and was anointed by Adad.

This passage is significant for several reasons. First, it is the first example of the weapon bestowal motif connected with the Combat myth or Chaoskampf. I would argue that this has more to do with the god in question than with the motif in general, i.e. it is not always the weapons that defeat chaos gods and monsters that are given to the human king. Secondly, this is the first evidence of the weapon bestowal motif outside of

³¹³ My thanks to J. Lauinger for this suggestion in translating the term *namrirutu*.

³¹⁴ A.1968; Jean-Marie Durand, *Florilegium marianum VII: Le culte d’Addu d’Alep et l’affaire d’Alahtum* (Mémoires de NABU 4; Paris: Société pour l’Étude du Proche-Orient Ancien, 2002), 134-135. See also Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (WAW 12; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 21-22.

Mesopotamia proper. Of course, the example of Narām-Sîn and Dagan may be an earlier example, but it is told from the perspective of the Mesopotamian ruler, so it is difficult to know if Dagan’s giving his weapon reflects a western practice (even if the event never took place). In contrast, this oracle is from the prophet of the god of Aleppo and purports to give the god’s own words. Thirdly, this provides another connection between the weapon bestowal motif and ascension to the position of king.

In another letter, FM 7 5, a royal representative called Sumu-Ila reports to the king that the weapons of Adad of Aleppo have arrived at the temple of Dagan in Terqa.

1. *a-na be-li₂-ia*
2. *qi₂-[bi₂]-ma*
3. *um-ma su-mu-i-la*
4. *IR₃-ka-a-ma*
5. *gišTUKUL.HA₂ ša dIM*
6. *ša ha-la-ab^[ki]*
7. *ik-šu-du-nim-m[a]*
8. *i-na E₂ dda-gan*
9. *i-na ter-qa^{ki}*

Say to my lord, “Thus (said) Sumu-Ila, your servant: ‘The weapons of Adad of Aleppo have arrived here in the temple of Dagan in Terqa. (FM 7 5 1-9)³¹⁵

The second letter dates to a much earlier period, sometime before Zimri-Lim’s fourth year.³¹⁶ As with Narām-Sîn’s ascension year name and Šulgi’s reference to Ninurta’s weapons in the Ešumeša, this furnishes us with an additional example of the physicality of such divine weapons.³¹⁷ The purpose of these weapons is not made explicit from the

³¹⁵A. 1858. Durand, *Le culte d’Addu d’Alep et l’affaire d’Alahtum*, 14-15.

³¹⁶ Sasson, *From the Mari Archives*, 257 n.68.

³¹⁷ See also Harris, “The Journey of the Divine Weapon,” 217-224.

text. They may have arrived in anticipation of a battle to act as support for the king as the next letter illustrates.

Many scholars have seen the reference in FM 7 38 to the weapon bestowal and the anointing with oil as part of a coronation ritual, which may have taken place in the temple of Dagan at Terqa.³¹⁸ J. Töyräänvuori argues that although it is possible Adad's weapons in FM 7 38 were involved in Zimri-Lim's coronation, she considers it preferable that they be seen as separate from Zimri-Lim's ceremonial establishment as king.³¹⁹ She rightly notes that the delivery of Adad's weapons in FM 7 5 cannot be related to a coronation, since Zimri-Lim is already king and the weapons here are not explicitly mentioned in the context of coronation.³²⁰ Instead, she suggests that the empowerment of the king before the campaign is the most likely reason for their journey from Aleppo to Terqa.³²¹ She also dismisses FM 7 38 as useful evidence due to the "lacuna at a rather critical juncture in the text, which makes it difficult to draw any firm conclusions based on it."³²² The problems of the letter's context and missing text, are not as insurmountable as she suggests.

³¹⁸ Jean-Marie Durand, "Le Mythologème du Combat entre le Dieu de l'Orage et la Mer en Mésopotamie," *MARI* 7 (1993): 52-53; Abraham Malamat, *Mari and the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 27; Daniel Schwemer, *Die Wettergottgestalten Mesopotamiens und Nordsyriens im Zeitalter der Keilschriftkulturen: Materialien und Studien nach den schriftlichen Quellen* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2001), 226; Durand, *Le Culte d'Addu d'Alep et l'affaire d'Alahtum*, 137; Annus, *The God Ninurta*, 176-177; Lluís Feliu, *The God Dagan in Bronze Age Syria*, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson (Leiden, Brill: 2003), 101; and Guy Bunnens, *A New Luwian Stele and the Cult of the Storm-God at Til Barsip-Masuwari* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 65.

³¹⁹ Töyräänvuori, "Weapons of the Storm God," 154-160.

³²⁰ J. Sasson also takes the view that the two letters do not refer to the same journey of Adad's weapons. See Sasson, *From the Mari Archives*, 257 n.68.

³²¹ Töyräänvuori, "Weapons of the Storm God," 160.

³²² Töyräänvuori, "Weapons of the Storm God," 155.

Beginning with the context of the letter (FM 7 38), the opening stresses the divine role in the transfer of power from one king to another. Adad positions himself as the one responsible for the shift in rule from Yaḥdun-Lim to Šamši-Addu and finally to Zimri-Lim, thus drawing attention to Zimri-Lim's indebted status, in order to make requests of the king. Additionally, the letter begins by paralleling Adad's gift of the land to Yaḥdun-Lim and his possession of Adad's weapons.³²³

Concerning the gap in the text, before the weapons are mentioned for the second time, Adad states that he restored (*utērka*) Zimri-Lim to something. Though the reconstruction of ^{giš}GU.ZA in the break is conjectural, it fits the pattern of the verb *tāru* in the D-stem appearing with ^{giš}GU.ZA in another letter from Nur-Sîn (FM 7 39 16b-18a, 51).³²⁴ In this letter, Nur-Sîn conveys a message from Adad of Kallassu and Adad of Aleppo in which they claim to have restored Zimri-Lim to the throne of his father's house three times. Thus, the reconstruction of ^{giš}GU.ZA has good textual support.

Returning to FM 7 38, Adad then describes giving his weapons to Zimri-Lim. Töyräänvuori notes that a weapon bestowal featured in Narām-Sîn's coronation, but concludes this was likely a unique case, noting instead the function of divine weapons in the Late Babylonian Akitu festival.³²⁵ This skips over many Neo-Assyrian references to divine weapon bestowal (among the other royal insignia, e.g. crown, throne, etc.)

³²³ The fact that Yaḥdun-Lim received the weapon of the storm-god is attested in his Disc Inscription (E4.6.8.1 9-14; RIME 4, 603), in which Dagan proclaims his kingship and gives him a mighty weapon (^{giš}TUKUL KALA.GA).

³²⁴ A.1121 + A.2731. See Durand, *Le culte d'Addu d'Alep et l'affaire d'Alahtum*, 137-140.

³²⁵ Töyräänvuori, "Weapons of the Storm God," 154.

connected with the king's ascension,³²⁶ the most well-known of which is Assurbanipal's Coronation Hymn.³²⁷ The weapon bestowal is followed by a reference to anointing Zimri-Lim with a special oil. While anointing oil does not appear to feature in Mesopotamian coronation ceremonies, it does feature prominently in biblical kingship.³²⁸ Perhaps its place here is indicative of a west Semitic tradition invoked by the god of Aleppo. Another option is that it would function as a physical and ritualistic symbol of divine radiance *šalummatu*, which the gods bestowed upon the kings along with crown, throne, and weapon.³²⁹ All of this seems to be within the context of establishing Zimri-Lim as king and I would argue that, similar to the examples of Narām-Sîn and later Neo-Assyrian kings, receiving divine weapons may have been a part of the coronation process.³³⁰

³²⁶ Yaḥdun-Lim's Disc Inscription presents some suggestive evidence for the OB existence of this practice. The inscription opens with Dagan calling him for kingship and giving him a mighty weapon (E4.6.8.1 9-14; RIME 4, p. 603). The Middle Assyrian Coronation ritual, while not clearly depicting a weapon bestowal, does feature the king lifting the crown of Aššur and weapons of Ninlil (VAT 9978; Müller 1937 ii 15-16, p. 10-11). Wilkinson lists weapons under the category of minor insignia associated with coronation. See Richard Herbert Wilkinson, "Mesopotamian Coronation and Accession Rites in the Neo-Sumerian and Early Old-Babylonian Periods, c. 2100-1800 B. C." (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1986), 230. Concerning Neo-Assyrian examples, perhaps the clearest is Esarhaddon's description of receiving crown and weapons at the beginning of his reign (Esar 48 53; RINAP 4, p. 106). Other examples include: Shalmaneser I (A.0.77.1 24-25; RIMA 1, p. 183); Aššur-nāsir-pal II (A.0.101.40 10-11; RIMA 2, p. 308); Shalmaneser III (A.0.102.1 11-13; RIMA 3, p. 8); and Sennacherib (Senn 43 6; RINAP 3.2, p. 57).

³²⁷ SAA 3 11 obv. 21-22, r.1-2, p. 27.

³²⁸ Wilkinson considers it a possibility for Mesopotamian kings, though he does admit we have little to no evidence. See Wilkinson, "Mesopotamian Coronation and Accession Rites," 254-255. Similarly, S. Dalley notes that although the kings of Babylon and Assyria would anoint vassal kings with oil as part of their selection, there is no evidence that they themselves were anointed as part of their coronation. See Stephanie Dalley, "Anointing in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *The Oil of Gladness: Anointing in the Christian Tradition*, eds. Martin Dudley and Geoffrey Rowell (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 23-24. Malamat cautiously suggests the anointing of the king may be an Amorite custom. See Malamat, *Mari and the Bible*, 152.

³²⁹ For an example, see Assurbanipal's Coronation Hymn, in which Nergal bestows his *šalummatu* upon the king (SAA 3 11 r. 7).

³³⁰ Other references to Zimri-Lim's receiving divine weapons also connect them to his very kingship and could have his coronation in mind, though it is not explicit in the texts. For examples, see the bilingual

Finally, in an unfortunately fragmentary letter, M.9714, Zimri-Lim receives promises of support from at least three gods: Adad, Ištar, and Šamaš. Adad's support takes the form of sending several weapons. The relevant text reads:³³¹

6. [g^{iš}]ka-ak-[k]i-ia da-an-nu-tim
7. [a-n]a pa-ni-ka aṭ-ru-ud
8. u₃ 7 ša-pa-ar-re a-n[a] LU₂.MEŠ ELAM-ma
9. [s]a₃-ha-pi₂-im aṭ-ru-u[d]

I sent my strong weapons for you and I sent seven nets to envelop the Elamites.
(ARM 26 192 6-9)

In contrast to Adad's bestowal of his weaponry, Ištar promises to stand (*azzazzakkum*) with Zimri-Lim with her strong weapons (*kakkīya dannūt[im]*). Unfortunately, the text breaks off before we find out what kind of support Šamaš might have promised.

Interestingly, in addition to his strong weapons, presumably the same mentioned in A.1968, Adad sends seven nets. This is reminiscent of the net of Ningirsu, which is depicted containing the enemy Ummaites on the so-called "Stele of the Vultures." The text of this stele describes how the victorious E-anatum of Lagaš made the leader of Umma swear by five great battle nets (*sa-šuš-gal*) of Enlil, Ninhursag, Enki, Sîn, and Utu.³³² This is an example in which divine weapons are provided not at the beginning of the king's reign, but in response to an imminent threat. In this scenario, such weapons are

scribal petition to Zimri-Lim (A.1258 + S160 SN 15-16), which describes the king's creation and selection by the gods and his endowment with the insignia of kingship, including a scepter from Šamaš and a strong weapon (*šita kala-ga*) from Adad, and A.4263 18' that mentions that Zimri-Lim received a strong weapon and eternal reign from Dagan and Itur-Mer. See, respectively, Dominique Charpin, "Les malheurs d'un Scribe ou de l'Inutilité du Sumérien loin de Nippur," in *Nippur at the Centennial: Papers Read at the 35e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Philadelphia, 1988*, ed. Maria de Jong Ellis (Philadelphia: The University Museum, 1992), 10; and ARM 25/1: 407.

³³¹ Jean-Marie Durand, *Archives Épistolaires de Mari I/1* (ARM 26; Paris: Editions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1988), 413-414.

³³² E1.9.3.1 xvi 8 – r.iii 1, RIME 1, 132-139.

intended to (re)empower the king, giving him an edge in the upcoming battle. The presence of these divine weapons legitimizes the king's (intended) violence against the Elamites. Additionally, the support of the gods for the king and thus his assured victory takes the form of gifted weapons and promises of support. As the Neo-Assyrian examples demonstrated, this is a common context for receiving divine aid via the gods' weapons. For Zimri-Lim, in spite of his victories over Elam, the weapons of Adad could not save him from the wrath of Hammurabi, who also claimed to have received divine weapons.³³³

Ugarit

Turning to Late Bronze Age Ugarit, there is a passage among the mythological texts that contains a reference to the weapon bestowal motif.³³⁴ The reference occurs in the Ba'lu Cycle during Ba'lu's final confrontation with his enemy and rival Yammu. Before the battle begins, Kôtaru gives Ba'lu words of encouragement and then he provides Ba'lu with two weapons (*šmd*). Like the reference to Adad of Aleppo's weapons in the Mari letters, these weapons are instrumental in Yammu's defeat.

Text and Translation

KTU 1.2 iv 18-26:

¹¹ ktr šmdm.ynḥt.

³³³ Hammurabi attributes part his military success to the powerful divine weapons given to him by the gods in the epilogue to his laws (xlvi 22-32). See Martha Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 133; R XXV 22-32 in Ernst Bergmann, *Codex Hammurabi Textus Primigenius* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1953), 33.

³³⁴ One might also include Kôtaru's giving a bow to Dānī'ilu, who in turn gives it to his son 'Aqhatu (KTU 1.17 v 2-39). While this scene does seem related to the weapon bestowal motif, it does not fit within the usual characteristics of other Near Eastern examples. The bow and arrows are a gift to 'Aqhatu (via Dānī'ilu), but there is no indication they are divine in any way. Dānī'ilu's status as king is not clear. Even allowing for this, 'Aqhatu is not yet king and the purpose of the weapons does not appear connected to vanquishing enemies. In fact, the weapon serves as a source of conflict between man ('Aqhatu) and god ('Anatu), instead of the usual favor and support in the weapon bestowal motif.

wyp^çr.šmthm.
 šmk àt¹² ygrš.
 ygrš.grš ym
 grš ym.lksih
¹³ [n]hr lkḫt drkth.
 trtqš.bd b^çl.km nš¹⁴ř.
 búšb^çth.hlm.ktp.zbl.ym.
 bn ydm¹⁵ [tḫ]ḫ nhr.
 yrtqš.šmd.bd b^çl.km.nšr
¹⁶ [bú]šb^çth.ylm.ktp.zbl ym.
 bn.ydm.tḫḫ¹⁷ [nh]r.
 çz.ym.l ymk.
 l tnğšn[.]pnth.
 l ydlp¹⁸ tmnh.
 kṯr.šmdm.ynḫt.
 wyp^çr.šmthm
¹⁹ šmk.át.áymr.
 áymr.mr.ym.
 mr.ym²⁰ lksih.
 nhr lkḫt.drkth.
 trtqš²¹ bđ b^çl.km.nšr
 búšb^çth.hlm.qdq²²đ.zbl ym.
 bn.çnm.tḫḫ.nhr.
 ypršḫ ym
²³ w̄yql.lårš.
 wyrtqš.šmd bd b^çl²⁴ [km] nšr.
 búšb^çth ylm.qdqđ.zbl²⁵ [ym].
 bn.çnm.tḫḫ.nhr.
 ypršḫ.ym.
 yql²⁶ lårš.
 tnğšn.pnth.
 wydlp.tmnh³³⁵

³³⁵ Mark S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle. Volume I: Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1-1.2* (VTSup 55; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 319.

Below is my vocalization of KTU 1.2 iv 18-26:

¹¹ Kôtaru brought (down) two maces.
 He proclaimed their names,
 “You, your name ¹² is Yagarriš.
 O Yagarriš, drive out Yammu!
 Drive out Yammu from his throne,
¹³ River from the seat of his rule!
 May you leap from the hands of Ba‘lu like a bird of prey!
¹⁴ From his fingers, strike the shoulder of Prince Yammu,
 between the arms ¹⁵ of Judge River.”
 Then the mace leapt from the hands of Ba‘lu like a bird of prey.
¹⁶ From his fingers, it struck the shoulder of Prince Yammu,
 between the arms of Judge ¹⁷ River.
 But Yammu is strong. He does not fall.
 His front parts are not shaken.
 His form does not ¹⁸ leak.
 Kôtaru brought (down) two maces.
 He proclaimed their names,
¹⁹ “You, your name is ‘Ayyamarrî.
 O ‘Ayyamarrî, eject Yammu!
 Eject Yammu ²⁰ from his throne,
 River from the seat of his rule!
 May you leap ²¹ from the hands of Ba‘lu like a bird of prey!
 From his fingers, strike the crown ²² of Prince Yammu,
 between the eyes of Judge River.
 May Yammu collapse
²³ and may he fall to the ground!”
 Then the mace leapt from the hands of Ba‘lu ²⁴ like a bird of prey.
 From his fingers, it struck the crown of Prince ²⁵ Yammu,
 between the eyes of Judge River.
 Yammu collapsed.
 He fell ²⁶ to the ground.
 His front parts were shaken.
 His form leaked.

11. kôtaru šimdêmi yanahhitu wa-yip‘aru šumâtêhumā šumuka ‘atta 12. yagarriš yagarriš garriš yamma garriš yamma lê-kussi‘ihu 13. nahara lê-kaḥti darkatihu tirtaḡiṣ bâdi ba‘li kama našri 14. bi-‘uṣba ‘ātihu hulumu katipê zubūli yammi bêna yadêmi 15. t̄āpiṭi nahari yirtaḡiṣu šimdu bâdi ba‘li kama našri 16. bi-‘uṣba ‘ātihu yâlumu katipê zubūli yammi bêna yadêmi t̄āpiṭi 17. nahari ‘azzu yammu lā yamukku lā tinnagīṣna pinnātuhu lā yadlupu 18. tamūnuhu kôtaru šimdêmi yanahhitu wa-yip‘aru šumâtêhumā 19. šumuka ‘atta ‘ayyamarrî ‘ayyamarrî marrî yamma marri yamma 20. lê-kussi‘ihu nahara lê-kaḥti darkatihu tirtaḡiṣ 21. bâdi ba‘li kama našri bi-‘uṣba ‘ātihu hulumu qudquda 22. zubūli yammi bêna ‘ênêmi t̄āpiṭi nahari yaparsih yammu 23. wa-yaqil lê-‘arṣi wa-yirtaḡiṣu šimdu bâdi ba‘li 24. kama našri bi-‘us‘ba ‘ātihu yâlumu qudqud zubūli 25. yammi bêna ‘ênêmi t̄āpiṭi nahari yaparsihu yammu yaqilu 26. lê-‘arṣi tinnagīṣna pinnātuhu wa-yadlupu tamūnuhu

KTU 1.2 iv 18-26: Problems and Interpretations

Before addressing the significance of the weapon bestowal motif in this passage, it is necessary to address a contested line (KTU 1.2 iv 11, 18) and my interpretation of it. The only difficulty of KTU 1.2 iv 11 || 18 appears in the meaning of the verb *nh̄t*. As we will see below, this same verbal root will appear in 2 Sam 22:35 || Ps 18:35. In addition to our passage, the root(s) *nh̄t* also appears in KTU 1.23 37, 40, 43, 47 and in the broken context of KTU 1.17 vi 9. The most common ways of approaching *nh̄t* is to understand it as reflecting two different root meanings: either from Aramaic and Hebrew *nh̄t* “go down, descend,” which is primarily used for KTU 1.23³³⁶ and from Arabic *naḥata* “sculpt stone, work wood” *nh̄t* would mean “form, fashion” and used only in KTU 1.2 iv.³³⁷ Dietrich and Loretz summarize the problem with *nh̄t* “Die grundlegende Frage ist, ob wir im Ugaritischen zwischen *nh̄t* ‘herstellen, bilden’ und *nh̄t* ‘hinabsinken, senken, spannen (einen Bogen)’ zu trennen haben oder ob nur eines der postulierten Verben in Betracht kommt.”³³⁸ To this we can add those who understand *nh̄t* as “strengthen” either based on context alone³³⁹ or based on the Egyptian *nh̄t* “strengthen.”³⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the stich in KTU 1.2 iv occurs without a synonymous parallel, as the following line, which describes

³³⁶ Marwin H. Pope, “The Status of El at Ugarit,” *UF* 19 (1987): 226; Mark S. Smith, *Rituals and Myths of the Feast of the Goodly Gods of KTU/CAT 1.23: Royal Constructions of Opposition, Intersection, Integration, and Domination* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 22, 83-85.

³³⁷ P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (AB 9; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 470; and Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle. Volume I*, 337-338.

³³⁸ Manfred Dietrich and Oswald Loretz, “Die Ugaritische Wortpaare *dm* || *mm* ‘ und *brkm* || *hlqm* im Kontext westsemitischer anatomischer Terminologie,” *UF* 35 (2003): 169.

³³⁹ Robert M. Good, “Hebrew and Ugaritic NHT,” *UF* 17 (1986): 154.

³⁴⁰ A. Hooker, “The Ugaritic Terms *nh̄t* and *ymin*,” *NABU* 2014/1 23, 34.

Kôtaru's naming of the weapons, seems to follow from the preceding stich instead of paralleling it. Of course, the forming or fashioning of weapons is exactly what we would expect of a craftsman god.

However, a closer examination reveals that the meaning "form, fashion" does not fit the context as seamlessly as has been previously imagined. To begin, though Kôtaru is undoubtedly a craftsman god, he is also a god of magic and incantation.³⁴¹ It is this second role that is being emphasized in this passage as he names the weapons and then empowers them through incantation. If Kôtaru's craftsman abilities were in focus, one might expect to find a reference to his bellows (*m ϕ hm*) or his gathering together of rare materials for its construction as happens when he fashions a gift for 'Aṭiratu (KTU 1.4 i 20-43), when he builds a house of silver and gold for Ba'lu (KTU 1.4 vi 16-35), or when 'Aqhatu suggests that 'Anatu has Kôtaru make her a bow (KTU 1.17 vi 20-25). While this is an argument from silence, the story of 'Aqhatu provides an example where Kôtaru's role is to deliver a weapon (KTU 1.17 v 2-3, 12-13, 26-28), which he presumably made previously. Another reason to question understanding *n \dot{h} t* as "fashion" in KTU 1.2 iv 11, 18 is that the weapon 'Ayyamarrî appears in the narrative before Kôtaru has a chance to create it (KTU 1.2 i 6). Although the broken context prevents us from understanding what kind of reference is intended (prediction, dream, prophecy?), the reference to 'Ayyamarrî suggests that the weapon was created some time before Kôtaru activated it through incantation and gave it to Ba'lu. Additionally, the description

³⁴¹ Mark S. Smith, "The Magic of Kothar, the Ugaritic Craftsman God, in KTU 1.6 VI 49-50," *RB* 91 (1984): 379-380.

of the creation of a weapon is not a part of the weapon bestowal motif in the Near East, and thus the Ugaritic example would be unique in this way.³⁴²

Given these objections, let us consider how D-stem *nḥt* “lower” might fit in the passage. This interpretation is nothing new, though it has fallen out of favor. Dahood suggested the verb *ynḥt* described Kôṭaru’s bringing down of the weapons in order to empower them and bestow them upon Ba‘lu.³⁴³ The primary objection does not concern whether *nḥt* can mean “descend” or in the D-stem “lower,” but how this fits into the narrative. Smith explains “The notion of bringing down a club leaves unanswered the locale from which the club descends. Such a description would lack a parallel as well.”³⁴⁴ This concern takes the notion of *ynḥt* as “lower” more literally than is probably necessary.³⁴⁵ Instead, it likely refers to the concept of “bringing” more generally. In 5th century BCE Imperial Aramaic *nḥt* in the C-stem seems to have this meaning. For example, in Hermopolis Papyrus 5, 5-6 we read: *ḥrwš br byt ’lšzb zy ’th lmḥth lbmršry ’tryh* “Haruz, son of Bethelshezeb, who is going to bring the officials to...”³⁴⁶ Likewise, in Cowley-Papyrus 42, 13 it describes a request for a tunic: *’l tqwm ḥt l’bq wl’bq hnḥt ly*

³⁴² The closest parallel might be the *Enūma Eliš*, in which Marduk, after receiving weapons from the assembly of the gods, makes his own weapons to fight Tiamat.

³⁴³ Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I 1-50: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 16; New York: Double Day, 1965), 115.

³⁴⁴ Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle I*, 338.

³⁴⁵ Though if one did want to take *ynḥt* more literally as “bring down” this need not render the passage nonsensical. Whence does Kôṭaru bring down the mace? Mostly likely he would bring them down from the heavens, the natural home of the meteorological phenomena (lightning, wind, etc.) that often serve as the weaponry for storm gods.

³⁴⁶ James M. Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, ed. Kent Harold Richards (WAW 4; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 35.

ktwn bydk “Do not stand still. Hurry down, hurry and bring me a tunic in your hand.”³⁴⁷ Smith and Pitard argued for a similar broader understanding of the verb *ly* in KTU 1.4 i 23, which usually is translated “ascend, go up.” In this case Smith and Pitard suggest the verb may refer to “movement more broadly” since there is no explicit need to ascend in the passage.³⁴⁸ I would argue that a similar semantic development is at work with *nh̄t* in KTU 1.2 iv 11, 18. This understanding would also eliminate the lack of parallels, since we do have another example of Kôṭaru bringing weapons. Kôṭaru brings (*ybl*) bow and arrows to Dānî’ilu, after the birth of his son (KTU 1.17 v 2-3, 12-13). Furthermore, as I will address below, 2 Sam 22:35 || Ps 18:35 represents another example of a god bringing (with *nh̄t*) a weapon for another.

Ultimately, the question of how to understand *nh̄t* is a methodological one. Should we privilege the West Semitic or the Arabic evidence? Generally speaking, West Semitic evidence should be privileged if it makes sense within the context of the word in question. As I have argued, the D-stem of *nh̄t* meaning “lower, bring” does make sense within the context of the line and the larger passage as a whole. Additionally, this understanding has the advantage of reducing the number possible roots associated with *nh̄t*. Thus, to answer Dietrich and Loretz’s question concerning *nh̄t*, I would suggest we have only one root in the Ugaritic evidence: *nh̄t* “descend, go down.”

³⁴⁷ *TAD* A3.8, 13.

³⁴⁸ Mark S. Smith and Wayne T. Pitard, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle. Volume II: Introduction with Text, Translation, and Commentary of KTU/CAT 1.3-1.4* (VTSup 114; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 410.

KTU 1.2 iv 18-26: Interpretation

In the broadest outline, the example from the Ba‘lu Cycle fits the pattern we’ve seen in other mythological examples, such as the *Enūma Eliš*: before engaging a powerful enemy, the divine hero is equipped for battle by another god(s). As discussed for the Mesopotamian mythological text, the gift of a weapon from one god to another serves as a mythological projection of an established human-divine dynamic, in which a human king is empowered by a divine weapon. Ba‘lu’s worthiness to receive Kôtaru’s enchanted weaponry is implicit in one of the primary themes of the Ba‘lu Cycle, i.e. Ba‘lu’s ascension to the throne.³⁴⁹ Ba‘lu’s worth functions as the often-implicit driving force of the narrative, leading him to defeat Yammu and gain the temple he previously lacked. ‘Anatu gives voice to Ba‘lu’s value when she informs Ilu that “Our king is Mighty Ba‘lu; Our judge, there is none above him” (KTU 1.3 v 32-33).³⁵⁰ Like the Mesopotamian examples, the Ugaritic weapon bestowal takes place within a framework of establishing kingship, in this case Ba‘lu’s. Before Kôtaru enchants the divine weapons, he charges Ba‘lu to take his eternal kingship (KTU 1.2 iv 10). Additionally, the Ugaritic version of the motif also shares in the heroic tone seen elsewhere. Ba‘lu is the victorious hero over a threatening foe. After his triumph, Ba‘lu celebrates with a feast with the gods (KTU 1.3 i 2-27).

The Ba‘lu Cycle, however, presents a number of unique features to the motif. First, the bestowal of the weapon is not explicitly narrated. Kôtaru brings (down) the weapons and then names and empowers them by means of incantation. These

³⁴⁹ Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle I*, xxiv.

³⁵⁰ 32) *mlkn.đliyn.b‘l.tp̄tn* 33) *in.d‘lnh*

incantations include descriptions of how and where the weapon is to attack Yammu. Following the incantation is its fulfillment in the narrative, at which point the weapon is in Ba‘lu’s hand. In fact, not only is the bestowal of the weapon moved to the background, Ba‘lu’s own efficacy is also overtaken by the weapons themselves.³⁵¹ As has been noted by many scholars, the weapons of Ba‘lu have their own agency, described as jumping (*yrtqs*) from Ba‘lu’s hand and striking (*ylm*) Yammu of their own accord.³⁵² This is not to say that Ba‘lu’s warrior status is in question. Even before the weapons enter the narrative, Kôtaru enjoins Ba‘lu to strike and defeat his enemy (KTU 1.2 iv 8b-9) and Yammu’s defeat ends with Ba‘lu finishing off the god (KTU 1.2 iv 27). Additionally, Môtu credits Ba‘lu with defeating the dragon Litanu (KTU 1.5 i 1). The focus upon the weapons themselves might be the result of the cultic significance of the storm god’s weaponry, as seen in the Mari examples. If physical or symbolic storm god weaponry played a part in Ugaritic kingship, then it would make sense that they would receive greater emphasis in mythological texts, since to praise the storm god’s weapons would be to enhance the power of the king (divine or human) who wields them. Regardless of the value as ritual objects, even within the narrative praising Ba‘lu’s weaponry grants glory to Ba‘lu himself, as the power of a weapon extends to its possessor. This same principle seems to be at work in Lugale myth, which devotes space to describing the exploits of Ninurta’s weapons (Lugale 79-89, 109-115).³⁵³

³⁵¹ The focus on the help Ba‘lu receives continues in KTU 1.2 iv 28-30, in which ‘Athtartu hexes Yammu. For more on this, see Theodore J. Lewis, “‘Athtartu’s Incantations and the Use of Divine Names as Weapons,” *JNES* 70 (2011): 207-227.

³⁵² Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle I*, 342.

³⁵³ J. van Dijk, *LUGAL UD ME-LÁM-bi NIR-ĜÁL: Le récit épique et didactique des Travaux de Ninurta, du Déluge et de la Nouvelle Création* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 1:62-63, 65-66.

Summation

Having examined representative examples from Mesopotamia and the Levant, the general characteristics of the weapon bestowal motif are apparent: a focus on the worth of the receiver; martial excellence; and the legitimation of violence. The first characteristic is made clear in the choice of the recipient: the human recipient is always a king. For Mesopotamian examples, the king's worthiness is often made explicit through descriptions of his piety and unique relationship to the gods. The texts from Mari provide examples in which the king's worthiness is implied and contingent upon his continued obedience to Adad and adherence to divine justice.

The bestowal of the weapon is connected with battle and the king's role as conqueror of enemies and warrior-protector of the people. Thus, the king's martial excellence is always in focus. In this association, the divine weapon functions to empower the king for conquest. The tone of such passages is heroic, celebratory, and self-aggrandizing. Additionally, though the god who bestows the weapon is not limited to a single deity, they are usually associated with warfare in some way (e.g. Adad, Ištar, Ninurta). In some cases, the god's higher status is in view (Kôtaru or Enlil).

Finally, the first two characteristics of the motif come together to provide legitimation for royal violence and imperial conquest. The gift of divine weapons reflects the king's special status as the one divinely authorized for bloodshed. The need for violence is further emphasized by associations of the motif imparts to enemies. If the king is given and wields divine weapons, especially those featured in myth, his enemies become enemies of the gods and can be associated with mythological evil. The king as

valiant warrior is without question successful and on the side of the gods, while his enemies are vile and evil and doomed for defeat.

Pre-exilic 2 Sam 22:35-36 || Ps 18:35-36

In contrast to the Mesopotamian and other West Semitic examples, the weapon bestowal motif is much less frequently attested in the Hebrew Bible. The few examples that we do have are instructive as the authors have used the motif for different purposes. P. Machinist in discussing the borrowing of Assyrian imperial motifs outlines two different types of borrowing: horizontal or lateral and vertical.³⁵⁴ In the case of lateral borrowing, the imperial motifs are adopted with little change and represent an aspiration to the same position and stature of the Assyrian king. They do not want to change the motif or what it represents, they want to take up the trope and be like the Assyrian king. In contrast, vertical borrowing inverts Assyrian imperial rhetoric to offer criticisms of the culture of empire. Machinist categorizes vertical borrowing as a kind of resistance against the power of an overwhelming empire.³⁵⁵ This view is close to H. Nelson's concept of counterstory, in which subgroups reshape master narratives perpetuated by dominant groups to criticize those in power and reassert the identity of the marginalized group.³⁵⁶

In the Hebrew Bible we have examples of both lateral and vertical borrowing. The first case demonstrates the traditional characteristics and tone for the motif. 2 Samuel 22

³⁵⁴ Peter Machinist, "Final Response: On the Study of the Ancients, Language, Writing, and the State," in *Margins of Writing, Origins of Culture*, ed. Seth L. Sanders (OIS 2; Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2006), 296-298.

³⁵⁵ Machinist, "Final Response," 298.

³⁵⁶ Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), xii.

|| Psalm 18 fits comfortably among the Near Eastern examples. Moving to the book of Ezekiel, however, shows a repurposing of this motif for an exilic audience that changes many of its elements. Ezekiel's adaptation of the motif serves as an example of vertical borrowing. First I will examine the more traditional portrayal of the motif in 2 Samuel 22 || Psalm 18 before comparing it to the examples from Ezekiel.

2 Samuel 22 is often classified among the royal psalms and it ascribes authorship to David, the quintessential king of Israel.³⁵⁷ While this attribution may be important for what it says about pre-exilic portrayals of kingship, scholars have demonstrated that it is most likely a late monarchic text.³⁵⁸ The psalmist calls upon Yahweh for help in his time of need. After a theophany, Yahweh rescues the psalmist because of his blamelessness and then empowers him to fight his enemies.

Text and Translation

2 Samuel 22	Psalm 18
32. <i>kī mī- 'ēl mibbal 'ādē yhw̄h ūmī šūr mibbal 'ādē 'ēlōhēnū</i>	32. <i>kī mī 'ēlōah mibbal 'ādē yhw̄h ūmī šūr zūlātī 'ēlōhēnū</i>
33. <i>hā 'ēl mā 'ūzzī ḥāyil wayyattēr tāmīm darkī³⁵⁹</i>	33. <i>hā 'ēl ham 'azzarēnī ḥāyil wayyittēn tāmīm darkī</i>
34. <i>māšawweh raglay³⁶⁰ kā 'ayyālōt</i>	34. <i>māšawweh raglay kā 'ayyālōt wā 'al bāmōtay ya 'āmīdēnī</i>

³⁵⁷ For examples, see: Robert Bruce Chisholm, "An Exegetical and Theological Study of Psalm 18 / 2 Samuel 22," (Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984), 19; Robert Couffignal, *Les Psaumes Royaux de la Bible* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 2003), 24-36; Markus Saur, *Die Königspsalmen: Studien zur Entstehung und Theologie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 47-79; Klaus-Peter Adam, *Der Königliche Held: Die Entsprechung von kämpfendem Gott und kämpfendem König in Psalm 18* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001).

³⁵⁸ Eckart Otto, "Politische Theologie in den Königspsalmen zwischen Ägypten und Assyrien Die Herrscherlegitimation in den Psalmen 2 und 18 in ihren altorientalischen Kontexten," in "*Mein Sohn bist du*" (*Ps 2,7*): *Studien zu den Königspsalmen* (eds. Eckart Otto and Erich Zenger; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2002), 52-59 and David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 315 and 398.

³⁵⁹ Here I follow the *qere* reading.

³⁶⁰ Here I am following the *qere* reading. See also Ps 18:34, which preserves this reading.

<i>wə 'al bāmōtay ya 'āmīdēnī</i>	
35. <i>məlammed yāday lammilhāmā</i> <i>wəniḥat qešet-nəḥūšā zərō 'ōtāy</i>	35. <i>məlammed yāday lammilhāmā</i> <i>wəniḥātā qešet-nəḥūšā zərō 'ōtāy</i>
36. <i>wattitten-lī māgēn yiš 'ekā</i> <i>wa 'ännōtākā tarbēnī</i>	36. <i>wattitten-lī māgēn yiš 'ekā</i> <i>wīmīnākā tis 'ādēnī</i> <i>wə 'anwatkā tarbēnī</i>
37. <i>tarḥīb ṣa 'ādī taḥtēnī</i> <i>wəlō ' mā 'ādū qarsullāy</i>	37. <i>tarḥīb ṣa 'ādī taḥtāy</i> <i>welō ' mā 'ādū qarsullāy</i>
38. <i>'erdəpā 'ōyəbay wā 'ašmīdēm</i> <i>wəlō ' 'āšūb 'ad-kallōtām</i>	38. <i>'erdōp 'ōyəbay wə 'aššīgēm</i> <i>wəlō ' - 'āšūb 'ad-kallōtām</i>
39. <i>wā 'ākallēm wā 'emḥāšēm wəlō ' </i> <i>yəqūmūn</i> <i>wayyippəlū taḥat raglāy</i>	39. <i>'emḥāšēm wəlō '-yuklū qūm</i> <i>yippəlū taḥat raglāy</i>
40. <i>wattazrēnī ḥayil lammilhāmā</i> <i>takrī 'a qāmay taḥtēnī</i>	40. <i>wattā 'azzērēnī ḥāyil lammilhāmā</i> <i>takrīa ' qāmay taḥtāy</i>
41. <i>wə 'ōyəbay tattā lī 'ōrep</i> <i>māsan 'ay wā 'ašmītēm</i>	41. <i>wə 'ōyəbay nātattā lī 'ōrep</i> <i>ūmāsan 'ay 'ašmītēm</i>
42. <i>yiš 'ū wə 'ēn mōšī 'a</i> <i>'el-yhwh wəlō ' 'ānām</i>	42. <i>yəšawwə 'ū wə 'ēn-mōšīa ' </i> <i>'al-yhwh wəlō ' 'ānām</i>
43. <i>wə 'ešḥāqēm ka 'āpar- 'āreš</i> <i>kəḥīt-ḥūšōt 'ādīqqēm 'erqā 'ēm</i>	43. <i>wə 'ešḥāqēm kə 'āpār 'al-pēnē-rūaḥ</i> <i>kəḥīt ḥūšōt 'arīqēm</i>
44. <i>watēpalləṭēnī mēribē 'ammī</i> <i>tīšmārēnī lərō 'š gōyim 'am lō '-yāda 'tī</i> <i>ya 'abdunī</i>	44. <i>təpalləṭēnī mēribē 'ām tāsīmēnī lərō 'š</i> <i>gōyim</i> <i>'am lō '-yāda 'tī ya 'abdunī</i>
45. <i>bənē nēkār yitkaḥāšū-lī</i> <i>lišmōa ' 'ōzen yiššāmə 'ū lī</i>	45. <i>lašēma ' 'ōzen yiššāmē 'ū lī</i> <i>bənē-nēkār yəkaḥāšū-lī</i>
46. <i>bənē nēkār yibbōlū</i> <i>wəyahgərū mimmisgərōtām</i>	46. <i>bənē-nēkār yibbōlū</i> <i>wəyahragū mimmisgərōtēhem</i>

Translation

2 Samuel 22	Psalms 18
32. Indeed, who is El apart from Yahweh? Who is a rock apart from our God?	32. Indeed, who is Eloah apart from Yahweh? Who is rock apart from our God?
33. God is my refuge, (my) strength; he makes the blameless jump his way.	33. The God girding me (with) strength, He has made my way blameless.
34. (the one) who made my feet like (those of) does; he made me stand upon my high places	34. (the one) who made my feet like (those of) does; he made me stand upon my high places

35. who trained my hands for battle; he lowered a bronze bow (into) my arms	35. who trained my hands for battle; you ³⁶¹ lowered a bronze bow (into) my arms
36. You gave me the shield of your victory; your affliction made me great.	36. You gave me the shield of your victory; your right hand supported me; your humility made me great.
37. You widened my step beneath me; my feet do not slip.	37. You widened my step beneath me; my feet do not slip.
38. I pursued my enemies and I exterminated them; I did not turn back until they were finished.	38. I pursued my enemies and I overtook them; I did not turn back until they were finished.
39. I destroyed them. I struck them so that they cannot stand. They fell under my feet.	39. I struck them so that they could not stand; They fell under my feet.
40. You have girded me (with) strength for war; you made those standing against me bow under me.	40. You have girded me (with) strength for war; you made those standing against me bow under me.
41. You gave me the neck of my enemies; those who hate me, I quashed them.	41. You gave me the neck of my enemies; those who hate me, I quashed them.
42. They looked, but there was no one to save them; to Yahweh, but he did not answer them.	42. They called for help, but there was no one to save them; to Yahweh, but he did not answer them.
43. I crushed them like dust of the earth; like street mud, I pulverized them, I trampled them.	43. I crushed them like dust upon the face of the wind; like street mud, I poured them out.
44. You saved me from the struggles of my people; you protect me as head of the nations; people I do not know serve me.	44. You saved me from the struggles of (the) people. You made me head of nations; people I do not know serve me.
45. Foreigners feigned obedience to me; at the hearing of an ear, they obeyed me.	45. At the hearing of an ear, they obeyed me. Foreign sons feigned obedience to me.

³⁶¹ As pointed in the MT, the verb is a third person feminine singular. Assuming just the consonantal text, however, also allows for the possibility of *niḥattā* “you lowered” with *tav* of the suffix merging with the *tav* of the root. The *he* at the end would then be just a *mater lectionis* for the long /a/ of the second masculine singular. This would be in keeping, at least in person/number, with the LXX’s translation of *ethou* “you placed.”

46. Foreigners withered; they girded themselves from their prisons.	46. Foreigners withered; they trembled from their prisons.
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Problems and Interpretations: NHT

The status of 2 Sam 22:35-36 || Ps 18:35-36 as an example of a literary weapon bestowal motif is neither as straightforward nor self-evident as Ezek 30:20-26, which I will address below. These two verses contain several cruces that have elicited much scholarly discussion. Some interpretations lean more heavily upon etymology, poetic parallelism, and ancient Near Eastern parallels. Unfortunately, as Schmuttermayr notes, the ancient versions do not provide a clear interpretation.³⁶² Fortunately, the meaning of v.35a is clear and not in debate. As for the second stitch, several scholars have identified the verb *nḥt* as the key issue.³⁶³ Outside discussions concerning the meaning of the verb, its subject and object are also in question. Added to this is the fact that Ps 18:35 presents a different form of the verb than what we have in 2 Sam 22:35. Another source of debate is the meaning *qešet nḥūšā*, the individual components of which are easy enough to understand, but the meaning together in this context has elicited a multitude of interpretations. Since these verses are central to my interpretation, I will endeavor to offer an explanation. I begin with the verb *wəniḥat*. The options brought forth by scholars are many and include: a. *nḥt* “fashion;” b. *ḥtt* “break;” c. *ntn* “give;” d. *nḥt* “strengthen;” e.

³⁶² Georg Schmuttermayr, *Psalm 18 und 2 Samuel 22 Studien zu einem Doppeltext: Probleme der Textkritik und Übersetzung und das Psalterium Pianum* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1972), 141.

³⁶³ Schmuttermayr, *Psalm 18 und 2 Samuel 22*, 141; Chisholm, “An Exegetical and Theological Study of Psalm 18/2 Samuel 22,” 253; Good, “Hebrew and Ugaritic NHT,” 153.

nḥt “descend.”³⁶⁴ I will consider each in turn saving my preference (see translations above) to the end.

A. *nḥt* “fashion.” J. Reider was the first to make the suggestion that *nḥt* in this verse is related to the Arabic root *naḥata*.³⁶⁵ This root has the meaning “cut, hew, formed or fashioned by cutting.”³⁶⁶ P. K. McCarter elaborates upon Reider’s interpretation, explaining that while the Qal form of Hebrew and Ugaritic *nḥt* means descend, the Piel conjugation does not mean “bring down, lower” but “press down, engrave, grave” and thus by extension come to mean “fashion, shape, grave.”³⁶⁷ Following LXX^L, which lacks a word corresponding to *nəḥûšâ*, McCarter translates “he shaped the bows of my arms.”³⁶⁸ In his commentary on the Baal Cycle, Smith prefers this understanding for the verb *ynḥt* for the action Kothar performs upon the *šmdm* “maces” he gives to Ba’lu in KTU 1.2 iv 11 and 18.³⁶⁹ A. Pinker rejects this interpretation because of the lack of

³⁶⁴ To this list one could add A. Pinker’s suggestion of *nḥh* “lead, guide,” with a nuance similar to G. R. Driver’s suggestion of Arabic *naḥa* “aim,” though Driver considered the arrow and not the bow to be the object of the guidance in contrast to Pinker. See, respectively, Aron Pinker, “On the Meaning of נחשה נחשק,” *JHS* 5 (2005): 4; and G. R. Driver, “Hebrew Notes,” *VT* 1 (1951): 248. A. Gray rejects this interpretation, noting that one would expect to see *nḥyt* in the consonantal text and *nḥh* is never used of weapons, cf. Alison Ruth Gray, *Psalms 18 in Words and Pictures: A Reading Through Metaphor* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 149 n. 61. To this I would add that *nḥh* is almost exclusively used with people (or animals) as its direct object and not of inanimate objects with one exception. In 1 Kgs 10:26, Solomon leads his chariots and horses (*pārāšîm*) into certain cities.

³⁶⁵ Joseph Reider, “Etymological Studies in Biblical Hebrew,” *VT* 2 (1952): 114. Though Reider was the first to suggest this meaning for 2 Sam 22:35 || Ps 18:35, J. Obermann had suggested it earlier in order to explain the verb *ynḥt* in KTU 1.2 iv 11, 18; see Julian Obermann, “How Baal Destroyed a Rival: A Mythological Incantation Scene,” *JAOS* 67 (1947): 199.

³⁶⁶ Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863), 2773.

³⁶⁷ McCarter, *II Samuel*, 470.

³⁶⁸ McCarter, *II Samuel*, 454.

³⁶⁹ Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle I*, 337-338.

parallelism between the notions of “training” and “fashioning.”³⁷⁰ It seems to this author, however, that one can make the case that physical training is a process through which stronger arms could be formed or fashioned. Additionally, there is no reason that the parallelism of the verse must be synonymous or one of strict equivalences.³⁷¹ The sentiment of the verse could be construed as “the one who trains my hands for war, not only that he fashioned the bows of my arms.” The weakness of this view is that the image of the “bow of the arm” as a way to refer to the elbow would be unique to 2 Sam 22:35 || Ps 18:35 in the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Near Eastern cultures. Usually, proponents of this view understand the psalmists arms to be the focus of the creation.³⁷² In contrast, I would argue that it is also possible that, like Smith’s understanding of the Ugaritic example, it is the weapon that is created with *zərō ‘ōtāy* functioning as the indirect object “for my arms.” This interpretation would fit the context of the passage.

B. *ḥtt* “break.” This interpretation is based on the LXX of 2 Sam 22:35 which employs *kataxas* from *katagnumi* “break, shatter”³⁷³ and a variant manuscript of 2 Samuel referenced in *BHS*, which has *wh̄tt* in place of MT *wəniḥat*. Without emending the text of MT, however, one would have to understand *wəniḥat* as a 3ms Niphal “he/it was broken.” This creates a syntactic difficulty, as it does not make sense for God or the king to be broken. Even if we extend the subject to *zərō ‘a*, normally feminine but

³⁷⁰ Pinker, “On the Meaning of קשת נחושה,” 4. Gray likewise rejects this interpretation without giving a reason; see Gray, *Psalm 18 in Words and Pictures*, 147.

³⁷¹ James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 8.

³⁷² See Reider, “Etymological Studies in Biblical Hebrew,” 114; and McCarter, *II Samuel*, 470-471.

³⁷³ The LXX translates *kai kataxas toxon chalkoun en brachioni mou* “and breaking a bronze bow with my arm.”

masculine in a few rare instances, having the king's arms broken does not fit the context of the verse.³⁷⁴ This seems to be what the LXX^L was struggling with when it translates: *ouk ēsthenēse toxon brachionos mou* “the bow of my arm was not weakened.” McCarter argues that this is likely under the influence of the LXX of 1 Sam 2:4 which translates *qešet gibborîm hattîm* with *toxon dynatōn ēsthenēsen*.³⁷⁵ Even allowing for emendation, the notion of Yahweh training the king's hands so that he could break a bronze bow is difficult. Presumably the enemy's bow would be in view, but why bronze and why only one bow? It is Yahweh, however, who usually destroys bows in the Hebrew Bible not humans.³⁷⁶ It is hard to see how “break” would fit the passage even if we allow for emendation.

C. *ntn* “give.” This interpretation comes from the LXX version of Ps 18:35 which translates *kai ethou toxon chalkoun*. BHS suggests that perhaps the Hebrew *Vorlage* would be *wānātattâ*. This is an attractive suggestion for several reasons. First, it fits in with the giving of the shield in the next verse. Additionally, there are many ancient Near Eastern parallels in which a king is given a bow by a deity.³⁷⁷ Gray, however, correctly points out that the LXX reading represents the easier reading, so by the principle of *lectio*

³⁷⁴ Isa 51:5; Job 22:9; Dan 11:6?; 11:15; 11:22; 11:31.

³⁷⁵ McCarter, *II Samuel*, 459. The verb *astheneō* is most often used to translate variations on the root *kšl* “stagger, stumble.” See Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, *A concordance to the Septuagint and the other Greek versions of the Old Testament (including the Apocryphal books)*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 172.

³⁷⁶ 1 Sam 2:4; Isa 41:2; Jer 51:56; Ezek 39:3; Hos 1:5; 2:20; Ps 37:15; 46:10; and 76:4. The only exception is Zech 9:10 in which the coming king will eliminate chariot and horse and the bow of war will be eliminated (Niphal of the root *krt*).

³⁷⁷ For examples in which the king is given a bow, see: Tiglath-pileser I (A.0.87.1 vi 58-60); Sennacherib (Senn 18 17'-19', 25'-29'; Senn 22 v 71-73, 78-81; Senn 23 v 61-62, 67-69; Senn 146 i' 7-8; Senn 230 64, 67); Esarhaddon (Esar 1 ii 38-39; Esar 8 ii 8'-13'; Esar 98 rev. 28).

difficilior it should be rejected.³⁷⁸ Furthermore, such an interpretation would require emendation.

D. *nḥt* “strengthen.” R. Good was the first to offer this suggestion as a way to explain another meaning of the root *nḥt* in 2 Sam 22:35 || Ps 18:35, Isa 30:30, and the Ugaritic cognate in KTU 1.2 iv 11 and 18.³⁷⁹ Good’s argument for *nḥt* is primarily contextual, arguing that in Isa 30:30 the meaning of the phrase *naḥat zərô ‘ô* is most properly understood as “the strength of his arm” or “his strong arm” instead of the customary “descent of his arm.”³⁸⁰ From this point, he interprets the verb *nḥt* in 2 Sam 22:35 || Ps 18:35 as a Piel denominative verb with the meaning “give (military) strength to.”³⁸¹ He follows the 2 Samuel form, understanding the verb as 3ms with Yahweh as the subject. Thus, he translates the verse “Training my hands for war, He strengthened my arms with a bronze bow.”³⁸² The etymological basis for this translation is weak and his view has found little traction among other scholars.³⁸³

E. *nḥt* “descend.” The most common interpretation understands *wəniḥat* as a D-stem of the root *nḥt* with the meaning “press down,” which is taken as a technical term

³⁷⁸ Gray, *Psalm 18 in Words and Pictures*, 149.

³⁷⁹ Good, “Hebrew and Ugaritic NḤT,” 153-156.

³⁸⁰ Good, “Hebrew and Ugaritic NḤT,” 154.

³⁸¹ Good, “Hebrew and Ugaritic NḤT,” 154.

³⁸² Good, “Hebrew and Ugaritic NḤT,” 154.

³⁸³ Pope, “The Status of El at Ugarit,” 226; Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle I*, 338. In contrast, D. M. Calabro agrees with Good only concerning Isa 30:30, which Calabro sees as an Egyptian loanword *nḥt* “strong.” See David Michael Calabro, “Ritual Gestures of Lifting, Extending, and Clasping the Hand(s) in Northwest Semitic Literature and Iconography,” (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2014), 58 n. 60.

referring to stringing or drawing the bow.³⁸⁴ This interpretation, however, is problematic because 2 Sam 22:35 || Ps 18:35 would be the only occurrence in which the root *nḥt* was used to string or draw a bow. Nor do the cognate languages provide similar expressions with this root.³⁸⁵ Additionally, given that there are other more common expressions for stringing a bow (with the root *drk*; e.g. Jer 51:3) and drawing the bow (with the root *mšk*; e.g. 1 Kgs 22:34), one wonders why the author would choose such an unusual expression.³⁸⁶ Certainly it is possible that it is a technical term, whose use outside of this passage has not been preserved and thus should not be excluded. However, methodologically such an option should be reserved in the event of no better choices.

There is another option for those wanting to understand the verb *wəniḥat* as a D-stem of the root *nḥt* “descend.” In this case, a factitive-causative meaning for the D-stem of *nḥt*, with the meaning “lower, bring down,” fits best. In this way, I follow J. Joosten’s classification of the root, though not his translation.³⁸⁷ Outside of 2 Sam 22:35 || Ps 18:35, the root appears as a D-stem only in Ps 65:11 in the Hebrew Bible, in which it refers to the lowering or deepening of gullies through God’s abundant rain. There are a few examples among Imperial Aramaic texts of the D-stem of *nḥt* meaning “bring down, put down,” though the consonantal text makes it difficult to rule out a C-stem

³⁸⁴ For representative examples, see Chisholm, “An Exegetical and Theological Study of Psalm 18/2 Samuel 22,” 256; Adam, *Der Königliche Held*, 44 and 46; and Gray, *Psalms 18 in Words and Pictures*, 146-149.

³⁸⁵ Pinker, “On the Meaning of קשת נחושה,” 4.

³⁸⁶ For more on stringing a bow, see J. A. Emerton, “Treading the Bow,” *VT* 53 (2003): 465-486.

³⁸⁷ He translates “press down” for the causative-factitive Piel meaning. Though, since in Joosten’s view the active (C-stem) version of these verbs indicates a resulting condition or state, the translation “lower” seems to fit his understanding of the root *nḥt*. See Jan Joosten, “The Functions of the Semitic D stem: Biblical Hebrew Materials for a Comparative-Historical Approach,” *Or* 67 (1998): 219-220 and 226.

interpretation in most cases.³⁸⁸ The meaning “bring down” is more amply attested in the C-stem for this root, especially in Aramaic.³⁸⁹ There can be semantic overlap between D-stem and C-stem meanings of the same root.³⁹⁰

The subject of the verb is not explicitly stated in the stich, but the third masculine singular form in 2 Sam 22:35 makes it likely that God is the subject just as he is the subject of *mālammed* in the first stich. In Ps 18:35, as pointed in the MT, the verb is a third person feminine singular. Assuming just the consonantal text, however, also allows for the possibility of *nihattā* “you lowered” with *tāw* of the suffix merging with the *tāw* of the root. The *hē* at the end would then be a *mater lectionis* for the long /a/ of the second masculine singular. This would be in keeping, at least in person/number, with the LXX’s translation of *ethou* “you placed.”³⁹¹ In this view, God lowers a bronze bow into the psalmist’s hands. This interpretation is not new and has been argued by M. Dahood and more recently by S. Shnider.³⁹² A common argument against this interpretation, is that giving a bow makes a poor parallel for the training of the psalmists hands in the first stich.³⁹³ Yet this is only a problem if we assume that the parallelism between the two

³⁸⁸ C1.1 (Aḥiqar), 170-171; D23.1.9, 7 (if one follows A. Lemaire’s reading of *ynḥtw*) and UrukInc, 3. For Lemaire’s reading, see André Lemaire, “Les Inscriptions araméennes de Cheikh-Fadl (Egypt),” in *Studia Aramaica: New Sources and New Approaches : Papers Delivered At the London Conference of the Institute of Jewish Studies, University College London, 26th-28th June 1991*, eds. Markham J. Geller, Jonas C Greenfield, and M. P. Weitzman (JSS 4; Oxford: Oxford University Press on behalf of the University of Manchester, 1995), 95-96.

³⁸⁹ For a Hebrew example, see Joel 4:11. For Old and Imperial Aramaic examples, see Tell Fakh 2; A2.5, 5f; A3.8, 13; C3.28, 119; D1.13, 5; IdOstr-L2:288, 1-3.

³⁹⁰ For example, see *yhl* in Piel and Hiph in Ps 130:5, 7.

³⁹¹ While the shift from third person to second within the same verse is not ideal, it does occur elsewhere in the psalm (v. 29).

³⁹² See, Dahood, *Psalms 11-50*, 103 and Steven Shnider, “Psalm XVIII: Theophany, Epiphany Empowerment.” *VT* 56 (2006): 395, respectively.

³⁹³ For example, see Gray, *Psalms 18 in Words and Pictures*, 149.

stiches is meant to be synonymous. But if we understand the second stich as going beyond or developing on the theme, there is no difficulty. This would not be the only verse in the psalm to use a non-synonymous parallel (e.g. 2 Sam 22:37). A similar semantic parallel, between conditioning an arm and giving a weapon, is present in Ezek 30:24, in which Yahweh strengthens the Babylonian king's arms (*h̄zq*) before giving (*ntn*) him his own sword. Additionally, the parallel between *n̄ht* and *ntn* is not unique to this passage, but shows up in the bilingual Akkadian-Aramaic inscription of Tell Fakhariah amidst the opening Aramaic description of Hadad:

1. dmwt' | zy | hdys'y : zy : šm : qdm : hddskn
2. gwgl : šmyn : w'rq : mhn̄ht : 'sr : wntn : r'y

1. *dumûta' d̄f hadyîf'î d̄f sām qadm Hadad sikan*
2. *gûgal : šamayn : wa'ard̄ : mahan̄hit : 'utr : wa-nātin : rî'î*

“The statue of Had-yisi who set (it) before Hadad of Sikan, the Canal Inspector of the heavens and earth, the one who causes wealth to fall and the one who gives pasture”
(Tell Fakh, 1-2).

In this 9th century BCE text, the storm god's bringing wealth via rain is paralleled with his provision of verdant grazing land. This brings us to another potential difficulty with this interpretation. If my interpretation of KTU 1.2 iv 11 & 18 is set aside as a parallel example, then understanding *nihat* as “lowering” a weapon into someone's hands presents a unique expression just as the interpretation “pressing down, bending” a bow results in an unusual expression. Unlike taking *nihat* as bending or drawing a bow, however, using *n̄ht* to describe a weapon bestowal serves to evoke the storm imagery present in the psalm. The root *n̄ht* does have meteorological associations. As shown above, the root appears in the Tell Fakhariah inscription to describe the wealth, i.e. precipitation that the storm god brings. The root is used in a similar way in Ps 65:11 to

describe how Elohim brings rain and abundance to the land. Additionally, in Targum Neofiti to Gen 7:4 the Hebrew *'ānōkî mamṭîr 'al-hā'āreṣ* “I will make it rain upon the earth” is translated with *'nh mḥt mṭr 'l 'r* “I will make rain fall on the earth.”³⁹⁴ In this way, using *nḥt* in 2 Sam 22:35 || Ps 18:35 evokes Yahweh’s image as the providing storm god, in this case providing the psalmist with a divine weapon.

In the view of this author, the two best options regarding how to understand the root *nḥt* and its place in v.35b are “fashion” relating *nḥt* to Arabic *naḥata* and “lower,” relating it to Aramaic. Of these, I think “lower” has the best cognate support, ancient Near Eastern parallels, and fits the context of the passage. Given the ubiquity of root *nḥt* “descend” in Aramaic and the fact that it produces a sensible and fitting reading here, I privilege the West Semitic evidence over the Arabic example.

Problems and Interpretations: QŠT NḤWŠH

The phrase *qešet nāḥûšâ* appears only three times in the Hebrew Bible: in our parallel passages and Job 20:24. The bow of bronze has been a topic of some scholarly curiosity based primarily on the fact that a bow made of bronze would be impractical and essentially useless for real warfare.³⁹⁵ The interpretive options fall into three main categories: 1) those who delete *nḥwšh*;³⁹⁶ 2) those who seek alternative roots for *nḥš*;³⁹⁷

³⁹⁴ Alejandro Díez Macho, *Neophyti 1, Targum Palestinense Ms De La Biblioteca Vaticana, Tomo I: Génesis* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1968), 39.

³⁹⁵ Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (trans. John McHugh; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 243.

³⁹⁶ For example, Schmuttermayr, *Psalm 18 und 2 Samuel 22*, 144-145; and McCarter, *II Samuel*, 460.

³⁹⁷ Dahood, *Psalms I 1-50, 115* and Pinker, “On the Meaning of קשת נחושה,” 5.

and 3) those who understand *nḥwšt* as bronze, but not meant to refer to a literal bow made of bronze. Of these, the third group has received the most scholarly support.³⁹⁸

The support for the first group primarily comes from the better rhythmic balance achieved when *nḥwšh* is removed. This interpretation is bolstered by the LXX^L, which lacks an equivalent for *nḥwšh*. While this would make good sense, and produce tighter poetry, one would need to explain how *nḥwšh* entered the text. McCarter and Schuttermayr consider that it might have entered via influence from Job 20:24.³⁹⁹ This is certainly possible, but neither author offers a reason why an editor might have added the *nḥwšh* from Job here. Why would a copyist choose what is an admittedly difficult passage to illuminate another difficult passage? Furthermore, one would still need to explain what *nḥwšh* was doing in Job 20:24. As I have mentioned above, emendation should be reserved for situations when no other good option remains.

For the second group, two suggestions have been offered: Dahood takes *nḥwšh* from the root *nḥš* “to practice divination, to charm, enchant” and translates *qešet nḥūšā* as “miraculous bow.”⁴⁰⁰ He offers the bow given to Aqhat as a parallel to our passage. While Aqhat’s bow is crafted by Kotharu and coveted by Anatu, thus making it a special bow, it is nowhere described with *nḥš*, *lḥš* or any similar word in KTU 1.17-18.

Pinker offers a second option, suggesting that *nḥūšā* should be understood as coming from *nāḥāš* “snake” and accordingly translates *qešet nḥūšā* as a “snake-like

³⁹⁸ B. Couroyer, “L’arc d’airain,” *RB* 72 (1965): 508-514; Chisholm, “An Exegetical and Theological Study of Psalm 18 / 2 Samuel 22,” 258-259; and Gray, *Psalm 18 in Words and Pictures*, 147-148.

³⁹⁹ McCarter, *II Samuel*, 460; and Schuttermayr, *Psalm 18 und 2 Samuel 22*, 145.

⁴⁰⁰ Dahood, *Psalms I 1-50*, 115.

bow.”⁴⁰¹ He considers this to be a reference to a double-convex bow, for which he considers snake-like to be “quite natural for the double-convex bow in the agricultural society of David’s time.”⁴⁰² Certainly this is possible depending on one’s aesthetic sensibilities. A piece of support for Pinker’s view is fact that the warrior god Ninurta is said to wield the *šibbu* “snake” that is equated to his deluge bow (*qaštu abūbiya*) in the Angim myth.⁴⁰³ In contrast to Pinker’s interpretation, this is a divine weapon, the flood itself, and not a human bow. To bolster this interpretation one would want to see bows as human weapons in texts described as snakes or compared to snakes or in art portrayed as snakes or with snake heads. In contrast, bows carried by soldiers and the king depicted in Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs terminate in duck or lion heads when animal decorations are used.⁴⁰⁴ Additionally, there is no connection between bows and snakes in the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁰⁵

The largest problem is that the meaning *nəḥûšâ* is well understood as “copper, bronze.” The majority of verses (8 of 11) containing *nəḥûšâ* in the Hebrew Bible parallel it with *barzel* “iron,” making its meaning secure. Though 2 Sam 22:35 || Ps 18:35 lacks a reference to iron, the *qešet nəḥûšâ* of Job 20:24 does contain such a parallel *nēšeq barzel*

⁴⁰¹ Pinker, “On the Meaning of נחושה,” 3.

⁴⁰² Pinker, “On the Meaning of נחושה,” 3.

⁴⁰³ Angim 141 (*ETCSL* 1.6.1 141), cf. Lugale 3. See Jerrold S. Cooper, *The Return of Ninurta to Nippur: An-gim dīm-ma* (AnOr 52; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978), 80.

⁴⁰⁴ For bows terminating in duck heads, see Room 6, slabs 11-12 in Pauline Albenda and Annie Caubet, *The Palace of Sargon, King of Assyria: Monumental Wall Reliefs at Dur-Sharrukin, From Original Drawings Made at the Time of Their Discovery in 1843-1844 by Botta and Flandin* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1986), 135, pl. 70.

⁴⁰⁵ There is, however, one well-known, biblical connection between copper and snakes in the copper serpent of Num 21:8-9 and 2 Kgs 18:4.

“iron weapon.” Additionally, this is supported by many of the ancient versions. It seems to this author that understanding *nəḥûšâ* from various *nḥš* roots in Hebrew, should only be employed if *nəḥûšâ* “bronze” results in a nonsensical, meaningless sentence. This is not the case, as I will argue below.

Finally, most scholars take *nəḥûšâ* as “bronze” and interpretations divide based on the passage in question. For 2 Sam 22:35 || Ps 18:35 many understand the term to be a figurative reference to the bow’s strength. For Job 20:24 scholars understand *nəḥûšâ* as a synecdoche for a bronze tipped arrow.⁴⁰⁶ While this makes good sense in Job 20:24, in which the bronze bow is said to pierce (*taḥlāpēhû*) the wicked, it does not fit the context of 2 Sam 22:35 || Ps 18:35.⁴⁰⁷ Based on evidence from Mesopotamian weapon bestowal motifs, arrows are only bestowed in combination with bows.⁴⁰⁸ Also, would one not need a special bow to fire divine arrows? Additionally, I would argue that while the reference to the bow in Job 20:24 is a synecdoche, it is not the fact that the bow is described as *nəḥûšâ* that sets off this synecdoche, but the verb *taḥlāpēhû*. This can be seen in a similar synecdoche in a Neo-Assyrian letter dating to the reign of Sargon II. Liphur-Bel writes to the king:

r.5. LU₂*.2-u₂ ša lu₂*GAL.URU.MEŠ-šū₂-nu
 r.6. 9 lu₂*ERIM.MEŠ i-si-šū₂ ina ŠA₃ gišBAN
 r.7. ma-ḥu-šu 2 ina ŠA₃-šū₂-nu UŠ₂

The deputy of their town overseer (and) nine of the troops with him were struck by the bow. Two of them died.
 (SAA 5 3, 5)

⁴⁰⁶ For a representative of this group, see Driver, “Hebrew Notes,” 248. Older views that the bronze of the bow referred to a decorative element of the bow have been rejected.

⁴⁰⁷ Even understanding *wəniḥat* as “bending” or “stringing” would not make sense in reference to an arrow.

⁴⁰⁸ For example, see A.0.87.1 vi 58-60 (Tiglath-pileser I; RIMA 2, 25); Senn 22 v 71-73, 78-81 (RINAP 3.1, 183); Esar 1 ii 38-39 (RINAP 4, 15); and Esar 8 ii 8’-13’ (RINAP 4, 53-54).

Here, as in Job 20:24, what must be meant is that the men were struck by arrows, which is how the editors of *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* understand the passage: “nine men who were with him were wounded (by shots) from a bow.”⁴⁰⁹ It is important to note that it is possible for the bow to be a synecdoche for arrow without a reference to a material unique to the arrow’s composition (i.e. a metal tip). Noting this, however, scholars have used the synecdoche between bow and arrow to explain the presence of the impractical bronze bow. So, by connecting the synecdoche with the verb we are still left with the issue of how to interpret the bronze bow. Returning to the other interpretive option, Couroyer argues persuasively that here bronze means “strong” or “robust.”⁴¹⁰ Recently, Pinker has called this interpretation into question, stating “it is difficult to see how a metaphor based on a known impracticality of making brass or bronze bows could convey a meaningful concept of unusual strength.”⁴¹¹ This seems to miss the point. The metaphor is not of a bronze bow standing in for some other object, it is bronze standing in for the notion of strength. While taking *nəḥûšâ* as a metaphor for a strong bow fits the context of the passage, the bow’s status as a gift suggests that more than strength is in view. The key to solving this crux is to realize who is the owner of the bow, namely God.

In 2 Sam 22:35 || Ps 18:35 I have argued that God is lowering a bow into the psalmist’s arms. This bow would then seem to be Yahweh’s own bow, which he had used against the psalmist’s enemies by shooting arrows in v. 15 (*wayyišlah ḥiṣṣîm*). Likewise,

⁴⁰⁹ CAD M1, s.v. *maḥāṣu*, 83.

⁴¹⁰ Couroyer, “L’arc d’airain,” 513.

⁴¹¹ Pinker, “On the Meaning of קשת נחושה,” 2.

in Job 20:24 the iron weapons (*nēšeq barzel*) and bronze bow (*qešet nəhūšā*) that are terrifying the wicked man are God's. This is suggested by the previous verse:

20:23 *yəhī ləmallē' biṭnō*
yəsallah-bô hărôn 'appô
wəyamṭēr 'ālémô bilḥûmô
20:24 *yibraḥ minnēšeq barzel*
taḥlāpēhû qešet nəhūšā

Let it fill his stomach;
Let him (God) send his burning anger;
Let him rain down his food/hostility upon him.

He will flee from an iron weapon;
(but) an (arrow from a) bronze bow will pierce him.

The third masc. singular subject of *yəsallah* must be God, as only God is associated with burning anger (*hărôn 'ap*). The identification of God as the source of the arrows has been proposed by several scholars.⁴¹² Furthermore, elsewhere in the book of Job, Shaddai punishes Job by piercing him with arrows (Job 6:4).

In the process of explaining the impracticality of a bronze bow for warfare, many scholars note that metal bows only appear in text and archaeological references as votive objects.⁴¹³ Among metal bows, perhaps most famous are the silver and bronze bows which Sargon II took from the temple of Ḫaldi during his eighth campaign (cf. lines 378 and 394).⁴¹⁴ Archaeological finds support the textual witnesses, though their exact

⁴¹² Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job* (OTL; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), 314; David J. A. Clines, *Job 1-20* (WBC 17; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 496.

⁴¹³ Clines, *Job 1-20*, 495.

⁴¹⁴ Walter Mayer, *Assyrien und Urartu I: Der Achte Feldzug Sargon II. im Jahr 714 v. Chr.* (AOAT 395/1; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013), 134-137. Another example can be found in the silver-plated bow made for a royal statue (UET 111 566).

function (divine weapon, votive offering, prestige object) is difficult to discern.⁴¹⁵ As an example, recently, five small-scale (70 cm on average) bronze bows and two bronze quivers have been discovered at the Iron II period site of Adam in Oman.⁴¹⁶ This cache of bronze weapons, which also included axes, daggers, all-bronze arrows, and arrow heads, was discovered near ceramic incense burners. This has led the excavators to suggest a votive or ritual use for the objects.



Fig. 3.3. Bow made entirely of bronze⁴¹⁷

Similarly, Driver argues that “Only a god's bow might be *auratus* 'gilded' or *aureus* 'golden', while bows of bronze were but votive offerings or weapons in the hands of

⁴¹⁵ For example, Couroyer notes miniature bronze bows discovered at Susa. See Couroyer, “L’arc d’airain,” 508 n.3. For discussion of the difficulties of classifying such finds, see Töyräänvuori, “Weapons of the Storm God,” 162.

⁴¹⁶ “First non-utilitarian weapons found in the Arabian Peninsula,” CNRS: Press Release, <http://www2.cnrs.fr/en/2725.htm>.

⁴¹⁷ The bow is categorized as completely non-utilitarian. See “First non-utilitarian weapons found in the Arabian Peninsula,” CNRS: Press Release, <http://www2.cnrs.fr/en/2725.htm>.

statues; these were no ordinary weapons.⁴¹⁸ For Driver, this is inappropriate for a human weapon, but, as I have argued above, if the bow is supernatural, being given by Yahweh, that this is precisely what one would expect. For a similar, though later, example, Judas Maccabeus receives a gold sword from the prophet Jeremiah in a dream (2 Macc 15:15-16). For a similar cross cultural example, Apollo was known to wield a silver bow (*argyreioio bioio*; e.g. *Il.* 1.49).

Additionally, the use of a precious metal, in this case bronze, designates a prestige weapon. Prestige weapons served as both votive offerings to a god or as a mark of rank and standing when given to humans. Among the former, examples would be a bronze sword dedicated to Nergal and the bronze and silver bows of the temple of Ḫaldi described in Sargon II's eighth campaign.⁴¹⁹ Among the latter group, one could cite the silver spears given to lieutenants at Mari.⁴²⁰ Therefore, although bronze would be an unfeasible substance for a human bow, it is just the kind of lustrous and extravagant material one would expect for the weapon of a god.

Interpretation

The weapon bestowal takes place in verses 35-36, in the midst of four verses describing Yahweh's empowerment of the psalmist, starting and ending with his feet. The psalmist's arms and what they carry function as the central element in this inclusio. In v.

⁴¹⁸ G. R. Driver, "Problems in the Hebrew Text of Job," in *Wisdom in Israel and In the Ancient Near East*, eds. Martin Noth, D. Winton Thomas, and H. H Rowley (VTSup 3; Leiden: Brill, 1955), 82.

⁴¹⁹ See, respectively, Hans G. Güterbock, "A Votive Sword with Old Assyrian Inscription," in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on His Seventy-fifth Birthday, April 21, 1963* (AS 16; eds. Hans G. Güterbock and Thorkild Jacobsen; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 197-198; and Mayer, *Assyrien und Urartu I*, 134-137.

⁴²⁰ Vidal, "Prestige Weapons in an Amorite Context," 249.

35, God bestows, seemingly, his own weapon upon the psalmist just as it is God's shield of victory given in v. 36. The bestowal of a divine weapon is tantamount to the bestowal of assured victory.⁴²¹ After being divinely equipped, the psalmist quickly gets to action. Starting in verse 38, he chases down his enemies and does not stop until their complete destruction. He strikes them and they fall, he crushes and pulverizes his enemies. The psalmist is victorious and ends by praising God for his conquests.

A similar description of peril followed by victory appears in Sennacherib's description of the battle at Halulê against an overwhelming coalition of forces, discussed above (see pages 82-84). In the face of these forces, he prays to the gods for victory and they hear and come to support him. He subsequently describes equipping himself for battle, which includes taking up the bow and arrows of Aššur had given him.⁴²² After this, the text relates how Sennacherib made his enemies retreat "with the weapons of Aššur" (*ina kakkī Aššur*), shooting them with *uṣṣu* and *mulmullu* arrows.⁴²³ Like Sennacherib, the psalmist turns to divine aid through prayer (2 Sam 22:4 || Ps 18:4).

The psalm conforms to many of the general characteristics of the weapon bestowal motif. The worthiness of the psalmist is highlighted in several ways. First, vv. 20-28 extol the virtues of the psalmist. He is the chosen one of Yahweh. Yahweh is pleased (*ḥāpēš*) with him (v.20), because he keeps (*šmr*) the ways of Yahweh (v.22) and

⁴²¹ For a comparative example from Mari, see A.1968 7, in which Adad's weapons enable Yaḥdun-Lim to have no equals (*u₃ i-na^{giš} TUKUL.MEŠ-ia ma-ḥi-ra-am u₂-ul ir-ši*), see above, pages 99-100.

⁴²² A few scholars have seen in this and other references to received divine weapons in the Neo-Assyrian texts indication that such weapons were ritually bestowed upon the king before each battle. See Capomacchia and Rivaroli, "Peace and War," 176. This seems unnecessary. Such references may refer to a bestowal before a campaign or more likely they harken back to weapons that the king would receive at his ascension, such as the weapon given during Assurbanipal's Coronation Hymn (SAA 3 11: 27).

⁴²³ Sennacherib Nr. 22, col. v, lines 78-82; RINAP 3.1: 183.

is a blameless warrior (*gibbôr tāmîm*) (v.26). Additionally, the recipient of the divine weapon is a king (v.51).⁴²⁴ As the Mesopotamian and Levantine examples demonstrate, the king is uniquely suited for such a gift because of his special relation with the gods. This relationship is manifest in Ps 18 || 2 Sam 22 when the psalmist calls out to Yahweh for aid (v. 7) and Yahweh appears in a theophany to save him (vv. 8-18).

The king's dual role as peerless warrior (vv. 38-49) comes to the forefront. Yahweh's weapons invest the king with the power necessary to completely eradicate his enemies. As mentioned above, after receiving divine weapons the psalmist begins his assault on his enemies. The mood is one of triumph as the psalmist is completely victorious against his foes. This is what A. R. George calls the heroic view of war;⁴²⁵ it is the most common mood in which to find the weapon bestowal motif. The king, with the bestowed power of the gods, cannot be anything other than victorious in battle. Enemies are either destroyed or submit to him.

Finally, the bestowal of divine weaponry is connected with the legitimation of violence and the institution of kingship. Not only do Yahweh's weapons give strength and power to the king, but they justify his retributive attack on his enemies. This is further supported by Yahweh's assistance of the king in the midst of battle by making opponents bow (*takrîa* ׀) before the king (v. 40) and giving the king the neck (*ōrep*) of his enemies (v. 41). The enemies are portrayed as those who hate the psalmist (v. 40) and those whom Yahweh has rejected by not hearing their pleas (v. 42), lending further

⁴²⁴ Even if the attribution to David is in doubt, the psalmist's status as the head of nations in v. 44 as well as the reference to obedience of foreigners in vv. 45-46 marks him as a ruler.

⁴²⁵ A. R. George, "The Poem of Erra and Ishum: A Babylonian Poet's View of War," in *Warfare and Poetry in the Middle East* (ed. Hugh Kennedy; London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 46.

credibility to the king's right to subjugate them. The subjugation seems to be the endpoint of the king's role as unparalleled warrior. The description of the king's battle prowess ends with him as the head of nations (*rō 'š gōyim*) and one whom strangers (*'am lō' - yāda 'î*) and foreigners (*bānê nēkār*) serve (vv. 44-46). In striking contrast, the exilic prophet Ezekiel, to whom we now turn, presents an altogether different mood in his use of the motif.

Exilic Examples: Ezekiel

Writing from exile in Babylonia, Ezekiel's perspective is shaped by his forced ejection from his homeland combined with his current status as a stranger in a foreign land. These events, in themselves, would be traumatic enough, yet as we have seen above, Ezekiel does not discuss his own past experiences in getting to Tel Abib, nor does he offer much information about his experience in captivity. This makes sense once we realized that the contest over the trauma process is centered on the future of Jerusalem and not the events of the first forced migration. The fate of Jerusalem is the hinge point that will determine how the events of the exile, both past and future, are to be understood. The imminent destruction of Jerusalem looms over the first part of Ezekiel like a malevolent storm cloud. According to Ezekiel, his suffering and that of other Judeans, both at home and in exile, is not yet over as the threat of Nebuchadnezzar II was not yet finished. It is vital for Ezekiel to drive home the point that Jerusalem will fall because of God's wrath against his people.

To this end, Ezekiel draws upon the weapon bestowal motif used both by his present captors (the Babylonians) and proverbial imperial antagonists (the Assyrians) to shape the interpretation of the future disaster as horrific and unavoidable. As Alexander

Gao explain, the trauma process is cultural work and “[i]t begins with defining, symbolizing, and dramatizing what ‘happened.’”⁴²⁶ Ezekiel makes use of the weapon bestowal motif as a dramatic backdrop in Ezekiel 21 and 30, drawing on the intensity of emotion associated with such rhetoric from the perspective of its rhetorical targets. While the context of both passages is a judgment pronouncement, the target is different in each case with Judah being the target in the former and Egypt the target in the latter. The second of these two references reflects the more conventional form, at least in its outline, that we have seen in other Near Eastern examples, including 2 Samuel 22 || Psalm 18. For this reason, I will begin with this reference before moving onto the less conventional, but no less provocative, Ezekiel 21, the so-called “Song of the Sword.” Concerning Egypt, he writes:

20. *wayhî bə`aḥat `esrēh šānā bāri`šōn bəšib`ā laḥōdeš hāyā dəbar-yhwh`ēlay lē`mor*

21. *ben-`ādām `et-zērō`a par`ōh melek-miṣrayim šābārtî wəhinnēh lō`-ḥubbāšā lātēt rəpu`ōt lāsūm ḥittūl ləḥobšāh ləḥozqāh litpōs beḥāreb*

22. *lākēn kōh-`āmar `ādōnāy yhwh hinnî`el-par`ōh melek-miṣrayim wəšābartî`et-zērō`ōtāyw`et-haḥāzāqāh wə`et-hannišbāret wəhippaltî`et-haḥereb mīyāyādō*

23. *wahāpīšōtî`et-miṣrayim baggōyim wəzērītīm bā`ārāšōt*

24. *wəḥizzaqtî`et-zērō`ōt melek bābel wənātattî`et-ḥarbî bəyādō wəšābartî`et-zērō`ōt par`ōh wənā`aq na`āqōt ḥālāl ləpānāyw*

25. *wəhaḥāzaqtî`et-zērō`ōt melek bābel ūzərō`ōt par`ōh tippōlnā wəyādē`ū kî-`ānî yhwh bātittî ḥarbî bəyad melek-bābel wənāḥā`ōtāh`el-`ereš miṣrāyim*

26. *wahāpīšōtî`et-miṣrayim baggōyim wəzērītî`ōtām bā`ārāšōt wəyādē`ū kî-`ānî yhwh*

20. In the eleventh year (587 BCE), in the first month, on the seventh (day) of the month, the word of Yahweh came to me:

21. "Son of man, I broke the arm of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Look, it has not been bound to give healing, to set a bandage, to wrap it in order to strengthen it to grasp a sword.

⁴²⁶ Alexander and Gao, “Remembrance of Things Past,” 593.

22. Therefore, thus says the lord Yahweh, I am against Pharaoh, king of Egypt. I will break his arms, the strong one and the broken one. I will make the sword fall from his hand.
23. I will disperse Egypt among the nations, I will scatter them among the lands.
24. I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon. I will place my sword into his hand. I will break the arms of Pharaoh. The groanings of the slain will groan before him.
25. I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon but the arms of Pharaoh will fall so that they will know that I am Yahweh, when I place my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon and he stretches it out against the land of Egypt.
26. I will disperse Egypt among the nations. I will scatter them among the lands so that they will know that I am Yahweh.
(Ezek 30:20-26)

Here the date formula places this prophecy in 587 BCE and most scholars consider it to refer to Pharaoh Apries attempt to break the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem.⁴²⁷ The traditional structure of the weapon bestowal motif is present in the passage.⁴²⁸ A king receives a divine weapon before engaging with a foe in battle. This weapon is connected with divinely provided increased strength for the king. In this way,

⁴²⁷ K. S. Freedy and D. B. Redford, "The Dates in Ezekiel in Relation to Biblical, Babylonian and Egyptian Sources," *JAOS* 90 (1970): 471; James K. Hoffmeier, "Egypt As an Arm of Flesh: A Prophetic Response," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, ed. Avraham Gileadi (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 91; Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 2:177.

⁴²⁸ This has been interpreted by some scholars as a reference to the Egyptian weapon bestowal motif, based on the language focused upon the Pharaoh's arms and the tradition of *hps*-sword presentation scenes going back to the New Kingdom. See Freedy and Redford, "The Dates in Ezekiel in Relation to Biblical, Babylonian and Egyptian Sources," 482-483; James K. Hoffmeier, "A New Insight on Pharaoh Apries from Herodotus, Diodorus, and Jeremiah 46:17," *SSEA* 11 (1981): 168; and Keel, "Powerful Symbols of Victory," 211-212. A general reference to an Egyptian motif seems more likely than a word play on Apries' Nebty name. This is made all the more plausible due to two Phoenician bowls with Egyptian weapon bestowal imagery dating to the late eighth century BCE and mid-to-late seventh century BCE. The problem, as I see it, is that these bowls were being distributed were distributed in Greece and Italy (Salamis and Praeneste) rather than the Levant. For more on these bowls, see Glenn Markoe, *Phoenician Bronze and Silver Bowls from Cyprus and the Mediterranean* (UCPCS 26; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 174-175 (cy5); 188-191 (E1). I think a reference to a still productive Mesopotamian motif is more likely than, especially considering the book's Mesopotamian setting. For a similar argument for Mesopotamian influence, see Theodore J. Lewis, "CT 13.33-34 and Ezekiel 32: Lion-Dragon Myths," *JAOS* 116 (1996): 28-47.

the motif sets up the king of Babylon as the expected hero, since, like the psalmist in 2 Samuel 22 || Psalm 18, he receives the weapon of Yahweh.⁴²⁹ Looking past the similarities in structure, this version of the weapon bestowal motif contains surprising divergences. First, as many scholars have noted, it is surprising that a foreign king, Judah's oppressor no less, is given Yahweh's sword.⁴³⁰ Part of the function of the weapon bestowal motif is to provide legitimation for the king. Yet the king of Judah is absent here. Instead, it is a contest between two foreign kings, one of whom receives the support and weapon of a foreign (to him) god.⁴³¹ L. Lee considers the primary theme of Ezek 30:20-26 to be "the rivalry between YHWH and Pharaoh."⁴³² While this is accurate according to the structure of Ezek 30:20-26's narrative frame, the contest between Pharaoh and Yahweh occurs only because Pharaoh sought to intervene in Yahweh's punishment of Judah. Such an intervention undoubtedly offered hope to those trapped in Jerusalem and the exiles abroad. This would have been a real threat to Ezekiel's trauma narrative and thus he had to weave a dramatic depiction of Egypt and ultimately Judah's crushing defeat. Yahweh's primary target remains his own people and by extension

⁴²⁹ There is no reason to think that this is the Pharaoh's sword. Once Pharaoh's sword drops, it disappears from the narrative. Yahweh refers to the sword he gives the Babylonian king as "my sword" and there is no reason in the narrative to assume that Pharaoh was originally carrying Yahweh's sword, contra Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, 177.

⁴³⁰ C. A. Strine and C. L. Crouch, "Yhwh's Battle against Chaos in Ezekiel: The Transformation of Judahite Mythology for a New Situation," *JBL* 132 (2013): 891.

⁴³¹ Strine and Crouch take this to be a kind of subversion of Babylonian authority, since it is Yahweh who equips Nebuchadnezzar II and not Marduk, see Strine and Crouch, "Yhwh's Battle against Chaos in Ezekiel," 903. While this is strange according to the usual convention, in which one would expect a Mesopotamian or Egyptian god to give this kind of support, Nebuchadnezzar II as a pious king would not have been surprised by the support of any deities, local or foreign. What is surprising, from a Mesopotamian perspective, would be that Yahweh would claim to have dominion over Egypt. For more on the support of foreign gods for Mesopotamian kings, see chapter four.

⁴³² Lydia Lee, *Mapping Judah's Fate in Ezekiel's Oracles Against the Nations* (ANEM 15; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 135.

anyone who might try to interfere with his plans for them. Secondly, the stretching out of the divine weapon is not a part of the traditional motif imagery. Instead, it seems to be an innovation by Ezekiel, which calls back to Moses (Exod 17:8-16) and Joshua (Josh 8:18, 26).

On the one hand, at face value this is a very powerful image. Receiving a deity's weapon is connected with divine selection for kingship and empowerment for conquest. In this way, Yahweh's awarding of his sword to Nebuchadnezzar II would be an endorsement on the level of Jeremiah referring to him as Yahweh's servant (Jer 25:9; 27:6; and 43:10) or Cyrus being called the messiah by Yahweh (Isa 45:1). This is even more surprising if we consider that it was Nebuchadnezzar II who forcefully relocated the elite of Judah to Babylonia and who soon would threaten the remainder of the Judeans and Jerusalem itself. Yet again, this makes sense if we realize Ezekiel's primary antagonists are not the Babylonians, but other Judeans who sought to interpret the threat against Jerusalem as the beginning of a great victory in which Yahweh would defeat the Babylonians and restore his people to their land. In Ezekiel's understanding, the Babylonian king is the instrument of Yahweh's wrath and cannot be stopped or challenged until his mission is complete. This is not to say that Ezekiel was necessarily pro-Babylonian in a meaningful sense (siding with Babylonians over Judeans), but like Isaiah before him, he saw the machinations of great empires as part of Yahweh's work in history.

On the other hand, the Babylonian king's role, however, is largely perfunctory. This fits with Lee's assessment of the major theme of the passage, which is Yahweh's contest of strength with Pharaoh. Although the Babylonian king does not take center

stage, his presence serves as a reminder to the exiles that he is still Yahweh's chosen instrument of retribution. This makes it clear that although Yahweh will deal with Pharaoh personally, this is not a signal that the Babylonian invasion will be stopped by Yahweh. The Babylonian king's role in the narrative is to emphasize the reason for Yahweh's intervention, i.e. the inevitable punishment of Judah. These differences between the traditional Mesopotamian weapon bestowal motif and Ezek 30:20-26 are due to the prophet's trauma narrative focusing on the imminent destruction of Jerusalem and will be addressed below. But first, we must turn to the second reference to the weapon bestowal motif in Ezek 21:6-20:⁴³³

6. wayhî dābar-yhwh 'ēlay lē'mōr
7. ben-'ādām śîm pānēkā 'el-yērūsālaïm wəhaṭṭēp 'el-miqdāsîm wəhinnābē' 'el-'admat yiśrā'ēl
8. wə'āmartā lə'admat yiśrā'ēl kōh 'āmar yhwh hinnî 'ēlayik wəhōšē'tî ḥarbî mitta 'rāh wəhikrattî mimmēk ṣaddîq wə'rāsā'
9. ya'an 'āšer-hikrattî mimmēk ṣaddîq wə'rāsā' lākēn tēšē' ḥarbî mitta 'rāh 'el-kol-bāsār minnegeb ṣāpōn
10. wəyādē'ū kol-bāsār kî 'ānî yhwh hōšē'tî ḥarbî mitta 'rāh lō' tāsūb 'ōd
11. wə'attā ben-'ādām hē'ānaḥ bəšibrōn motnayim ūbimrîrūt tē'ānaḥ lə'ēnēhem
12. wəhāyā kî-yō'marū 'ēlēkā 'al-mā'attā ne'ēnāḥ wə'āmartā 'el-šamū'ā kî-bā'ā wə'nāmēs kol-lēb wə'rāpū kol-yādayim wəkihātā kol-rūaḥ wəkol-birkayim tēlaknā mayim hinnēh bā'ā wənihyātā nə'um 'ādōnāy yhwh
13. wayhî dābar-yhwh 'ēlay lē'mōr
14. ben-'ādām hinnābē' wə'āmartā kōh 'āmar 'ādōnāy 'ēmōr ḥereb ḥereb hūḥaddā wəgam-mərūtā
15. ləma'an ṭəbōaḥ ṭəbaḥ hūḥaddā ləma'an-hēyēh-lāh bārāq mōrāṭṭā 'ō nāsîs šēbeṭ bānay⁴³⁴ mō'eset kol-'ēs
16. wayyittēn 'ōtāh ləmorṭā litpōs bakkāp hî'-hūḥaddā ḥereb wəhî' mōrāṭṭā lātēt 'ōtāh bəyad-hōrēg
17. zə'aq wəhēlēl ben-'ādām kî-hî' hāyṭā bə'ammî hî' bəkol-nāsî'ē yiśrā'ēl məgūrē'el-ḥereb hāyū 'et-'ammî lākēn səpōq 'el-yārēq
18. kî bōḥan ūmā 'im-gam-šēbeṭ mō'eset lō' yihyeh nə'um 'ādōnāy yhwh

⁴³³ For a detailed treatment of Ezek 21:19-22, see chapter six below.

⁴³⁴ Here I am not following the MT vocalization. For an explanation of this change and the difficulties of verses 15b and 18, see the Excursus below.

19. *wə`attā ben-`ādām hinnābē` wəhak kap`el-kāp wətikkāpēl hereb
 šālīšitā hereb ḥālālīm hi` hereb ḥālāl haggādōl haḥōderet lāhem*
 20. *lāma`an lāmūg lēb wəharbēh hammikšōlīm`al kol-ša`ārēhem nātattī
 `ibḥat-ḥāreb`āḥ`āšūyā ləbārāq mə`uṭṭā ləṭābah*
 21. *hit`aḥādī hēminī hāsīmī hašmīl`ānā pānayik mu`ādōt*
 22. *wəgam-`ānī`akkeh kappī`el-kappī wahāniḥōtī ḥāmātī`ānī yhw
 dibbartī*

6. The word of Yahweh came to me:
7. “Son of Man, set your face against Jerusalem, foam-at-the-mouth against the sanctuaries and prophesy against the land of Israel!
8. Say to the land of Israel, thus the Lord has said, ‘Here I am against you. I will draw out my sword from its sheath. I will exterminate from you the righteous and the wicked.’
9. I hereby will exterminate from you the righteous and the wicked, therefore my sword will go out from its sheath against all flesh from the Negev north(ward).
10. Then all flesh will know that I am the Lord. I have drawn my sword from its sheath, it will not return again.
11. As for you, son of man, groan with shattering loins and you will groan with bitterness before their eyes.
12. When they say to you, ‘Why are you groaning?’ Then you will speak about the report that has arrived. Every heart will melt, all hands will drop, every spirit will become disheartened, all knees will flow with water. Look it is coming! It will be fulfilled. Utterance of the Lord.
13. The word of Yahweh came to me:
14. “Son of man, prophesy and say: ‘Thus the lord has said, ‘Say: A sword, a sword has been sharpened and even polished.’”
15. In order to make a slaughtering, it has been sharpened. In order to become lightning it has been polished. (They said) “Or shall we rejoice?” (No), (the sword) despises the scepter of my sons (and) every tree.
16. He has given it to polish, to seize with the palm (of the hand); a sword—it has been sharpened, it has been polished to give into the hand of a killer.
17. Cry out and wail, son of man, for it has come against my people, it is against the princes of Israel. They will fall upon the sword with my people, therefore slap yourself on the thigh!
18. For it (the scepter) has been tested. What (will happen), if (the sword) despises even the scepter? It will no longer exist. Utterance of the lord Yahweh.
19. As for you, son of man, prophesy and clap hands, a sword be doubled a third (time), it is a sword of (the) slain, the sword of the slain of the great one, the one surrounding them.
20. In order that heart(s) waver and that stumbling blocks increase, upon all their gates I have set the slaughter of (the) sword. Alas, it was made as lightning, it was withdrawn for slaughter.

The reference to the weapon bestowal motif in this passage is subtle and for good reason has escaped the notice of most scholars. Part of the reason the reference has gone unnoticed is a complete shift in focus. The traditional weapon bestowal motif is focused upon the person of the king, as the recipient, and his relationship to the divine. All that is mentioned about the recipient of the divine weapon is that the weapon is prepared for him and that he is a killer (*hōrēg*) (v. 16). That this “killer” refers to the king of Babylon only becomes clear in Ezek 21:24-26.⁴³⁵ In Ezek 21:6-20, the primary focus is upon the sword itself and the perspective is from its intended targets. There is almost a perverse lingering on the preparation of Yahweh’s weapon of destruction, the sharpening and polishing of which is mentioned again and again (v.14, 15, 16, and 20). The imagery in connection to a ruler’s weapon (Nebuchadnezzar II) is not completely unique to the Hebrew Bible, as Tiglath-pileser I claims to possess weapons sharpened by Aššur.⁴³⁶ The extended focus, however, on the weapon’s preparation is indeed unique to Ezekiel.

The purpose of the divine weapon is repeated: for slaughter (v.15, 20). Like the traditional portrayals of the weapon bestowal motif, the wicked enemies of the gods are the targets of punishment. In this case, however, these evil targets of divine wrath are also the ones to whom the message is directed. This is not a celebration of heroic victories over malevolent forces, but a lament of those about to face divine destruction. Ezekiel uses the frame of the weapon bestowal motif to create a new message shaping the

⁴³⁵ Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1970), 296; Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 685; Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 22a; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 441 and 444; and Bowen, *Ezekiel*, 127.

⁴³⁶ *ša d*aš-šur^{giš}TUKUL.MEŠ-šu u₂-ša₂-hi-lu-ma; A.0.87.1 i 36b-37a, RIMA 2, 13.

experience of exile. Ezekiel's two examples demonstrate several significant deviations from the normal form of the weapon bestowal motif that serves his trauma narrative: a horrific tone, reduced agency for the king, and a shift in allegiance from the conquering king to Yahweh alone.

Ezekiel's Trauma Narrative: Horrific Tone

The first and most obvious difference between the two Ezekielian examples of the motif is their attitude toward war. Typically, as George notes, a heroic tone is conveyed by both language and the idea of glorifying battle and the heroic figure that takes part in it.⁴³⁷ A change in tone would be a necessary component of Ezekiel's trauma narrative, since it seeks to understand the events of 597 BCE and the future of Jerusalem within a framework of divine punishment. The change in tone becomes clear when we examine the 2 Samuel 22 || Psalm 18 example. In 2 Samuel 22 || Psalm 18, the king/psalmist is saved and then empowered by God with the weapons given to him. He smashes and destroys his enemies. The audience is meant to cheer for the king's victories as proof of Yahweh's faithfulness and power. In contrast, in Ezekiel 21 the focus is not upon a glorious king and his conquests. Instead, the perspective of the motif is turned on its head.

By flipping the perspective of the motif, Ezekiel flips the tone and the meaning. In Ezekiel, we hear of the weapon bestowal from the perspective of those who will soon be

⁴³⁷ George, "The Poem of Erra and Ishum," 43. Aside from a similar tone, D. Bodi has noted several parallels between the Poem of Erra and the Song of the Sword, including claims of divine inspiration, the power of words, and a connection between sword and fire imagery. Of these parallels, the association between fire and sword is the most convincing, though Bodi notes that this connection is limited to neither the book of Ezekiel or the Poem of Erra. Cf. Daniel Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra* (OBO 104; Fribourg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag, 1991), 231-257.

its target. The weapon itself and its targets become the central focus. The sword is polished and sharpened for slaughter (*tebah*). This is not the description of a hero to be lauded, but a horror to be feared. The prophet is then enjoined to cry (*zē'aq*) and wail (*hēlēl*). Though the prophet refers to rejoicing (*nāsīs*), the reference takes place as an interrogative whose unspoken answer is an emphatic rejection.⁴³⁸ There will be no rejoicing. The tone here is one of loss and mourning.

Turning to Ezek 30:20-26, while the structure of the motif takes a more traditional form, the lingering and unavoidable destruction of Jerusalem renders the tone tragic. Though it appears that one of Judah's historical enemies is finally receiving divine justice, the fate of Jerusalem and Pharaoh are intertwined. Pharaoh's failure to break the Babylonian siege will result in the city's destruction. Thus, Yahweh might as well be breaking the arms of Judah, since they are allowed no defense against the oncoming punishment. Additional support for this view can be seen in the language used in this passage, which is the language of exile, specifically Judah's exile. This is a topic I will take up in more depth below. In Ezek 30:24 after Yahweh breaks Pharaoh's arms, Pharaoh groans (*nā'aq*). This verbal root is rare in the Hebrew Bible, appearing only four times outside of this verse. Significantly, it is used twice to describe the moaning of Israel during Egyptian bondage which caused God to remember his covenant with Israel (Exod 2:24 and 6:5). There is no heroic victory here, only God's punishment of Judah and Egypt, who is described with the language usually reserved for the people of Yahweh.

⁴³⁸ See Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 422-423. Following Garfinkle's interpretation, Block views 'ō as a corrupt form of the Akkadian prohibitive particle and translates it "Let us not..." See Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 672.

Ezekiel's primary obstacles in crafting his trauma narrative are the stubborn, hard-hearted Judeans of his audience (Ezek 2:4) and false prophets predicting peace (Ezek 13:1-10). To combat counter-carrier groups, Ezekiel employs a horrific tone that serves to answer two of Alexander's essential four questions: the nature of the pain and relation of the trauma to a wider audience.⁴³⁹ The dramatic representation of impending violence supplies Ezekiel's audience with an emotional response to the events of 586 BCE. This serves to reify the correct interpretation, at least from Ezekiel's perspective, not only of Jerusalem's fall, but retroactively of the forced migration of 597 BCE as well.

Agency Denied

Another difference between the pre-exilic and exilic uses of the weapon bestowal motif is the agency of the king. Removal of the king's normal agency is a way for Ezekiel to make use of the symbolic power of imperial rhetoric, while neutralizing elements that would conflict with his message. This is also a way for Ezekiel to navigate the complex currents of blame and culpability, answering Alexander's question about responsibility.⁴⁴⁰ In Mesopotamian examples and in 2 Samuel 22 || Psalm 18, the recipient attacks and defeats his enemies. Though the psalmist receives aid from Yahweh, this help strengthens the king as he executes the divine plan. It is the psalmist as king who pursues (*'erdapâ*), exterminates (*'ašmîdēm*), destroys (*'ākallēm*), strikes (*'emhāšēm*), quashes (*'ašmîdēm*), crushes (*'ešhāqēm*), pulverizes (*'ādīqqēm*), and tramples (*'erqā'ēm*) his foes (2 Sam 22:38-43). The king's agency is in keeping with a heroic tone, which portrays valiant kings as brave warriors ready and able to defeat

⁴³⁹ Alexander, "Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 13-15.

⁴⁴⁰ Alexander, "Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 19.

anyone who would stand against them. The gift of divine weaponry marks the king as one in a special relationship with the divine world. He is worthy and faithful enough to be entrusted with powerful mythological objects.

In Ezekiel 30, however, we saw that even though the Babylonian king received Yahweh's sword his role in Egypt's punishment was superfluous. It is Yahweh who breaks Pharaoh's arms and it is Yahweh who will scatter the people of Egypt. The Babylonian king's only action is to stretch out the divine weapon in a scene reminiscent of Joshua's stretching out the *kîdôn* at the battle of Ai (Josh 8:18). Unlike Joshua and his army, who are the primary actors taking the city and burning it down (Josh 8:19, 28), Yahweh is the only one with effective agency. Removing the agency from the king undermines the usual intent of the weapon bestowal motif, i.e. glorifying the king.

In Ezekiel 21:6-22, the role of the king as recipient of divine armament is eclipsed by Yahweh's sword, which serves as the central focus. The recipient here is not specified by name, but called "the killer" (*hōrēg*). While vocabulary of brutality can be positive in the right context (e.g. heroic exploits of warriors), here it paints the recipient of the sword as one carrying out the task of the sword, death. This fixation upon the sword communicates that it does not matter who holds the sword. Their function is completely expendable. The wielder is characterized a killer, but even this role is effaced with the sword gaining attention over its handler. The remainder of chapter 21 and the status of the exiles as captives in Babylonia make the identity of this "killer" clear. Ezekiel's use of the weapon bestowal motif serves to sanction the punishment of Judah while diminishing the king's role in that punishment. It also serves as a reminder that the status as Yahweh's chosen instrument of punishment is not a blanket endorsement as it is in

Mesopotamian royal inscriptions. Perhaps the lack of agency for the king is meant to place the head of an oppressive imperial power in the same state of powerlessness that displaced Judeans felt in Babylonia.

The diminishing of the king's role is important for Ezekiel's framing of the trauma narrative. In discussing the attribution of responsibility necessary for any trauma narrative, Alexander highlights several key elements that must be included: "it is critical to establish the identity of the perpetrator—the 'antagonist.' Who actually injured the victim? Who caused the trauma?"⁴⁴¹ For Ezekiel, the role of the antagonist is spread out among different groups. Who injured the victim? On one level, it is the king of Babylon and his forces. But, as we have seen, Ezekiel rejects this association by denying the king agency. Instead, he places all the agency with Yahweh who takes on the role of the punisher of his people. The answer to who caused the trauma is a different group. Again, a modern perspective would place the blame on Babylon, but Ezekiel situations the blame with the Judeans themselves, whose sin was so great that Yahweh had to act.

Shifting Allegiance

As discussed above, the classic form of the weapon bestowal motif serves to demonstrate the worthiness of king (both in reverence to the gods and in combat ability) and legitimize his violence against others. At the heart of the classic form of the motif is the king's relationship with the gods. The purpose of such rhetoric, at least for those in the role of the king's enemy, is submission to the king and by extension the divine world that supports him. The king's enemies are often characterized as the insubmissive (*lā*

⁴⁴¹ Alexander, "Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 19.

māgirī). Allegiance and obedience to the king is framed as allegiance to both the king's gods and one's own, since in Mesopotamian rhetoric the piety of the king naturally makes him an ally and representative of all the gods. By disconnecting the king's role from his worthiness for such a task, Ezekiel again shifts responsibility from Yahweh's human instrument to Yahweh himself. In terms of allegiance, this serves as a natural focal point for Ezekiel's progressive trauma narrative.

Ezekiel reframes this narrative so that the Judeans and their relationship with Yahweh becomes the central and driving element. Understandably, in this reworking of the motif, the role of the king as hero is inappropriate and his role fades into the background. It is important to understand this distinction because many of the surface details between the classic version of the motif and Ezekiel's reworking remain the same. In both versions, the enemies of the king are characterized as those who elicited divine wrath against them and the king is fulfilling this role of divine vengeance on earth. If Nebuchadnezzar II claimed to have been sent by Yahweh like the Rab-Shakeh did for Sennacherib (2 Kgs 18:22-25 || Isa 36:7-10), Ezekiel would have been in agreement with him. Yet we should be careful before attributing uncritical support for the Babylonian king to the prophet. As we have seen, in Ezekiel's version of the weapon bestowal motif the king's role is greatly diminished. Though Nebuchadnezzar II and Ezekiel might both agree that the king was sent by Yahweh, they would disagree over why Nebuchadnezzar II was sent and what it signified. For Ezekiel, Nebuchadnezzar II was sent because he was in a position to punish Judah, especially since they broke their oath to him (Ezek 17:13), but not because of his great piety or worthiness for this position. The fact that the king's role is so perfunctory serves as a reminder that Yahweh could fill this role with

anyone and there is nothing special about the Babylonian king. Thus, the submission of Judeans should be to Yahweh first and only to the Babylonian king in as much as he continues to function as Yahweh's agent.

This last point is especially significant, since in captivity in Babylonia Ezekiel would have to take some care in criticizing the dominant power. Adopting the weapon bestowal motif serves as a way to appear compliant with the dominant culture, while retaining one's own contrary understanding of events. In this way, the exiled Judeans can retain a spirit of resistance against a powerful empire by using imperial rhetoric against those in power. While this is no call for rebellion, it does serve as a reminder that their ultimate allegiance is to Yahweh. Additionally, it demonstrates that the king's seemingly favored position is a matter of convenience and does not approach the significance of Yahweh's relationship with Israel. This element is central to Ezekiel's progressive trauma narrative. As mentioned in chapter two, Alexander characterizes the progressive trauma narrative as one that focuses on the future and the possibility for redemption.⁴⁴² By situating Yahweh as the aggrieved party and the one ultimately responsible for their hardship, Ezekiel offers the possibility for reconciliation and return. Through contrition and obedience, exiled Judeans have a way to impact their future and return to their land.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the motif of weapon bestowal in exilic sources provides powerful symbolic material for Ezekiel's construction of his progressive trauma narrative. According to Alexander and Breese, successful trauma narratives are "mediated by

⁴⁴² Alexander, "Holocaust and Trauma," 72.

symbolic representations of social suffering and how such a cultural process channels powerful human emotion.”⁴⁴³ Yet to best take advantage the weapon bestowal motif as part of his trauma narrative, Ezekiel had to creatively reconstruct the motif. I have argued that three significant differences are clear. First is the shift in tone concerning war. In 2 Samuel 22 we saw the usual representation of the weapon bestowal motif as part of the heroic rhetoric of conquest. 2 Samuel 22 would be at home among the many similar examples of the motif from Mesopotamia and Egypt. The use of the same motif by Ezekiel, from the perspective of the conquered, is a rare insight into the reaction of the oppressed to the rhetoric of empire. In Ezek 21:13-17; 30:20-26 the heroic tone becomes horrific in light of the experience of exile. Secondly, by denying the foreign king meaningful agency, even after receiving Yahweh’s sword, the narrative makes clear who caused Judah’s fate and who is responsible for inflicting the traumatic events upon them. Though centering the blame upon the people of Judah, the victims, may be difficult for us moderns to understand—even irrational, it was part of a larger coping strategy that sought to frame what happened in a way that restored a sense of order and meaning to the world. It also served to stress that Yahweh and Yahweh alone was responsible for what was happening. Thirdly, the shift from allegiance to the king as the representative of the gods, to Yahweh offers an avenue for a restored future, in which Yahweh relents from his punishment and allows his people to return to their land. Ezekiel’s progressive trauma narrative illustrates that traumatic though it was, the exile was not meaningless. There was a lesson to be learned and a hope for the future.

⁴⁴³ Alexander and Breese, “Introduction,” xi.

Excursus: The Sword and the Scepter in Ezek 21:15b, 18

Ezek 21:15b and 18 continue to present problems to translators and commentators alike. The verses have been called “unintelligible”⁴⁴⁴ and “badly garbled.”⁴⁴⁵ In addition, it is argued that the verses seem to interrupt the flow of their contexts and employ their own vocabulary.⁴⁴⁶ Furthermore, the ancient versions seem to be struggling with the same difficult text and thus do not offer a definitive solution. This has led some scholars to consider these verses as secondary editorial glosses that were latter added to the text.⁴⁴⁷ Block has argued against interpreting the verses according to this view, since our oldest textual witnesses include these verses (and thus would be early additions, if they are additions) and according to the principle of *lectio difficilior* they should be retained.⁴⁴⁸ Here I think Block is correct. It is not easy to guess how these comments would have aided in interpretation. Plus, two comments added so close to one another and sharing in vocabulary is harder to justify. The charge of different vocabulary seems exaggerated. There are only two words not found elsewhere in Ezekiel, the roots *śwś* and *bḥn*. The verses are admittedly difficult and give the impression that something is missing, though some meaning can be found. Though L. Allen considers v. 18 to be the more intelligible

⁴⁴⁴ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 424.

⁴⁴⁵ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 672 n. 82.

⁴⁴⁶ Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, eds. Frank Moore Cross and Klaus Baltzer, trans. Ronald E. Clements, 2 vols. (Hermenia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 1:427; and L. C. Allen, “The Rejected Sceptre in Ezekiel XXI 15b, 18a,” *VT* 39 (1989): 67.

⁴⁴⁷ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 1:427 and Allen, “The Rejected Sceptre,” 67-71.

⁴⁴⁸ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 672-673 n.82 and 677.

of the two, I think v. 15 presents less of a challenge and can help in trying to interpret v. 18, so I will start with v. 15:

*lāma ‘an ṭabōaḥ ṭebaḥ hūḥaddā lāma ‘an-hēyēh-lāh bārāq mōrāṭṭā ’ō nāsīs
šēbeṭ bānī mō’eset kol-’ēš*

(They said) “Or shall we rejoice?” (No), (the sword) despises the scepter of my sons (and) every tree.

As noted already by Zimmerli and later Allen, the key to understanding the general force of both v. 15b and v. 18 is the phrase *šēbeṭ (bny) mō’eset*. Both scholars explain that the meaning in both verses must be the same.⁴⁴⁹ While some have wanted *šēbeṭ* to be the subject of *mō’eset* the noun is masculine and thus must be the object.⁴⁵⁰ The closest feminine noun is the sword (*ḥereb*), occurring earlier in the verse. This is fitting since the sword is the focus of these verses.

The next issue is what is meant by *šēbeṭ*, which can refer to a rod of rule or punishment or a tribe. Like many scholars, I think *šēbeṭ* here serves as a symbol for the monarchy as in Ezek 19:11, 14.⁴⁵¹ The meaning “rod of punishment” does not occur in Ezekiel, which makes sense as the sword is the main symbol of punishment. While the meaning “tribe” for *šēbeṭ* appears several times in the book of Ezekiel it is almost always plural.⁴⁵² That *šēbeṭ* should refer to the king is confirmed by the second direct object *kōl*

⁴⁴⁹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 1:427.

⁴⁵⁰ Contra Allen, who reads a *niphal* form here, which corresponds to the passive verbs in the LXX, Peshitta, and Targum. Semantically, there is no significant difference between *šēbeṭ* being the object of an active-transitive verb and being the subject of a passive verb. The passive forms in the ancient versions are just interpretive translation choices, that highlight the emphasis on the object (since the sword is only implied) in the MT by rendering the verb as a passive. Thus, there is no need to emend the Hebrew text to hew so closely to ancient translations. See Allen, “The Rejected Sceptre,” 69.

⁴⁵¹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 1:427; Allen, “The Rejected Sceptre,” 67-71; Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 677-678.

⁴⁵² For example, Ezek 37:19.

‘ēš “every tree.” With Block, I see *kōl* ‘ēš to as referring to all the residents as in v. 3, though not, as Block does, including the royal family, which I take to be represented by the *šēbeṭ*.⁴⁵³ Thus king and people alike are the sword’s targets. This dual target for the sword is repeated chiasmatically in v. 17, in which now the people (‘*ammî*) come first and are marked by the 1st person pronominal suffix and all (*kōl*) the monarchy, represented by the princes (*nāšî’ēy yiśrā’ēl*).

v. 15b <i>šēbeṭ bny</i>	<i>kōl-‘ēš</i>
v. 17b <i>bə‘ammî</i>	<i>bəkōl-nāšî’ēy yiśrā’ēl</i>

This chiastic relationship also helps to explain the relation of *bny* to the rest of the phrase. I take it to be part of a construct chain headed by *šēbeṭ*. While the MT pointing, *bānî*, would be at home in Ps 2:7, given Ezekiel’s negative view toward kingship, this phrasing would be surprising.⁴⁵⁴ Thus, I suggest we read *bānay* “my children,” referring to the house of Israel, just as Ezekiel is sent to the hard-faced people (*habbānîm*) in Ezek 2:4.

Returning to the beginning of the stich, the final major issue is the verb *nāšîś* from the root *šwś* “rejoice.” At first glance, the joyful meaning of the verb seems out of place in the midst of a description of Yahweh’s punishing sword. But perhaps more problematic is the subject. The switch from third person passive verbs, to the first plural is jarring. Who is the “we” who is rejoicing? There seem to be two options: A) the “we”

⁴⁵³ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 678. Additionally, Ezek 37:19 mentions the ‘ēš of Joseph and the ‘ēš of Judah as a way to refer to the people.

⁴⁵⁴ Daniel I. Block, “Transformation of Royal Ideology in Ezekiel,” in *Transforming Visions: Transformations of Text, Tradition, and Theology in Ezekiel*, eds. William A. Tooman and Michael A. Lyons (PTMS 127; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 209.

is God speaking; or B) the “we” is an interjection by Ezekiel’s audience in the narrative.⁴⁵⁵

In favor of option A is the fact that there has been no explicit switch to the words/thoughts of another group, usually indicated with some form of the verb *’mr*.⁴⁵⁶ As for the meaning of rejoice, it can either be taken as a rhetorical question or even as a declarative statement, since Yahweh is known to rejoice (*yāsîs*), in a reversal of expectations, when punishing his people (Deut 28:63). While the use of the first plural to refer to the deity would be at home in Gen 1:26, nowhere else in Ezekiel does God speak in the plural.

Concerning option B, the first plural is used exclusively for the thoughts and words of the house of Israel. In this way, Ezekiel’s audience interrupts in the hope that Yahweh’s destructive sword is prepared for their enemies as in Isa 66:14. As mentioned above, there is no indication that we have switched speakers. This is not unknown in the Hebrew Bible, with Song of Songs being the best example.⁴⁵⁷ The book of Ezekiel, however, often marks change of speaker, leaving one to wonder if a form of *’mr* has dropped from the text. While option B is not without difficulties, I think a narrational issue is easier to explain than a theological one.

⁴⁵⁵ It is unlikely to be the prophet speaking in an inclusive manner with his audience, because of the following *šēbet bny*. If I am correct in interpreting this as a reference to the king or prince of Judah, it seems out of place for the prophet to refer to him as “my son.” Additionally, why would the king suddenly become “my son” and not “our son” ending the inclusive language?

⁴⁵⁶ For example, in Ezek 20:32 the intent of the people to be like other nations is revealed: *’attem ’ōmārîm nihyeh kaggōyim*. Also see Ezek 33:10; 35:10; and 37:11.

⁴⁵⁷ Scott B. Noegel and Gary A. Rendsburg, *Solomon’s Vineyard: Literary and Linguistic Studies in the Song of Songs* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 188.

Turning to v. 18, I translate:

kī bōḥan ūmā 'im-gam-šēbeṭ mō'eset lō' yihyeh nā'um 'ādōnāy yhw

For it (the scepter) has been tested. What (will happen), if (the sword) despises even the scepter? It will no longer exist. Utterance of the lord Yahweh.

Though the text is very difficult, having, in Block's words, the appearance of "a group of words randomly thrown together," we have established that *šēbeṭ mō'eset* must refer to the sword rejecting the staff, i.e. the Judean monarchy. The primary issue remaining is the meaning of *bōḥan*. Many take *bōḥan* to be a noun meaning "test, trial" similar to the usage in Isa 28:16.⁴⁵⁸ As vocalized in the MT, it could also be a Pual perfect third masculine singular, which would match the passive ἀπόσθη of the LXX. In contrast to Block, it is not the sword that is being tested.⁴⁵⁹ The sword is the instrument of the testing and is being polished and sharpened to this end. It is the monarch and God's people who are being tested as in v. 17. Just as there will no longer be a prince in Egypt (*wānāšī' mē'ereṣ-miṣrayim lō' yihyeh- 'ōd*) in Ezek 30:13, the sword will dispatch Judah's prince and he will be no more.

⁴⁵⁸ Allen, "The Rejected Sceptre," 67; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 416; Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 674.

⁴⁵⁹ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 679.

Chapter Four: The King as Weapon

Ceci n'est pas une pipe.
-René Magritte, *La trahison des images*

Among the weapon motifs shared between Mesopotamian and Israelite literatures, the king as weapon of the divine is the least explored, especially in the context of Mesopotamian literature.⁴⁶⁰ In the interaction between Judah and the great empires of Assyria and Babylon, the prophets have categorized such conquering kings as instruments in the hand of Yahweh (e.g. as a knife, rod/staff, mace, and sword). Scholars have framed this motif as a way to affirm the realities of imperial power over the Israelite kingdoms. In such literature, Isaiah's adoption of this motif has been seen as a way to subvert imperial rhetoric either by considering the king's role as a divine instrument to be an insult⁴⁶¹ or alternatively by connecting the source of his power and authority with Yahweh instead of Aššur. In Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, however, the king proudly proclaims his status as the weapon of the great gods. I will argue, however, that it is not the fact that the king is an instrument of divine wrath nor that he is commissioned by Yahweh that serves as a critique of imperial power. Instead, it is how the king is depicted as a passive tool in Yahweh's hands that would have rankled the Assyrian ruler. Additionally, the king's portrayal as a razor or staff serves to devalorize his role in

⁴⁶⁰ Annus discusses how Assyrian kings took on Ninurta's epithets which included identification with divine weapons. See, Annus, *The God Ninurta*, 204. More recently, M. Karlsson briefly discusses kings as divine weapons in the titulary for early Assyrian kings (934-745 BCE). See, Karlsson, *Relations of Power in Early Neo-Assyrian State Ideology*, 116.

⁴⁶¹ Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12: A Commentary*, trans. John Bowden, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 235; John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33 (WBC 24)*; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 150-151; Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 93; J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah: A Commentary*, ed. Peter Machinist (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 165.

relation to his self-conception as an elite mythic weapon. In order to better understand the prophetic subversion, we will explore the motif in Assyrian royal inscriptions before noting its root in Ninurta's relationship with his weaponry. Finally, we will unpack how the biblical prophets use and transform this motif to form a trauma-counternarrative.

A Mesopotamian Motif

The motif of the king as divine weapon appears most frequently in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, usually among the king's titulary. The king can be described as a *kakku* "weapon," *kašūšu* "catastrophic weapon," *abūbu* "deluge weapon," or a net (either *saparru* or *šuškallu*).⁴⁶² Though these terms may seem disparate, they all share the status of weapons employed by the gods, especially the warrior god Ninurta. A brief methodological note is necessary at the outset, concerning the types of examples upon which I will be drawing. I have limited myself to cases in which the king is equated with a divine weapon by way of metaphor, frequently by taking on the title of divine weapon directly (as in the titulary). I have not included the many similes in which the king is described as being like a weapon in some aspect, e.g. ferocity. I make this distinction because metaphorical comparison has a stronger connection to identity than the comparison found in similes due in part to the ambiguity inherent in metaphor. D. Chiappe et al. observes that "metaphors are often used when a topic has many pertinent properties associated with the vehicle, and similes are often used when the topic does not

⁴⁶² While *saparru* and *šuškallu* are certainly the most frequently types of nets with which Mesopotamian kings associated themselves, Hammurabi identifies himself in a Sumerian hymn as an *al-lu5-ḫab2* "net" (*alluhappu* in Akkadian). See *TLB* 2, 3 10 in Åke W. Sjöberg, "Ein Selbstpreis des Königs Ḫammurabi von Babylon," *ZA* 54 (1961): 51-70.

have as many of those properties.”⁴⁶³ As such, metaphors serve as stronger icons than similes, since the possibility of multiple levels of association offer better representation.

The Net as a Divine Weapon

Aside from *kakku*, which is clearly a weapon according to the definitions we have established earlier, a brief discussion of the other divine weapons is in order. Beginning with the net, in modern conceptions the net is more likely viewed as a hunting or fishing tool rather than a powerful weapon of war.⁴⁶⁴ The net was not a typical weapon used by Assyrian soldiers in warfare. T. Solyman explains that, “Das Netz ist als Kampfwanne bisher sehr selten zu belegen. Selbst in diesen wenigen Fällen hat es sicherlich nur symbolische Bedeutung ge habt, als Sinnbild für Macht und Sieg des betreffenden Gottes bzw. Königs.”⁴⁶⁵ Naturally, the net was used for capturing animals, but its association with divine warfare and divine punishment has a long history. One of the earliest references appears in the context of the Umma-Lagash border conflict on the so-called Stele of the Vultures. This stele contains both textual and iconographic references to the net’s use after the battle.⁴⁶⁶ In the text, E-anatum of Lagash makes the leader of Umma

⁴⁶³ Dan L. Chiappe, John M. Kennedy, and Penny Chiappe, “Aptness is more important than comprehensibility in preference for metaphors and similes,” *Poetics* 31 (2003): 64.

⁴⁶⁴ For a detailed exploration of fishing imagery in the ancient Near East, including nets, see Tyler R. Yoder, *Fishers of Fish and Fishers of Men: Fishing Imagery in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), esp. 44-50, 77-86, 95-99.

⁴⁶⁵ Toufic Solyman, “Die Entstehung und Entwicklung der Götterwanne im Alten Mesopotamien und ihre Bedeutung” (PhD diss., Freien Universität Berlin, 1964), 39. For a similar opinion, see Eriikki Salonen, *Die Waffen der alten Mesopotamier: Eine lexikalische und kulturgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (StOr 33; Helsinki: Societas Orientalis Fennica, 1965), 94.

⁴⁶⁶ For the interplay between textual and iconographic narrative of the stele, see Irene J. Winter, “After the Battle is Over: The Stele of the Vultures and the Beginning of Historical Narrative in the Art of the Ancient Near East,” in *Pictorial Narrative in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Herbert L. Kessler and Marianna Shreve Simpson (SHA 16; Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1985), 11-32.

swear by the ^{sa}šuš-gal “net” of the gods Enlil, Ninḫursag, Enki, Sin, and Utu (E1.9.3.1 xvi 12 – r. iii 1).⁴⁶⁷ On the obverse of the stele stands Ningirsu holding a mace in one hand and a net full of captives in the other.



Fig. 4.1. The Obverse of the Stele of the Vultures⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁷ RIME 1, 132-137. For a discussion of the oath in Sumerian and this text in particular, see Dietz Otto Edzard, “Zum sumerischen Eid,” in *Sumerological Studies in Honor of Thorkild Jacobsen on his Seventieth Birthday June 7, 1974* (AS 20; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 63-98, esp. 64-82.

⁴⁶⁸ “Detail Image of Vulture Stele,” cdli, https://cdli.ucla.edu/dl/photo/P222399_d.jpg.

The ^{sa}šuš-gal “net” is one of Ninurta’s weapons in the Angim myth and its military association is made explicit in the Akkadian translation *šuškal taḥāzi* “net of battle” (Angim 137). Similarly, the battle net is one of Gilgamesh’s weapons in an OB version of the Gilgamesh epic (OB Ishchali 36’)⁴⁶⁹ and Marduk employs the *saparru* net against Tiamat.⁴⁷⁰ Though nets were not actually used as weapons in war, their status as mythological weapons for the gods makes them prime targets for royal interest and legitimization.

Deluge (abūbu) and Catastrophic (kašūšu) Weapons

Concerning *abūbu* “flood” and *kašūšu* “catastrophic weapon,” both terms are related to what we might consider natural disasters and appear together in deluge narratives. For *abūbu*, the word not only referred to the mythological flood, but to the weaponized natural phenomenon wielded by the gods. In Angim, the deluge appears as a bow in Ninurta’s prodigious arsenal of weaponry (Angim 142). Similarly, Marduk employs the deluge weapon against his enemies (EE iv 49, 75-76; vi 125).⁴⁷¹ Tiglath-pileser I even receives the deluge weapon from Aššur and the great gods:

- 46. ^da-šur DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ *mu-šer₃-bu-u₂ LUGAL-ti-ia*
- 47. *ša kiš-šu-ta u₃ da-na-na a-na iš-qi-ia*
- 48. *iš-ru-ku-ni mi-šir KUR-ti-šu-nu*
- 49. *ru-up-pu-ša iq-bu-ni* ^{giš}TUKUL.MEŠ-šu-nu
- 50. *dan-nu-ti a-bu-ub tam-ḥa-ri*
- 51. *qa-ti lu-šat-me-ḥu ...*

⁴⁶⁹ A 22007 (Ish. 35-T 117). See Theo Bauer, “Ein Viertes altbabylonisches Fragment des Gilgameš-Epos,” *JNES* 16 (1957): 254-262 and George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 1:260-266.

⁴⁷⁰ EE iv 41, 95; v 64; vi 83. For a discussion of the Enūma Eliš’s borrowing of net imagery from the Anzu myth, see Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 450-451.

⁴⁷¹ See Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 88-91, 116-117.

Aššur and the great gods, who magnify my kingship, who granted might and strength as my lot, they commanded me to expand the border of their land. They indeed caused my hand to grasp their strong weapons, the deluge of battle.
(A.0.87.1 i 46-51a)⁴⁷²

On the other hand, *kašūšu* is less directly evocative of deluge imagery. In omen texts, the term refers to an overwhelming defeat or devastation due to pestilence (Nergal).⁴⁷³ The authors of CAD summarize, “The word denotes, somewhat like *abūbu*, an event and the divine tool (weapon) which produces it.” In this sense, *abūbu* and *kašūšu* are paired together in Atrahasis to describe the complete and total devastation of the deluge (Atrahasis C III iii 11-12).⁴⁷⁴ Likewise, the terms appear together in the flood story of Gilgamesh (xi 110-111), if the reconstruction of both *abūbu* and *kašūšu* at the end of the line is correct.⁴⁷⁵ Not only are the terms paired in prominent flood stories, they occur together in the royal inscriptions of Tukulti-Ninurta I, in which the king takes on the titles:

9. [...] 𒊕 *qar*¹-*di ka-šu-uš* DINGIR.MEŠ *a-bu-ub tam-ḫa-ri*

Heroic [...] catastrophic weapon of the gods, deluge of battle
(A.0.78.24 9)⁴⁷⁶

The term *kašūšu* appears independently of *abūbu* as a *kakku* “weapon” in the Šumma Izbu commentary gloss on I 82.⁴⁷⁷ It is in this role that *kašūšu* occurs in the epilogue to

⁴⁷² RIMA 2, 13.

⁴⁷³ CAD K, s.v. *kašūšu*, 297.

⁴⁷⁴ W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-ḫasīs: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 94-95.

⁴⁷⁵ A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 710-711, 885-886.

⁴⁷⁶ RIMA 1, 275.

⁴⁷⁷ Erle Leichty, *The Omen Series Šumma Izbu* (Locust Valley, NY: Augustin, 1970), 39, 213.

Hammurabi's law code. In this section below, the king invokes divine curses upon anyone who disregards the pronouncements of the stela, changes them, or removes Hammurabi's name. Among these imprecations include a request for Nergal to punish the disobedient with his *kašūšu*.

24. ^dGIR₃.UNU.GAL
25. *dan-nu-um i-na i₃-li₂*
26. *qa-ba-al la ma-ḥa-ar*
27. *mu-ša-ak-ši-du*
28. *ir-ni-ti-ia*
29. *i-na ka-šu-ši-šu*
30. *ra-bi-im*
31. *ki-ma i-ša-tim*
32. *ez-ze-tim ša a-pi₂-im*
33. *ni-ši-šu*
34. *li-iq-mi₃*

Nergal, strong one among the gods, matchless combat, who causes (me) to obtain my victory, may he burn his people with his great catastrophic weapon like the fierce fire of a reed thicket.
(CH li 24-34; Bergman R XXVIII 24-25)

Here, in contrast to *kašūšu*'s association with the flood, the weapon is associated with fire. The object of Nergal's fury and the target of his "catastrophic weapon" are people associated with the individual who disobeys the king's stele and thus becomes an enemy of the gods, at least according to the framework of royal rhetoric. Similarly, as we will see below, the king takes on the role of a divine weapon (*kašūšu*) whose targets are not only his own enemies but enemies of the divine realm.

The King as Net

The earliest use of the king as weapon motif occurs with the king being equated with a net and may begin as early as the pre-Sargonic period (2700-2350 B.C.E.) in Sumerian onomastica. Not only does the king as net serve as the earliest type of the king as weapon motif, it is the longest running version, extending from the pre-Sargonic period all the way to the latter part of the Neo-Assyrian period. The pre-Sargonic names lugal-sa-par₄ “the king is a net” (*L'uomo* Nr. 6 4)⁴⁷⁸ and lugal-sa-šuš-gal “the king is a net” (DP 136 r. i 3; Nik 1, 3 vi 19)⁴⁷⁹ are of a type “The king is X,” here focusing on the protective nature of the king,⁴⁸⁰ in this case the king as net.⁴⁸¹ It seems probable that these nets refer to divine weapons, especially in the case of the sa-šuš-gal, which we saw as the net of various gods in the Stele of the Vultures. The sa-šuš-gal net also appears in an inscription of En-metena, in which Ningirsu does battle with Umma by casting his sa-šuš-

⁴⁷⁸ Giovanni Pettinato, *L'uomo cominciò a scrivere: Iscrizioni cuneiformi della Collezione Michail* (Milan: Electa, 1997), 61. Pettinato reads e₂xpap in place of sa-par₄. The reading lugal-sa-par₄ is supported by J. Andersson and A. Westenholz. See, respectively, Jakob Andersson, *Kingship in the Early Mesopotamian Onomasticon 2800-2200 BCE* (Studia Semitica Upsaliensia 28; Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2012), 113 n. 611; Aage Westenholz, *A Third-Millennium Miscellany of Cuneiform Texts* (CUSAS 26; Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2014), 141 #267.

⁴⁷⁹ Ingo Schrakamp, “Krieger und Waffen im frühen Mesopotamien Organisation und Bewaffnung des Militärs in fröhndynastischer und sargonischer Zeit” (PhD diss., Philipps University of Marburg, 2010), 257, 267.

⁴⁸⁰ Whether this is meant to be the human king or some deity, in this case probably Ningirsu, as divine ruler is uncertain. D. Foxvog and J. Andersson both consider the human king to be the more likely option in view. See Daniel A. Foxvog, “Aspects of Name-Giving in Presargonic Lagash,” in *Strings and Threads: A Celebration of the Work of Anne Draffkorn Kilmer*, eds. Wolfgang Heimpel and Gabriella Frantz-Szabó (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 81-83; Andersson, *Kingship in the Early Mesopotamian Onomasticon*, 113-114.

⁴⁸¹ Piotr Steinkeller, “A Note on sa-bar = sa-par₄/pār ‘Casting Net,’” *ZA* 75 (1985): 42; Foxvog, “Aspects of Name-Giving in Presargonic Lagash,” 83. In contrast, Andersson considers the names lugal-sa-par₄ and lugal-sa-šuš-gal to be shortened versions of a verbal sentence, “the king ... the net” based on the Ur III period name lugal-sa-par₂-re, which evinces a loc.-term dimensional suffix. See Andersson, *Kingship in the Early Mesopotamian Onomasticon*, 113-114.

gal net on it (E1.9.5.1 i 28-29).⁴⁸² The inscription ends with a curse on anyone transgressing the established border by calling on Ningirsu to cast his net on him (E1.9.5.1 vi 21-23).⁴⁸³ The first literary reference to the motif occurs with the Ur III ruler Šulgi. In the praise poem, Šulgi X, the king is described as sa-par₃ an ki-e dub-ba-me-en₃ “You are a net collecting the heavens and earth” (Šulgi X 122).⁴⁸⁴ This motif was continued by Hammurabi in the Old Babylonian period, who describes himself in the prologue of his law code as:

- ii 55. UŠUMGAL LUGAL-ri₂
- ii 56. ta-li-im
- ii 57. ^dZA.BA₄.BA₄
- ii 58. mu-šar-ši-id
- ii 59. šu-ba-at ^{uru}KIŠ^{ki}
- ii 60. mu-uš-ta-as₂-ḫi-ir
- ii 61. me-li-im-mi
- ii 62. E₂.ME.TE.UR.SAG
- ii 63. mu-uš-te-eš-bi
- ii 64. pa-ar-ši₂ ra-bu-u₂-tim
- ii 65. ša ^dINANNA
- ii 66. pa-qi₂-id bi-tim
- ii 67. ḪUR.SAG.KALAM.MA
- ii 68. sa-par₄ na-ki-ri

Lion-dragon among the kings, beloved brother of Zababa, establisher of the site of Kish, the one who surrounds (with) radiance Emeteursag, the one who implements the great rites of Ištar, the one who administers the temple, Ḫursagkalamma, the net (against) enemies.
(CH ii 55-68)

⁴⁸² RIME 1, 195.

⁴⁸³ RIME 1, 199.

⁴⁸⁴ *ETCSL* 2.4.2.24 122; Jacob Klein, *Three Šulgi Hymns: Sumerian Royal Hymns Glorifying King Šulgi of Ur* (Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1981), 143. The motif also appears in the Song of the Hoe (*ETCSL* 5.5.4 77) in reference to Gilgamesh, who is the net (sa-par₃) when he wields the hoe. For more on the Song of the Hoe, see Paul Delnero, “Variation in Sumerian Literary Compositions: A Case Study Based on the Decad” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2006), 22 n. 20 (bibliography), 934ff (Source by source analysis), and 1961ff (score).

Hammurabi's epithets in the prologue reflect his status as a just ruler. He portrays himself as pious towards the gods, caring to his people, and a fierce warrior to his enemies. Not only is Hammurabi a *qarrādum* "warrior" (CH ii 32), he takes on mythological ferocity as the *ušumgal šarrī* "lion-dragon (among) kings"⁴⁸⁵ and the *sapār nakirī* "net (against) enemies." A similar litany of epithets can be found in a Sumerian hymn praising Hammurabi as the *ušumgal* "lion-dragon," *sa-par*₃ "net," *sa-šu*₂-*uš-gal* "battle net," *al-lu*₅-*ḫab*₂ "alluḫab net" (TLB 2, 3:5-6, 8, 10).⁴⁸⁶

This motif first enters into Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions during the reign of Tiglath-pileser I. After describing the king's victory against the land of Katmuḫu, Tiglath-pileser is reintroduced and portrayed as:

- iii 32. ^{mgīš}TUKUL-ti-IBILA-E₂.ŠAR₂.RA LUGAL *dan-nu*
- iii 33. *šu-uš-kal la-a ma-gi-ri sa-pi-nu*
- iii 34. *qa-bal tar-gi₄-gi₄*

Tiglath-pileser I, strong king, net against the insubmissive, devastator of the evildoer in battle.
(A.0.87.1 iii 32-34)⁴⁸⁷

These lines emphasize the king's prowess in battle, setting the stage for his victories over the land of Ḫaria and Paphû. The motif of the king as a net would resurface in the Sargonid period in Sargon II's Nimrud Inscription, in which he takes the title *malku*

⁴⁸⁵ The association of the king with the *ušumgal* does not originate with Hammurabi, but goes back at least to the Ur III period in Šulgi A (ETCSL 2.4.2.1 2), in which the king claims to be a lion (*piriḡ*) born of an *ušumgal*. For more on lion/dragon connections, see Lewis "CT 13.33-34 and Ezekiel 32," 41-42.

⁴⁸⁶ For *al-lu*₅-*ḫab*₂ I have followed the transliteration of *PSD*. Sjöberg has the reading *al-lu*₅-*da*. See, respectively, *PSD* A3, s.v. *al-ḫab*₂, 149; Åke W. Sjöberg, "Ein Selbstpreis des Königs Hammurabi von Babylon," *ZA* 54 (1961): 51. For a recent translation of the passage, see Marc Van De Mieroop, *King Hammurabi of Babylon: A Biography* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 126-127.

⁴⁸⁷ RIMA 2, 18.

pitqudu šuškal lā māgirī “trustworthy ruler, net (against) the insubmissive” (pl. 48:10).⁴⁸⁸

According to N. Na’aman, lines 7-12 of Nimrud Inscription can be divided into two sections, which served as a mostly chronological summary marked off by royal titles.⁴⁸⁹

The first section covers the years 720-719 BCE and the second section deals with the years 718-717 CE. Sargon II’s epithet “net (against) the insubmissive” occurs in the beginning of the second section and serves as the royal title setting off this new section.

The parallel to this title in the first section is a reference to Sargon’s defeat of Ḫumbanigaš, king of Elam (pl. 48:7). Sargon II’s title not only calls back to Tiglath-pileser I, who was also a *šuškal lā māgirī*, but also serves to reference the god Ninurta.

As we have seen above, the net, especially the *šuškalu*, was one of the iconic weapons of Ningirsu/Ninurta. Additionally, Wilfred Lambert has demonstrated that the net is associated with Ninurta’s capture of the dreaded Anzu bird.⁴⁹⁰ Additionally, the use of the phrase *lā māgirī* “the insubmissive” in connection with a weapon evokes the weaponry of Aššur, whose fierce weapons are described in Sargon’s Letter to Aššur as those that *lā māgirī imēššū* “crushed the insubmissive.”⁴⁹¹ This parallel has the effect of casting Sargon II as Aššur’s weapon against the god’s enemies.

⁴⁸⁸ Austen Henry Layard, *Inscriptions in the Cuneiform Character from Assyrian Monuments* (London: Harrison and Son, 1851), pls. 33-34; Hugo Winckler, *Die Keilschrifttexte Sargons: Nach den Papierabklatschen und Originalen* (Leipzig: Pfeiffer, 1889), 1:168-169.

⁴⁸⁹ Nadav Na’aman, “The Historical Portion of Sargon II’s Nimrud Inscription,” *SAAB* 8 (1994): 17-18.

⁴⁹⁰ Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 205-206; 450-451.

⁴⁹¹ TCL 3 126. See Mayer, *Assyrien und Urartu*, 1:108-109. This notion of Aššur’s weapons being used against the *lā māgirī* “the insubmissive” goes back at least to Shalmaneser III, who is given Aššur’s strong weapons (*kakku dannu*) that *mušamqit lā māgirī* “fell the insubmissive” (A.0.102.1 12; RIMA 3; A.0.102.2 13; RIMA 3,14).

Unquestionably, referring to the king as a net evokes inescapability and divine justice. On the one hand, a net surrounds, ensnares, and traps an enemy within it. This emphasizes the inevitability of the enemy's defeat, as he will doubtlessly be surrounded by the king and his forces. There is no escape for the king's enemies. On the other hand, the notion of the king as the net aligns the king with divine justice and retribution. As we have seen above in the case of the Stele of the Vultures, the gods employ nets to punish wrong-doers.⁴⁹² Similarly, in the Etana myth, we see again the connection between the net and divine justice. When the eagle contemplates breaking his oath and eating the snake's children, his son admonishes him:

47. *la ta-kal a-bi še-e-tu ša₂ dUTU i-ba-a[r₂-ka]*
 48. *giš-par-ru ma-mit dUTU ib-bal-ki-tu-ka-ma i-bar-ru-^Γnik¹-k[a]*

Don't eat, my father! The net of Šamaš will hunt you! The trap, the curse of Šamaš, will overcome you and hunt you!
 (Etana ii 47-48)⁴⁹³

Later, after the eagle has broken his oath, the snake seeks justice from Šamaš, saying:

67. *u₂-ri-dam-ma e-ta-kal [li-da-ni-ia]*
 68. *^Γlum¹-nu ša₂ i-pu-ša₂-an-ni dU[TU lu ti-di]*
 69. *a-bar-ša₂ dUTU še-et-ka er-še-[tum DAGAL-tum]*
 70. *giš-par-ru-ka AN-u₂ [ru-qu-tu]*
 71. *i-na še-ti-ka a-a u₂-š[i A₂.MUŠEN]*

He came down (and) he ate my brood. Šamaš, you indeed know the evil, which he did to me. Truly, Šamaš your net is the wide underworld. Your trap is the distant heavens. May the eagle not escape from your net!
 (Etana ii 67-71)⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹² E1.9.3.1 xvii 16-20; RIME 1, 133.

⁴⁹³ Jamie R. Novotny and Simo Parpola, *The Standard Babylonian Etana Epic: Cuneiform Text, Transliteration, Score, Glossary, Indices and Sign List* (SAACT 2; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001), 17.

⁴⁹⁴ Novotny and Parpola, *The Standard Babylonian Etana Epic*, 18.

Certainly, a net makes for a threatening punishment for a bird. Yet, nets are regularly used by the gods to punish humans. T. Yoder in his summary of deities employing nets concludes: “The sum of evidence demonstrates that divine retribution conceptually binds all of these images and descriptions together.”⁴⁹⁵ In addition to this, Ninurta counted several nets among his arsenal of weapons. In *Angim*, Ninurta bears the *alluḥappu*-net and the *šuškal tāhāzi* “battle net” (*Angim* 136-137).⁴⁹⁶

One final example appears in Assurbanipal’s Rassam Cylinder. This reference has not been included previously in discussions of the motif of king as weapon or king as net. The reason for this is that the reference is oblique, but there is good reason to think that Assurbanipal sought to compare himself to the net of the gods that delivers justice. Assurbanipal’s Rassam Cylinder A iv 41-63 describes the fate of Šamaš-šumu-ukin and the people of Babylonia who encouraged him to rebel. Some of these people are struck with famine, while Assurbanipal’s brother is destroyed in a fire by a litany of gods in support of the Assyrian king. Those who escaped Šamaš-šumu-ukin’s fate must face the net of the great gods:

iv 61. *sa-par* DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ EN.MEŠ-*ia* ša₂ la na-par-šu-di
 iv 62. *is-ḥu-up-šu₂-nu-ti e-du ul ip-par-šid*
 iv 63. *mul-taḥ-ṭu ul u₂-ši ina ŠU^{II}-ia im-nu-u ŠU^{II}-u-a*

The net of the great gods, my lords, which cannot be escaped, covered them. No one escaped. No survivor, whom they [the gods] delivered into my hand, evaded my hand.
 (RC A iv 61-63)⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁵ Yoder, *Fishers of Fish and Fishers of Men*, 47.

⁴⁹⁶ Jerrold S. Cooper, *The Return of Ninurta to Nippur: An-gim dim-ma* (AnOr 52; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978), 78-81.

⁴⁹⁷ *BIWA*, 44.

Here we can see the reference to the king as weapon motif is not made explicitly, as has been the case with the previous examples. The interpretation hinges on what is meant here by the phrase “the net of the great gods.” There are at least three plausible options: 1) the net is wielded or otherwise under the command of the gods and they are delivering the captured prisoners to Assurbanipal;⁴⁹⁸ 2) The net is a divine weapon in the hands of the king; 3) The net is the king himself. While the first option is certainly possible and accords with the earlier divine punishment, if the net of the gods is under divine control and Assurbanipal’s enemies are handed to him entirely bound, there is hardly a reason to stress that none of them escaped the king’s hands. As for the second option, to my knowledge there are no examples of any Assyrian king receiving a divine net from the gods. Of course, often times the king receives a ^{gi}TUKUL, which is a generic term that could possibly include a battle-net. When the king receives weaponry from the great gods, however, the weapon-term is always in the plural.⁴⁹⁹ This same phenomenon (nets not being given) is paralleled in the divine world. For example, though Marduk receives a “weapon without rival” from the great gods in the Enūma Eliš (iv 30), he makes his own net (*īpušma saparra*) to capture Tiamat (iv 41).

⁴⁹⁸ C. Crouch seems to take this view. She considers the reference to be employing cosmological language associated with the Enūma Eliš in an attempt to broaden the typically warrior god imagery to all the great gods. For more, see C. L. Crouch, “Ištar and the Motif of the Cosmological Warrior Assurbanipal’s Adaptation of Enuma Elish,” in *“Thus Speaks Ishtar of Arbela” Prophecy in Israel, Assyria, and Egypt in the Neo-Assyrian Period*, eds. Robert P. Gordon and Hans M. Barstad (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 140. But without any other vocabulary in common with EE, this seems to overstate the EE reference, since the net was associated with other gods, especially Ninurta, and references to a net as a divine weapon appears in many texts (e.g. The Vulture Stele, Angim, Lugale, Etana, Hymn to Ištar K.257).

⁴⁹⁹ See, Tiglath-pileser I A.0.87.1 i 46-61 (RIMA 2, 13); Aššurnāširpal II A.0.101.1 i 26 (RIMA 2, 195), A.0.101.17 i 23-24 (RIMA 2, 239), A.0.101.20 30-31 (RIMA 2, 264); and Esarhaddon 98 r. 7-8 (RINAP 4, 184).

These three lines appear to be a creative composite of three different tropes: the inescapable divine weapon (net, trap); the inescapability of the king; and having the gods deliver an enemy into someone's hands (*manû + ina qāti*). The first of these tropes, the inescapable divine net or trap⁵⁰⁰ appears in various places, including Assurbanipal's Ištar Temple Inscription (IIT:9),⁵⁰¹ EST 650-651,⁵⁰² Sargon II's Letter to Aššur (TCL 3 118),⁵⁰³ and the Akkadian translation of the Angim Myth (Angim 137).⁵⁰⁴ Similarly, in Assurbanipal's inscriptions, the inescapability of the king is also stressed through the formula: *ēdu ul ipparšid multahūtu ul uši ina qātiya*. Outside of the passage in question, this formula appears once more in the Rassam Cylinder and in Assurbanipal's Cylinder C (ix 29-31).⁵⁰⁵ In both cases, the inescapability is associated with the king himself sans net. Concerning the forces of Abiyate' and Ayamu, who escaped from the initial confrontation with Assurbanipal's forces, the king claims:

ix 38. *ša qe₂-reb KUR-e e-lu-u₂*
 ix 39. *e-ru-bu e-ḥu-zu mar-qi₂-tu*
 ix 40. *e-du ul ip-par-šid mul-taḥ-ṭu ul u₂-ši ina ŠU^{II}-ia*

⁵⁰⁰ This trope is extended to the Assyrian king in one of Esarhaddon's royal inscriptions: Esar 1 v 10-13, 17-19 (RINAP 4, 21-22), cf. *ABL* 1102 r. 6-8. A related trope is the flight (*naparšudu*) before divine weapons.

⁵⁰¹ *sa-par-ša₂ šu-par-ru-ru a-na a-a-bi šu-nu-[u]l-lu ina giš-par-ri-ša₂ la ip-pa-raš-ši-du na-[ki-ru ? ...]-ni* in *BIWA*, 265 and 290. See also, *AAA* 20 pl. 90:9.

⁵⁰² *ina giš-par-ri ša₂ la na-par-šu-di li-di-ku-nu a-a u₂-še-ši nap-šat-kun* SAA 2, 58. For the new Tell Tayinat version of these lines (MS T viii 49-51), see Jacob Lauinger, "Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty at Tell Tayinat: Text and Commentary," *JCS* 64 (2012): 111.

⁵⁰³ *kab-tu qar-ra-du ša i-na giš-par-ri-šu₂ e-piš le-mu-ti la ip-par-šid-du-ma*. See, Mayer, *Assyrien und Urartu I*, 108.

⁵⁰⁴ *ša₂ ša₂-du-u ina qa-ti-šu₂ la ip-par-šid-du šu-uš-kal ta-ḥa-zi* MIN in Cooper, *The Return of Ninurta to Nippur*, 80.

⁵⁰⁵ *BIWA*, pp. 152-153.

Of those who went up into the mountains (and) took refuge, no one escaped. No survivor evaded my hand.
(RC A ix 38-40)⁵⁰⁶

By juxtaposing two motifs focused on inescapability (*lā/ul naparšudu*), RC A iv 61-63 casts the king as the great net of the gods, from which there can be no evasion (For more on this, see below). The third trope, the god's delivery of an enemy into the subject's hands, functions as a promise of divinely sanctioned victory. As such it appears in the introductory royal praise in letters.⁵⁰⁷ Because the gods have given the enemy over into the king's hands, there is no chance for failure. For example, Ištar of Arbela promises to deliver (*manû*) the king of the Mannians into his own servants' hands. This promise is followed by a report of rebellion and the king's body being cast into the street.⁵⁰⁸ In ABL 1102 we find a similar description to our passage, this time it is the king's net that will capture the enemy:

6. *ki-i i-ḫal-li-qu e-da-nu-uš-šu₂*
7. *še-e-ti ša₂ LUGAL KUR.KUR la-ma-tu-uš*
8. *DINGIR.MEŠ-ka a-na ŠU^{II}-ka i-man-nu-šu₂*

If he flees, (he is) on his own. The net of the king of the lands surrounds him. Your gods will deliver him into your hand.
(ABL 1102 r. 6-8)

Here it is the king's net which captures the enemy as a result of the gods delivering him into the king's hand (cf. Esarhaddon #1 v 18-19).⁵⁰⁹ This demonstrates that it is not the net which is the means of divine delivery.

⁵⁰⁶ Maximilian Streck, *Assurbanipal und die letzten assyrischen Könige bis zum Untergang Niniveh's* (VAB 7.2; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1916), 2:74 ix 38-40; *BIWA* A ix 38-40.

⁵⁰⁷ See *ABL* 137 5-6 (SAA 10 168, 129) and *ABL* 340 21-22 (SAA 10 348, 283).

⁵⁰⁸ Streck, *Assurbanipal*, 2:24 iii 7-10.

⁵⁰⁹ RINAP 4, 22.

Returning to our passage in the Rassam Cylinder, I would argue that the king being equated with the net of the great gods is the best interpretation of these lines. As we saw above, the passage combines two motifs centered on inescapability equating the king with the powerful net of the gods. This fits within the general self-representation of Neo-Assyrian kings as they liken themselves to a net through simile.⁵¹⁰ Not only is the king compared to a net which covers (*saḥāpu*) his enemies, the king himself is called a net as we have seen above. The king takes on various epithets in the form of “X of the great gods,” such as the title *kašūš ilānī rabûte* “catastrophic weapon of the great gods” (Aššurnāširpal II A.0.101.26 35).⁵¹¹ The description *sapār ilānī rabûte* “net of the great gods,” however, comes closest to one of Ninurta’s epithets in the Nippur Compendium ^dnin-urta sa-par₃ [DINGIR.MEŠ].⁵¹² This would fit the general theme of Neo-Assyrian kings identifying themselves with and taking on aspects of Ninurta, including epithets. This topic will be taken up in detail below, but first we must take up the king’s identification with other divine weapons.

The King as Catastrophic Weapon (kašūšu)

The earliest use of *kašūšu* as a royal epithet goes back to the Kassite king, Kurigalzu, who in a text describing his installation claims for himself the titles:

⁵¹⁰ KUR.E₂-*kap-si* KUR.E₂-*sa-an-gi* KUR.E₂-*ur-zak-ki* GIM *sa-pa-ri as-ḥu-up* in Tiglath-pileser III #7 6 (RINAP 1, 31). For other examples, see also Tiglath-pileser III (RINAP 1, 118), Adad-nirari II (RIMA 1, 148, 157) and Šamši-Adad V (RIMA 2, 183).

⁵¹¹ RIMA 2, 281. For example, Assurbanipal is both the *narām ilānī rabûti* and the *binût qātāti ilānī rabûti* (SAA 3 3 23, 12). See, respectively, Marie-Joseph Seux, *Épithètes Royales Akkadiennes et Sumeriennes* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1967), 192 and 62.

⁵¹² Based on IM 44150 with lacuna filled in from K2892+8397 taken from no. 18 in A. R. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts* (OLA 40; Leuven: Departement Oriëntalistiek, 1992), 154-155.

ka-šu-uš na-ki-ri ka-mu-u₂ a-a-bi-šu na-ra-am ^dAMAR.UTU

Catastrophic weapon against enemies, ensnarer of his enemies, beloved of
Marduk
(RA 29 1.10)⁵¹³

Unfortunately, it is not clear whether this inscription describes Kurigalzu I (d. ca. 1375 BCE) or Kurigalzu II (1332-1308 BCE). J. Brinkman does not group it with the texts that can be confidently assigned to one king or the other. He does, however, mention that K. Jaritz attributes the text to Kurigalzu II.⁵¹⁴ After Kurigalzu, the epithet was reused by several Middle Assyrian kings, beginning with Shalmaneser I (1273-1244 BCE) in the forms *kašūš lā māgirī* “catastrophic weapon (against) the insubmissive”⁵¹⁵ and *[ka]šūš ilī* “catastrophic weapon of the gods.”⁵¹⁶ Later Shalmaneser I’s son, Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243-1207 BCE), employed this term in his titulary, as we saw above. The first of the Neo-Assyrian kings to use the title was Aššurnasirpal II (883-859 BCE), who utilized it in several royal inscriptions,⁵¹⁷ for example:

⁵¹³ MAH 15922. Alfred Boissier, “Document Cassite,” *RA* 29 (1932): 93-104. In J. Brinkman’s catalogue of Kassite texts this text features as Q.2.5, see J. A. Brinkman, *Materials and Studies for Kassite History: A Catalogue of Cuneiform Sources Pertaining to Specific Monarchs of the Kassite Dynasty* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1976), 1:211.

⁵¹⁴ Brinkman, *Materials and Studies for Kassite History*, 1:205-207.

⁵¹⁵ A.0.77.4 7; RIMA 1, 192.

⁵¹⁶ This comes from a Ninevite clay cone containing one of the exemplars (#4, SM 2125) for A.0.77.18 (RIMA 1, 207) containing a variation on Shalmaneser I’s titulary. See L. W. King, *Records of the Reign of Tukulti-Ninib I, King of Assyria, about B. C. 1275* (London: Luzac and co., 1904), 133, 169; Ernst F. Weidner, “Die Inschriften der assyrischen Könige Adadnarari I. und Salmanassar I,” in *Die Inschriften der altassyrischen Könige*, eds. Erich Ebeling, Bruno Meissner, and Ernst F. Weidner (Leipzig: Quelle, 1926), xxxv, 146.

⁵¹⁷ See A.0.101.1 i 9b-17a (RIMA 2, 194); i 21 (RIMA 2, 195); i 34 (RIMA 2, 196); iii 118 (RIMA 2, 221); iii 130 (RIMA 2, 222). A.0.101.2 1 (RIMA 2, 224). A.0.101.3 19 (RIMA 2, 229). A.0.101.17 i 16, 38 (RIMA 2, 239). A.0.101.20 21, 45-46 (RIMA 2, 263-264). A.0.101.23 1 (RIMA 2, 275). A.0.101.28 i 9 (RIMA 2, 284). A.0.101.29 2’-8’ (RIMA 2, 287). A.0.101.30 2 (RIMA 2, 288). A.0.101.104 3 (RIMA 2, 357).

33. *u₂-šum₂-gal-lu ek-du ka-šid* URU.URU *u ħur-ša₂-ni paṭ gim-ri-šu₂-nu*
 MAN EN.MEŠ
34. *mu-la-iṭ ek-šu-te tiz₂-qa-ru la pa-du-u₂ mu-rib a-nun-te* MAN DU₃
mal-ki.MEŠ
35. MAN MAN.MEŠ-*ni i-ši-pu na-a`-du ni-bit* ^dMAŠ *qar-di ka-šu-uš*
 DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ
36. MAN *ša₂ ina* ^{giš}TUKUL-*ti aš-šur u* ^dMAŠ DINGIR.MEŠ *tik-li-šu₂ me-*
ša₂-riš DU.DU-*ku-ma*
37. KUR.MEŠ *šap-šu-te u mal-ki*.MEŠ ^{lu₂}KUR₂.MEŠ-*šu₂ kul-lat*
 KUR.KUR.MEŠ-*šu₂-nu*
38. *a-na* GIR₃^{II}-*šu₂ u₂-šek₂-ni-ša₂* ^{lu₂}KUR₂.MEŠ-*ut aš-šur* AN.TA *u* KI.TA
39. *iš-ta-na-nu-ma* GUN *u ma-da-tu* UGU-*šu₂-nu u₂-ki-nu*

Fierce lion-dragon, conqueror of cities and mountain regions in their entirety, king of lords, who curbs the dangerous, august, merciless, who makes resistance tremble, king of every foreign ruler, king of kings, attentive purification priest, chosen by heroic Ninurta, catastrophic weapon of the great gods, king, who with the support of Aššur and Ninurta, the gods his helpers, always walks justly, he made submit strong mountains and his enemy foreign rulers, all their lands, he fought with the enemies of Aššur above and below (and) he imposed on them tax and tribute.

(A.0.101.26 33-39)⁵¹⁸

This passage is paralleled in the so-called Annals of Aššurnāširpal II in the final portion of the text, which functions as a display text.⁵¹⁹ Both Tukulti-Ninurta I and Aššurnasirpal II share the variation *kašūš* DINGIR.MEŠ (GAL.MEŠ) “catastrophic weapon of the (great) gods.” This emphasizes the divine support of the king, who not only takes on the role of a divine weapon, but a divine weapon sent or under the authority of the great gods. Finally, Aššurnasirpal II’s son, Shalmaneser III (858-824 BCE), is the last of the Neo-Assyrian kings to make use of this epithet:

1. ^ΓmdSILIM -*ma-nu*^Γ-[MAŠ] ^ΓMAN GAL^Γ MAN *dan-nu* MAN KIŠ
2. MAN *la* *ša₂-na-an u₂-šum₂-gal-lu*
3. *ka-šu-uš* DU₃* *kib-ra-a-te* *ša₂-pir*
4. *mal-ki*.MEŠ *ša₂* kul₂-la-te* *ša₂ kul₂-la-at*

⁵¹⁸ RIMA 2, 281.

⁵¹⁹ RIMA 2, 191-192.

5. *na-ki-ri-šu₂ ki-ma ḥa-aṣ-ba-te*
6. *u₂-da-qi-qu NITA₂ dan-nu la pa-du-u₂*

Shalmaneser III, great king, strong king, king of the world, king without equal, lion-dragon, catastrophic weapon of all regions, ruler of foreign rulers everywhere, one who smashed all his enemies like a pot, strong man, merciless (one).
(A.O.102.25 1-6)⁵²⁰

This text appears on a stone statue of the king found at the city of Aššur. In this text, Shalmaneser III is not only the *kašūšu*, but the *kašūšu* over all regions, thus expanding the range of his devastating force. The king's title of *kašūšu* "catastrophic weapon" serves to underscore his unique claim to unparalleled violence by evoking divine devastation. This devastation is variously associated with the mythological deluge and the god Nergal. The connection with Nergal, seen above in the example from Hammurabi's law code, will be explored in greater detail below. In addition, as the catastrophic weapon of the gods, the king's violence is cast in terms of religious reverence and piety.⁵²¹

The King as Weapon (kakku)

The king's role as a *kakku*, specifically the *kakku lā pādû* "merciless weapon," is less frequently attested compared to the more specific weapons (net and catastrophic weapon). The earliest version of this motif appears in the royal inscriptions of Aššurnasirpal II, in the same text in which he claimed the title catastrophic weapon of the great gods. The king is described as:

⁵²⁰ RIMA 3, 98.

⁵²¹ For example, Aššurnasirpal II is also the "worshipper of the great gods" (A.O.101.26 32; RIMA 2, 281), "he who acts with the support of the great gods" (A.O.101.26 11; RIMA 2, 280), "provider of offerings for the great gods" (A.O.101.1 i 23-24; RIMA 2, 195), and "appointee of the great gods" (A.O.101.1 29; RIMA 2, 195).

40. ^maš-šur-PAB-A MAN *dan-nu ni-bit* ^d30 *me-gir* ^da-nim *na-mad*
^dIŠKUR

41. *kaš-kaš* DINGIR.MEŠ ^{giš}TUKUL *la pa-du-u mu-u₂-šam-qit* KUR
KUR₂.MEŠ-š_u₂ *ana-ku*

Aššurnāsirpal II, strong king, chosen by Sin, favorite of Anu, beloved of Adad, the overpowering one of the gods, the merciless weapon,⁵²² which fells the land hostile to him, am I.
(A.0.101.26 40-41)⁵²³

In very similar phrasing, Esarhaddon also claims to be a merciless weapon that is deadly against the enemy land:

r. 21. *ni-šit* AN.ŠAR₂ ^dAG *u* ^dAMAR.UTU *ni-bit* ^d30 *mi-gir* ^da-nim *na-ra-am* *šar-ra-ti*

r. 22. ^diš-tar *i-lat kal gim-ri* ^{giš}TUKUL *la pa-du-u mu-rib* KUR *nu-kur₂-ti* *a-na-ku-ma*

Favorite of Aššur, Nabû, and Marduk; chosen by Sîn, favorite of Anu, beloved of the Queen, Ištar goddess of the whole universe, merciless weapon which makes the enemy country quake, am I.
(Esarhaddon 98 r. 21-22)⁵²⁴

Both Aššurnasirpal II and Esarhaddon claim to be merciless weapons which act against enemy lands. The description of the weapon is not accidental, but echoes language used to describe divine weaponry, which both Aššurnasirpal II and Esarhaddon received in the same texts. For example, before taking on the title *kakku lā pādû mušamqit māt nakrīšu*, Aššurnasirpal II describes that Aššur placed (*tamāhu*) his merciless weapon (*kakkašu lā*

⁵²² The placement of this epithet among Aššurnasirpal II's titles is ambiguous, since it directly follows one of Adad's epithets *kaškaš ilānī* "overpowering one of the gods" and thus one might consider it a continuation of Adad's description. A variation of this titulary, however, makes it clear that the *kakku lā pādû* is one of the king's titles: 33) ... ^maš-šur-PAB-A MAN *dan-nu* MAN KUR *aš-šur ni-bit* ^d30 *mi-gir* ^da-nim *na-mad* ^d10 *kaš-kaš* DINGIR.MEŠ 34) *ana-ku* ^{giš}TUKUL *la pa-du-u₂ mu-šam-qit* KUR KUR₂.MEŠ-š_u₂ *ana-ku* ... (A.0.101.1 i 33-34; RIMA 2, 196). The placement of the *anāku* between Adad's epithet and the *kakku lā pādû* demonstrates that this phrase is associated with the king and not the god.

⁵²³ RIMA 2, 281. For parallels, see A.0.101.1 i 33-34 (RIMA 2, 196); A.0.101.1 iii 129-130 (RIMA 2, 222); A.0.101.17 i 36-39 (RIMA 2, 239-240); A.0.101.20 44-46 (RIMA 2, 264).

⁵²⁴ RINAP 4, 185.

pādâ) in the king's arms.⁵²⁵ Immediately following this, the king fells (*ušamqit*) the forces of Lullumu in battle with weapons (*ina kakkī*).⁵²⁶ As we have seen in chapter three, the bestowal of a divine weapon served to empower the king for battle. This seems to be worked into the king's later title, which echoes both the weapon he received from Aššur (*kakku lā pādû*) and his own prowess in battle (*mušamqit*). Similarly, Esarhaddon's reception of divine weapons precedes his description as a merciless weapon. After recounting his pious reverence to the great gods, they present (*šarāku*) him with their merciless weapons (*kakkīšunu lā pādûti*).⁵²⁷ In this way, the kings become the very divine weapons they received from the gods in order to bring justice to those rebelling against divinely sanctioned royal rule.

In these dimensions as a pious and unstoppable warrior on behalf of Aššur and the great gods, the king's identification with divine weapons also serves to cast the him in the role of a warrior-king like Ninurta. M. Karlsson explains that "In his warfare, the king takes on divine attributes and forms, and likens himself to deities."⁵²⁸ This can take the form of similes in which the king is compared to various warrior deities, including Erra, Girru, Adad, and Dagan. Furthermore, in the weapons that the king wields, such as the arrow that cuts off life (*šiltāhu pāri' napšāti*),⁵²⁹ and the description of the enemies he fights, the king takes on the role of Ninurta or Marduk facing down mythological

⁵²⁵ A.0.101.26 15b-16; RIMA 2, 280.

⁵²⁶ A.0.101.26 17-18a; RIMA 2, 280.

⁵²⁷ Esar 98 r.7-8; RINAP 4, 184.

⁵²⁸ Karlsson, *Relations of Power in Early Neo-Assyrian State Ideology*, 119.

⁵²⁹ Senn 22 v 67-73; RINAP 3.1, 183.

threats.⁵³⁰ Amar Annus and Beate Pongratz-Leisten both argue that Assyrian kingship, beginning with Tukulti-Ninurta I, was connected with the god Ninurta, who served as a divine model for earthly kingship.⁵³¹ Pongratz-Leisten explains that “the king’s role as Aššur’s agent consisted of emulation of Ninurta’s role as steward.”⁵³² These connections between the king and Ninurta take various forms including: receiving Ninurta’s weapons, being accompanied by Ninurta’s weapons on campaigns, and taking on similar epithets.

It is this last category that helps to explain the king’s role as a weapon of the gods. Ninurta, is often equated with his own weapons. The texts *Angim* (Ninurta’s Return) and *Lugale* (Ninurta’s Exploits) both recount the exploits of the warrior god, Ninurta, and thus his mighty weapons come into view. Both texts survive into the Neo-Assyrian period through exemplars going back to the Old Babylonian period and some scholars think their origin might extend back to Gudea (ca. 2120 BCE).⁵³³ The Neo-Assyrian versions are bilingual texts with Akkadian translations provided beneath the Sumerian text. Ninurta wields the deluge-weapon as his fifty-headed mace (*Angim* 140),⁵³⁴ which Enlil gave to him as the *kakku abūbu* “deluge-weapon” (*Lugale* 686).⁵³⁵ This scene may echo

⁵³⁰ Weissert, “Creating a Political Climate,” 194-195.

⁵³¹ Annus, *The God Ninurta*, 203; Pongratz-Leisten, *Religion and Ideology in Assyria*, 414.

⁵³² Pongratz-Leisten, *Religion and Ideology in Assyria*, 414.

⁵³³ William W. Hallo, *The World's Oldest Literature: Studies in Sumerian Belles-Lettres* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 61-62.

⁵³⁴ The Sumerian: a-ma-ru me₃-a šita₂ saḡ-ninnu-ḡu₁₀. The Akkadian version: *a-bu-bu ta-ḥa-zi* ^{giš}TUKUL SAG.NINNU. Here I am following *ETCSL*’s numbering of the lines (*ETCSL* 1.6.1 140). For Cooper, this is line 141. See Cooper, *The Return of Ninurta to Nippur*, 80.

⁵³⁵ The Sumerian has ^{giš}tukul mar-urus. The Akkadian version is ^{giš}TUKUL *a-bu-bu*. I follow *ETCSL*’s numbering of the lines (*ETCSL* 1.6.2 686). Van Dijk has this as line 689. See Van Dijk, *LUGAL UD ME-LÁM-bi NIR-ĜÁL*, 1:142.

in Tiglath-pileser I's reception of the strong weapons, *abūb tamḥāri* "the deluge of battle" from Aššur and the great gods, as we saw above.⁵³⁶ Ninurta also possesses a deluge bow associated with *šibbu*-snake in the Akkadian version (Angim 141).⁵³⁷ Ninurta is so closely associated with his weapons that they become epithets for the god himself. For example, *Lugale* begins with a list of Ninurta's titles, including an epithet which evokes his deluge-bow:

3. *a-bu-bu šib-bu la a-ni-ḥu ša₂ a-na KUR nu-kur₂-tum i-šub-bu*

Deluge, the untiring viper, the one who vibrates⁵³⁸ against the foreign land.
(*Lugale* 3)⁵³⁹

Similarly, Ninurta also receives a *šita₂ an-na* "mace of heaven," among other gifts from Enlil (*Lugale* 695). One of Ninurta's many weapons in Angim is the *šita₂ idim an-na* "the

⁵³⁶ A.0.87.1 i 46-51a; RIMA 2, 13.

⁵³⁷ Cooper's line 142. See Cooper, *The Return of Ninurta to Nippur*, 80.

⁵³⁸ This translation is an attempt to deal with an admittedly difficult verb in this context. Regardless, whether one reads *rābu* "quake" or *šābu* "tremble," the range of meaning between the verbs are similar and describe the shaking of the earth or shaking in response to fear. As noted above, the verbal meaning in the G-stem does not fit the context. If one considers the subject in view to be Ninurta as a bow, then perhaps the trembling or swaying could refer to the bow-string, either as the twang after the arrow is fired or quivering when the string is pulled back in preparation to fire. I also tried to reflect the alliteration between *šibbu* and *išubbu* in my translation.

⁵³⁹ There are several issues with this line. First, there is some debate over whether to read the verb *i-RU-bu* as *rābu* "quake" or *šābu* "tremble." Here, I am following the Akkadian of MSS a (VAT 17012), which preserves the reading *i-RU-bu* for the last word. With S. Seminara I read *i-šub-bu* from *šābu* "tremble, sway." In addition to the arguments presented by Seminara, I would add that understanding the verb *šābu* here allows for paronomasia between the *šibbu* snake and its action (*išubbu*). See, Stefano Seminara, *La versione accadica del Lugale-e: La tecnica babilonese della traduzione dal sumerico e la sue Regole* (Rome: La Sapienza, 2001), 219. This way of reading *i-RU-bu* is also suggested by CAD, though not for this line explicitly. See CAD R, s.v. *rābu* B, 57. The composite Sumerian text reads: a-ma-ru mir-DU nu-kuš₂-u₃ ki-bal ḡa₂-ḡa₂ in ETCSL 1.6.2 3; Van Dijk, *LUGAL UD ME-LÁM-bi NIR-ĜÁL*, 1:51. Secondly, neither of the meanings for either *rābu* or *šābu* accords with the context of the line, since Ninurta should be the one causing trembling in D or Š stems, rather than trembling himself. This can be resolved through emendation or understanding the subject as Ninurta as bow.

heavy mace of heaven” (Angim 134).⁵⁴⁰ Again, Ninurta takes on the name of his weaponry, this time the mace of heaven.⁵⁴¹

123. ^dMIN *šar-ru kak-ku e-lu-[u₂ ša₂ a-a-bu rit-t]a-šu₂ l[a] i-ma[h-h]a-r[u]*

Ninurta, king, exalted weapon, whose hand the enemy cannot withstand.
(Lugale 123)⁵⁴²

In the Neo-Assyrian version of these texts, *šita₂* is translated with the more generic *kakku*, while *an-na* is taken variously as *ša Anim* “of Anu” (Angim 134) or *elū* “exalted” (Lugale 123).⁵⁴³ This pattern is reflected in the previously mentioned examples from Aššurnasirpal II and Esarhaddon. Just as Ninurta receives a weapon from Enlil to validate his kingship, so Assyrian kings received weapons from Aššur. Likewise, just as Ninurta takes on the epithet of the divinely given weapon, Aššurnasirpal and Esarhaddon do the same.

Perhaps the most common weapon related epithet for Ninurta was an all-encompassing net, most commonly a *šuškallu* or *saparru*. As we have seen, the description of Ninurta as a net derives from the nets in his mighty arsenal of monster fighting equipment. In Angim, Ninurta carries both an *alluḥappu*-net and a *šuškal tāhāzi* “battle net” (Angim 136-137). Likewise, in Lugale Ninurta is described as the possessor of a fearsome net:

⁵⁴⁰ Cooper, *The Return of Ninurta to Nippur*, 78.

⁵⁴¹ In Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave (ETCSL 1.8.2.1 486) Utu is described as the *šita₂ ku₃ an-na-ke₄* “the shinning mace of heaven.”

⁵⁴² Reconstruction based on Seminara, *La versione accadica del Lugal-e*, 89; cf. Van Dijk, *LUGAL UD ME-LÁM-bi NIR-ĜÁL*, 1:67.

⁵⁴³ Of note, there is no surviving Akkadian version of Lugale 695, which depicts Enlil’s bestowal of the *šita₂ an-na* to Ninurta.

qar-ra-du ša₂ šu-uš-kal-la-šu₂ a-a-bu i-saḥ-ḥa-pu

Hero, whose net spreads over the enemy.
(Lugale 13)

Later in Lugale, Ninurta's weapon and messenger, Šarur, addresses his master as:

[qar]-ra-du mu-šam-qi₂-tu₄ šu-uš-kal ta-ḥa-zi

Hero, pitfall, battle net.
(Lugale 122)

Ninurta's identity as a great net extended beyond mythological literature. It appears in commentaries and ritual texts as an epithet of the deity. The Nippur Compendium, a list of the gods, temples, and the Akītu festivals of Nippur dating from the Neo-Babylonian to the Late Babylonian periods, refers to Ninurta as the *sapār ilānī* "net of the gods" in the section listing the various Akītu celebrations (*BTT* 18:16'-17').⁵⁴⁴ A similar epithet appears in a Late Babylonian procession calendar, the Šabātu procession, that describes the journey of various gods to Kish with stops along the way.⁵⁴⁵ During his stay at the temple of Madānu and trip to the Edubba, Ninurta is called the *šapār Ešarra* "the net of the Ešarra" (*BTT* 57:9, 16).⁵⁴⁶ In the bilingual (Sumerian-Akkadian) balag to Ninurta, *nir-gal₂ lu₂ e₃-NE* known from Neo-Assyrian and Seleucid versions, Ninurta is praised as the *ŠU-ma (šuškallu) sāḥip māt nukurti* "the net, which covers the hostile land" (4R 27 no. 4

⁵⁴⁴ 16') *a₂-ki-it ša₂* ^dEN.ZU-na ana ^dnin-urta sa-par₃ [DINGIR.MEŠ] 17') *a₂-ki-it ma-la ba-ša₂-a ana ^dnin-urta sa-par₃* [DINGIR.MEŠ]. Based on IM 44150 iii 16'-17' (ms a) with lacuna filled in from K2892+8397: 23-24 (ms c). George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, 143-145, 154-155.

⁵⁴⁵ A. R. George, "Four Temple Rituals from Babylon," in *Wisdom, Gods and Literature: Studies in Assyriology in Honour of W. G. Lambert*, eds. A. R. George and I. L. Finkel (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 289-292.

⁵⁴⁶ 9) ^dnin-urta ša₂-par₃ E₂.ŠAR₂.RA ina E₂ ^dDI.KUD i-ba-a-[tu] and 16) [DU-ak ^dINANNA-]ṚTIN^{ki}. ^dma-lu-ka-tum ^dMAŠ ša₂-par₃ E₂.ŠAR₂.[RA]. The Composite text is based on BM 32516 (ms A) and BM 41239 (ms B). For ms A, see George, "Four Temple Rituals from Babylon," 293. For ms B, see George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, 232, pl. 54.

15'-16').⁵⁴⁷ Perhaps Ninurta's close association with his battle net is responsible for the description of Nebuchadnezzar II's net worship in Hab. 1:16, though there is no indication that a net, even as a divine weapon, served as a recipient of cult activity for Ninurta. Though several of Ninurta's weapons are listed in the Nippur Compendium as *bēl āliya* "divine mayor" of several cities.⁵⁴⁸

Finally, it should be noted that the royal epithet *kašūšu* "catastrophic weapon" appears nowhere as a weapon of Ninurta or among Ninurta's epithets. The closest parallel is *abūbu* "deluge," which appears among Ninurta's weaponry and as an epithet for the warrior god.⁵⁴⁹ The god Nergal, however, seems more closely associated with the weapon. As we saw above, in the epilogue to Hammurabi's law code, Ninurta is invoked to burn those disregarding the stela with his *kašūšu* (CH li 24-34). Additionally, the devastation by Nergal is associated with the *kašūšu* in omen texts.⁵⁵⁰ Whether like Ninurta, Nergal's weapon commonly served as one of his epithets is harder to determine. There are two Shuillas⁵⁵¹ to Nergal that seem to use *kašūšu* as an epithet of the deity, but one of them (LKA 30:2 || BMS 27:2) requires reconstruction to restore the term *kašūšu*,

⁵⁴⁷ 4R 27 no. 4 represents the Assyrian version. The Seleucid period manuscript is MMA 86.11.349 + 86.11.365. For a discussion of the Seleucid version, see Stefan M. Maul, "Nos. 2-18 Bilingual (Sumerian-Akkadian) Hymns from the Seleucid-Arsacid Period," in *Literary and Scholastic Texts of the First Millennium B.C.*, eds. Ira Spar and W. G. Lambert (CTMMA 2; New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), 32-41.

⁵⁴⁸ George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, 150-151.

⁵⁴⁹ Lugale 3, 657. For Van Dijk, this is line 660. Angim 205. For Cooper, this is line 207.

⁵⁵⁰ Šumma Izbu i 82. See Leichty, *The Omen Series Šumma Izbu*, 39. Pān tākalti i 133; ii 67, 73 (pestilence, *ilu*). See Ulla Koch-Westenholz, *Babylonian Liver Omens: The Chapters Manzāzu, Padānu and Pān tākalti of the Babylonian Extispicy Series mainly from Assurbanipal's Library* (CNIP 25; Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2000), 293, 306, and 307.

⁵⁵¹ For an up-to-date catalog of Shuilla prayers, see Alen Lenzi, "Corpus of Akkadian Shuilla Prayers Online," University of the Pacific, <http://www1.pacific.edu/~alenzi/shuillas/catalog.html>.

since only the KA sign is undamaged.⁵⁵² The second Shuilla (*BMS* 46:20-21 + *SFS* 79:23)⁵⁵³ does preserve the term *kašūšu* presumably used as Nergal’s epithet: *ka-šu-šu e-til-lu* “catastrophic weapon, prince.”⁵⁵⁴ One clear reference, however, is not much upon which to build a case. Regardless whether it functions as an epithet of Nergal or not, *kašūšu* is connected with the god. Thus, when the king takes up the identity as the *kašūšu*, he is evoking the destructive power of the warrior god, Nergal.

While this does deviate from the more typical royal alignment with Ninurta, there are several ways in which to understand it. First, one could, with Annus, understand this to be a result of syncretism. He explains that “in Neo-Assyrian times Ninurta shared his identity with Adad, Nabû, Nergal and Zababa.”⁵⁵⁵ Annus further notes that in an *eršemma* to Ninurta, he is called “Nergal, warrior.”⁵⁵⁶ Second, one could take the position of

⁵⁵² Number 206 in Lenzi’s online catalog. *BMS* 27:2 provides a variant version and reads *a-ša-riḍ ḏa-nun-na-[ki EN tam-ḥa-ri]* with *ašarid* “foremost” taking the place of *LKA* 30:2’s presumed *kašūš*. E. Ebeling does list various duplicates for *BMS* 27, including MS E (VAT 13954), which contains the reading, according to him, “KA + ?” for line two. In W. Mayer’s list of manuscripts, this is MS F. VAT 13954 is *LKA* 30, as noted by M-J. Seux, which does contain the reading *ka-ḥ-šu-[X]*. See, respectively, Leonard William King, *Babylonian Magic and Sorcery: Being “the Prayers of the Lifting of the Hand,”* (1896; repr., Hildesheim: Olms, 1975), 87-90; Erich Ebeling, *Die akkadische Gebetsserie “HandErhebung” von neuem Gesammelt und Herausgegeben* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1953), 112 n.5; Werner Mayer, *Untersuchungen zur Formensprache der babylonische Gebetsbeschwörungen* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1976), 402, 478-481; Marie-Joseph Seux, *Hymnes et Prières aux Dieux de Babylonie et d’Assyrie (LAPO 8; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1976), 312 n. 3.* For a more recent study on this Shuilla, see Tzvi Abusch, “A Shuilla: Nergal 2,” in *Reading Akkadian Prayers & Hymns: A Reader*, ed. Alan Lenzi (*ANEM* 3; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011), 339-349.

⁵⁵³ Number 212 in Lenzi’s online catalog. King, *Babylonian Magic and Sorcery*, 109-111; Vincent Scheil, *Une Saison de Fouilles à Sippar* (Cairo: Institut Français d’archéologie orientale, 1902), 115; Ebeling, *Die Akkadische Gebetsserie “Handerhebung,”* 114-117; Mayer, *Untersuchungen zur Formensprache der babylonische Gebetsbeschwörungen*, 402-403.

⁵⁵⁴ *BMS* 46:19-22, which lists Nergal’s titles and epithets, only preserves the very end of the lines, none of which include *kašūšu*. *SFS* 79 provides the beginning of the lines 12-22, which shows that after *muqtablum* at the end of *BMS* 46:20 there followed *ka-šu-šu e-til-lu*.

⁵⁵⁵ Annus, *The God Ninurta*, 46.

⁵⁵⁶ Annus, *The God Ninurta*, 87 n. 244.

Karlsson, who sees the king as invoking the roles of a variety of gods, such as Erra, Girru, Adad, or Dagan.⁵⁵⁷ Obviously, the common denominator in these choices is the association of the king with powerful warrior gods. In this way, I think Karlsson is correct. Kings identified themselves with a variety of gods in their roles as divine warrior. Ninurta is the most prominent of such gods, having strong connections to kingship and battle. Therefore, there are many connections between the king and Ninurta made throughout royal inscriptions. But Ninurta is not the only god to which the king can compare himself. For example, Shalmaneser III likens himself to Erra and Adad (A.O.102.5 iii 2b-3a)⁵⁵⁸ and Sennacherib likens his thundering to that of Adad (Senn 18 v 22').⁵⁵⁹ Just as such warrior gods could be referred to by the names of their powerful and iconic weapons, distilling the god's aspect of martial excellence until nothing is left but the weapon itself. So, Mesopotamian kings took on weapon related epithets to cast themselves in the role of divine warrior and evoke their unparalleled devastation on the battlefield.

It is important to note that although the king took on divine weapon epithets, this was not to portray the king as merely an instrument in divine hands. Though the king's actions are undoubtedly in sync with the designs of the great gods, the king's agency as the one who accomplishes the will of the gods is never in question. Among the king's titular and various epithets, in which his equivalence with divine weapons appears, the king is always the primary actor. Even as a *kakku lā pādû* "merciless weapon," it is

⁵⁵⁷ Karlsson, *Relations of Power in Early Neo-Assyrian State Ideology*, 119.

⁵⁵⁸ RIMA 3, 29.

⁵⁵⁹ RINAP 3.1, 154; cf. Tiglath-pileser III (TP III 17 8), RINAP 1, 50-51.

Esarhaddon who causes the land of the enemy to quake in fear.⁵⁶⁰ Likewise, Aššurnasirpal III is the weapon “which fells the land hostile to him” (A.0.101.26 41).⁵⁶¹ Shalmaneser III, as we saw above, is not only the *kašūš kal kibrāte* “catastrophic weapon of all regions,” he is also “one who crushed all his enemies like a pot” (A.0.102.25 4-6).⁵⁶² Even when portrayed as a weapon, the king retains his agency. He is always an active weapon, ready to descend upon anyone who violates divine justice. To this end, it is important to note that the king-as-weapon never appears in the hands of the gods, nor is he depicted as passively wielded by the gods. Instead, like Ninurta, he takes on the very identity of the divine instrument of punishment, usually a weapon with rich mythological associations. By taking on the epithets of fierce warrior gods, not only does the king align himself with mythological heroes and the side of the great gods, he casts his opponents as mythological evil. If the net of Ninurta, i.e. the king, descends upon a group, how can anyone argue that they are in the right? Yet, as we will see below, those on the receiving end of state sponsored violence did not always accept royal rhetoric at face value. Instead, Judean prophets took imperial motifs and changed them in subtle ways so that the agency of the king was nullified and his representation of divine justice was transformed into naked lust for power.

⁵⁶⁰ Esar 98 r. 22; RINAP 4, 185.

⁵⁶¹ RIMA 2, 281.

⁵⁶² RIMA 3, 98.

The Motif comes to Judah

The motif of the king as a weapon of Yahweh does not appear to be a native Israelite motif, since it is not used for any of the kings of the united or divided monarchies.⁵⁶³ Instead, the motif appears only with foreign kings, Assyrian and Babylonian, whose portrayals are hardly flattering. Given the trope's prevalence in Assyrian royal inscriptions and its limited use in Hebrew literature, the prophets likely borrowed this motif as a way to confront Mesopotamian imperial power.⁵⁶⁴ Though the exact mechanism of cultural transmission remains uncertain, it is worth noting that the trope of the king as a weapon appears on a stele Esarhaddon set up in the rebellious province of Sam' al. M. Cogan has recently used the text of this stele in reconstructing the text of the Ben-Shemen Assyrian stele fragment, suggesting a duplicate or a stele with similar content existed within ancient Israel.⁵⁶⁵ While this must remain speculative, it is evident that this trope was part of the repertoire of propaganda Assyrian kings could employ to influence problematic polities, not unlike Judah.⁵⁶⁶ Of the biblical uses of the

⁵⁶³ Though there are examples in which nations (Judah and Ephraim), a prophet, and priests are equated with weapons. See, respectively, Zech 9:13; Isa 49:2; and Hos 5:1.

⁵⁶⁴ The avenues of cultural transmission between the Assyrian empire and their vassals, especially in Judah, has been explored by many scholars. Representative examples include: Chaim Cohen, "Neo-Assyrian Elements in the First Speech of the Rab-šāqê," *IOS* (1979) 32–48; Peter Machinist, "Assyria and its Image in First Isaiah," *JAOS* 103 (1983): 729-734; Lewis, "'You Have Heard What the Kings of Assyria Have Done,'" 88-89; Shawn Zelig Aster, "Transmission of Neo-Assyrian Claims of Empire to Judah in the Late Eighth Century B.C.E.," *HUCA* 78 (2007): 1-44; and recently Shawn Zelig Aster, *Reflections of Empire in Isaiah 1-39: Responses to Assyrian Ideology* (ANEM 19; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017).

⁵⁶⁵ Mordechai Cogan, "The Assyrian Stela Fragment from Ben-Shemen," in *Treasures on Camels' Humps: Historical and Literary Studies from the Ancient Near East Presented to Israel Eph'al*, eds. Mordechai Cogan and Dan'el Kahn (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2008), 68.

⁵⁶⁶ Perhaps some rhetoric/propaganda was used in communications between Hezekiah and Sennacherib in establishing the tribute to be paid, especially since the motif occurs among titulary (2 Kgs 18:13-16). Or Judeans could have learned of it from the Babylonian envoys sent to Hezekiah (2 Kgs 20:12-13), assuming such envoys might disagree with the lofty descriptions the Assyrian kings used of themselves.

king-as-weapon motif, perhaps the most famous are two examples from First Isaiah concerning the Assyrian king. Though the Isaianic examples do not take up the topic of the Babylonian conquest and exile, they are the earliest versions of the motif and thus serve as a lens through which scholars and perhaps even the authors of Jeremiah and Ezekiel viewed the king of Babylon's role. Thus, I will explore these examples before moving onto the cases in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. For the examples involving Nebuchadnezzar II, I divide the instances into those involving other weapons and those involving the sword.

In the first of these Isaianic references, the Assyrian king is portrayed as a *ta'ar* "razor," which Yahweh uses to shave his own people:

18. *wəhāyā bayyôm hahû` yišrōq yhw hazzabûb` ʾăšer biqšēh yə`ōrē mišrāyim wəladdəbôrâ` ʾăšer bə`eres` ʾaššûr*
 19. *ûbā`û wənāhû kullām bənaḥlê habbattôt ûbinqîqê hassəlā`im ûbəkōl hanna` ʾăšûšîm ûbəkōl hannahālōlîm*
 20. *bayyôm hahû` yəgallah` ʾădōnāy bəta`ar hasśəkîrâ bə`ebrê nāhār bəmelek` ʾaššûr` et-hārō`š wəša`ar hāraglāyim wəgam` et-hazzāqān tispeh*

18. On that day, Yahweh will whistle to the flies that is at the end of the streams of Egypt, to the bees that are in the land of Aššur.

19. All of them will come and will settle in the wadis of cliffs, in the clefts of the rocks, in all the camel-thorn, and in every watering place.

20. On that day, my lord will shave with the knife hired from the other side of the Euphrates, with the king of Aššur, the head, pubic hair, and it will even carry away the beard.

(Isa 7:18-20).

In response to Ahaz of Judah's worry concerning the alliance of King Pekah of Israel and King Rezin of Aram against him, Yahweh assures him not to worry about the conspiring kings. In the verses that follow, the promised hope darkens beneath the shadows of empire. Yahweh summons the forces of Egypt and Assyria, represented as flies and bees respectively, to settle in the land. Whether this is meant to be interpreted as a continuing

or expanded punishment of Israel or as the unintended consequence of asking the great powers for help is uncertain. What becomes clear, however, is the role afforded to the Assyrian king. He is a razor that Yahweh will use to punish his people. Instead of Ahaz or another Judean king serving as Yahweh's tool/weapon, it is the king of Assyria, whom Yahweh has hired from across the distant Euphrates river. For Yahweh's people, this is a symbol of humiliating and emasculating defeat.⁵⁶⁷ S. Niditch explains that this oracle "draws upon the meanings of hair cutting, in particular the forced cutting of the hair of the cheek and pubic areas, to create an image of subjugation and loss of power associated with the virility of the warrior."⁵⁶⁸

While it would be in keeping with the Assyrian king's self-presentation to be responsible for the humiliation of an enemy, the king's own role, while built on a common imperial motif, is hardly ideal from the Assyrian perspective. Not only do God's people suffer degradation, but the Assyrian king's status is greatly reduced. Instead of presenting the king as the chosen, favorite, or beloved of the gods, he is *šakîrâ* "hired."⁵⁶⁹ He may be serviceable to Yahweh, but he is not special or beloved by him. This may not come as a great surprise, since one would not expect a foreign king to receive such praise, though the figure of Cyrus serves as an intriguing counter example. Moreover, the king's role is not as one of Yahweh's mythological weapons, such as the great, cruel, mighty sword that Yahweh used to defeat Leviathan (Isa 27:1). Instead, the king is imagined as a shaving instrument. Furthermore, it also places the king, as razor, in the demeaning

⁵⁶⁷ Susan Niditch, *"My Brother Esau is a Hairy Man": Hair and Identity in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 130.

⁵⁶⁸ Niditch, *"My Brother Esau is a Hairy Man"*, 99.

⁵⁶⁹ See Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 127.

position of being used to shave pubic hair. This represents a clear demotion in the Assyrian king's status. As if that was not enough, even as a razor the king lacks meaningful agency. He is not depicted as a razor, however mundane, that will pursue and humiliate the enemies of Yahweh. It is Yahweh who will do the shaving, while the king functions as an inanimate object in his hand. This trend of passivity is repeated in Isaiah's portrayal of Assyria as the staff of Yahweh's anger.

Isaiah 10 features an explanation of Judah's subservience to Assyria, which serves as a vehicle of punishment for their sinful actions. This also functions as a promise of a better future, in which Yahweh's anger comes to an end and Assyria, especially in the person of the king, is punished for its arrogance. Machinist has argued that this chapter evinces knowledge of common tropes found in Assyrian royal inscriptions while simultaneously subverting them.⁵⁷⁰ One of the ways in which the prophet transforms Assyrian imperial rhetoric is through the motif of the king-as-weapon, upon which M. Chan has elaborated.⁵⁷¹ The subversive element, however, is not necessarily the replacement of Aššur with Yahweh, as Chan argues.⁵⁷² It is, instead, as we saw in Isa 7:20, the undermining of the king's heroic status as the manifestation of the warrior god, Ninurta. He is portrayed as a weapon in the hand of Yahweh, which is to be used and unceremoniously discarded when its task is done. To unpack this point, I will first examine the passage and how the Assyrian king's role is subtly but significantly altered much to the king's detriment.

⁵⁷⁰ Machinist, "Assyria and its Image in First Isaiah," 719-737; Machinist, "Final Response," 296-298.

⁵⁷¹ Michael Chan, "Rhetorical Reversal and Usurpation: Isaiah 10:5-34 and the Use of Neo-Assyrian Royal Idiom in the Construction of an Anti-Assyrian Theology," *JBL* 128 (2009): 717-733.

⁵⁷² Chan, "Rhetorical Reversal and Usurpation," 725-726.

5. *hōy 'aššūr šēbet 'appī ūmaṭṭeh- hū' bəyād mizza 'mī*⁵⁷³
6. *bəgōy ḥānēp 'āšalləḥennū wə 'al- 'am 'ebrātī 'āšawwennū lišlōl šālāl wəlabōz baz ūlāsīmō*⁵⁷⁴ *mirmās kəḥōmer ḥūšōt*
7. *wəhū' lō' -kēn yədammeḥ ūləbābō lō' -kēn yaḥšōb kī ləhašmīd bilbābō ūləhakrīt gōyim lō' mə 'āt*
8. *kī yō' mar ḥālō' śāray yaḥdāw məlākīm*
9. *ḥālō' kəkarkəmīš kalnō 'im-lō' kə' arpad ḥāmāt 'im-lō' kədammešeq šōmərōn*
10. *ka 'āšer māšə 'ā yādī ləməmləkōt ḥā 'əlīl ūpəsīlēhem mīrūšālaīm ūmīššōmərōn*
11. *ḥālō' ka 'āšer 'āsītī ləšōmərōn wəle 'əlīlēhā kēn 'e 'ēseh līrūšālaīm wəla 'āšabbēhā*
12. *wəḥāyā kī-yəbašša ' 'ādōnāy 'et-kol-mā 'āsēhū bəhar šīyyōn (šīyōn) ūbīrūšālaīm 'epqōd 'al-pərī-gōdel ləbab melek- 'aššūr wə 'al-tip 'eret rūm 'ēnāyw*
13. *kī 'āmar bəkōaḥ yādī 'āsītī ūbəḥokmātī kī nəbunōtī wə 'āsīr gəbūlōt 'ammīm wa 'ātūdōtēhem*⁵⁷⁵ *šósētī wə 'ōrīd ka 'bīr yōšəbīm*
14. *wattimšā' kaqqēn yādī ləḥēl ḥā 'ammīm wəke 'ēsōp bēšīm 'āzūbōt kol-ḥā 'āreš 'ānī 'āsāptī wəlō' ḥāyā nōdēd kānāp ūpōseh pēh ūməšapsēp*
15. *ḥāyitpā 'ēr haggarzen 'al ḥəḥōšēb bō 'im-yitgaddēl ḥammaššōr 'al-mənīpō kəḥānīp šēbet wə 'et-mərīmāyw kəḥārīm maṭṭeh lō' - 'ēš*

5. Alas! Aššur, the staff of my anger; he is the rod in (my) hand because of my wrath.
6. I will dispatch him among godless nations and I will command him against the people of my rage to capture and plunder, to make it an overtrodden land like the dirt of the ground.
7. But he does not feel inclined, his heart does not plan thus for in his heart (is) to destroy and to exterminate not a few nations.
8. Indeed/for he says, “Are not my officers all/invariably kings?
9. Was not Kalno like Carchemish, or Hamath like Arpad, or Samaria like Damascus?
10. Just as my hand found the kingdoms of pagan gods and their divine images were more than (those of) Jerusalem and Samaria.
11. Is it not, as I have done to Samaria and to its pagan gods, thus I will do to Jerusalem and its idols.
12. But when my lord finishes all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the arrogance of the heart of the king of Assyria and the pride of his haughty eyes.

⁵⁷³ The MT of v.5b reads *ūmaṭṭeh-hū' bəyādām za 'mī*.

⁵⁷⁴ The *qere* reads *ūlāsūmō*.

⁵⁷⁵ The *qere* reads *wa 'ātūdōtēhem*.

13. For he said, “By the strength of my hand, I acted and by my wisdom, for I was discerning, I removed the borders of the people and I raided their provisions; I caused the inhabitants to fall like a strong-one.

14. My hand found the wealth of the peoples like a bird nest; like (one) gathers abandoned eggs, I myself gathered all the earth; no one was flapping (its) wings, opening (its) mouth; or twittering.

15. Does the axe boast over the one hewing with it; or does the saw exalt itself over the one brandishing it; As if the staff brandishes the ones raising it aloft; as if the rod lifts what is not wood.

To begin, I will address a crux that has received no small amount of attention from scholars, namely, the status of the text of Isa 10:5b. The first half of the verse flows without serious difficulty and identifies Assyria, in the person of the king, as the staff of Yahweh’s anger.⁵⁷⁶ The latter portion of v.5, however, presents a predicament. Unfortunately, the ancient versions offer little help as they either reflect the same text as MT (1QIsa, Vulg., Pehsitta), a slightly different text with most of the same problems (LXX), or a completely free translation (Targum). Many scholars have suggested that the problem lies with the words *hû’ bəyādām*.⁵⁷⁷ This phrase interrupts the expected construct *maṭṭēh za ‘mî* “rod of my wrath,” which would parallel the *šēbet ‘appî* “staff of my anger” in the A-line. For this reason, some suggest deleting the phrase *hû’ bəyādām* completely.⁵⁷⁸ As several scholars have noted, this is a problematic solution because it

⁵⁷⁶ With the majority of scholars, I understand *’aššûr* in Isaiah 10 to refer to the Assyrian king. The term *Aššur* can cover a range of meanings including: city, nation, people, god, and king. The identification of *’aššûr* as a reference to the king is made clear in v. 12, in which we find the subject of vv. 5-15 clarified as *melek-’aššûr* “king of Assyria.” Yet, recently, Machinist has argued that verses 10-12 cannot be part of the original composition, which must have been written before Sargon II’s campaign against Ashdod in 711 BCE. See, Machinist, “‘Ah, Assyria...’,” 204-206. Even so, the treatment of the term *’aššûr* as a masculine singular noun, in combination with rhetoric echoing and responding to typical Assyrian royal motifs make it clear that the person of the king is in view.

⁵⁷⁷ Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 146; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 19; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 252; Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 164.

⁵⁷⁸ George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah I-XXXIX* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1912), 195-196.

results in a B-line that is too short.⁵⁷⁹ Others, inspired in part by the LXX (see more on this below), have rearranged the text so that *za 'mî* follows directly after *maṭṭēh* now in the construct.⁵⁸⁰ Of course, not every form of parallelism needs to be synonymous. Not only is the expected parallelism lacking, as it stands in the MT, the imagery shifts from the Assyrian king as the weapon to the king brandishing the weapon.⁵⁸¹ As the Mesopotamian examples examined above make clear, the notion that the king can be both the wielder of the weapon and the weapon is not a problem in and of itself. Yet, the image of the Assyrian king as the wielder of divine weapons is not taken up again in the chapter, whereas the status of the king-as-weapon is (Isa 10:15).⁵⁸² Further complicating matters is the third person plural pronominal suffix, as vocalized in the MT, on the noun *yād*. This pronominal suffix is awkward if it is meant to refer back to Assyria.⁵⁸³

Because of these issues, scholars have often viewed the phrase as an intrusion, most commonly as a gloss.⁵⁸⁴ If it is a gloss, it was an early one, since it is reflected in

⁵⁷⁹ Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, 222 n.2; Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 412.

⁵⁸⁰ G. R. Driver, “Studies in the Vocabulary of the Old Testament VI,” *JTS* 34 (1933): 383; Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, 222 n.1. P. Auvray, understanding *hū' bəyādām* as a gloss, takes a different but related approach by shifting *maṭṭēh* after the gloss so as to be in construct with *za 'mî*. See Paul Auvray, *Isaie 1-39* (SB; Paris: Gabalda, 1972), 131.

⁵⁸¹ J. N. Oswalt considers this a contradiction of the message of the first stich. See, John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 261 n. 1.

⁵⁸² For the reference to Assyria raising the staff *šēbeṭ* in v. 24, see my treatment below.

⁵⁸³ When it appears alone, the noun *'aššūr* is frequently taken as a third masculine singular noun, especially in Isaiah. I will treat this in greater detail below.

⁵⁸⁴ Theoretically, the confusion could also be the result of a conflation of variants, though this would also result in a problematically short B-line.

almost every ancient witness.⁵⁸⁵ As mentioned above, the deletion of the supposed gloss results in a B-line that is much too short. Returning to the option of moving *za 'mî* after *maṭṭeh*, this view is based upon the fact that the LXX exhibits a different word order with *orgē* minus the pronominal suffix coming directly after *'appî* and the conjunction, while the phrase *hû' bəyādām* appears at the very end of the verse. The term *orgē* (as *tēn orgēn mou*) appears again with the pronominal suffix, reflecting the MT's *za 'mî*, at the beginning of the next verse. Additionally, the relation of *orgē* to the rest of the verse is not consistent, with Alexandrinus and Sinaiticus taking it as a genitive (*orgēs*) going with *rhabdos* "rod" producing "the rod of my anger and wrath is in their hands." On the other hand, Vaticanus gives *orgē* as a nominative "the wrath is in their hands." This approach is predicated on the position of *orgē* after the *kai* and understanding *orgē* to translate the Hebrew *za 'am* with *maṭṭeh* seemingly missing from the LXX. R. L. Troxel and F. Wilk, however, argue that the LXX basically follows the MT text and that *orgē* translates *maṭṭeh* and not *za 'am* in v.5b.⁵⁸⁶ Troxel draws attention to the fact that the translator uses *orgē* to render *maṭṭeh* in 10:26 and in other atypical translations (Isa 37:3; 59:19).⁵⁸⁷ Wilk argues that this is yet another example of the translator's "tendency to interpret Hebrew metaphors."⁵⁸⁸ This makes the strategy of rearranging of the text less certain, as the

⁵⁸⁵ Only Targum Jonathan's translation lacks the phrase. The latter portion of the Targumic translation, however, is so free and different from MT or any other ancient witness that it is difficult to see this as anything other than an attempt to derive meaning from a troublesome stitch.

⁵⁸⁶ Ronald L. Troxel, *LXX-Isaiah as Translation and Interpretation: The Strategies of the Translator of the Septuagint of Isaiah* (JSJSup 124; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 228-229; Florian Wilk, "Between Scripture and History: Technique and Hermeneutics of Interpreting Biblical Prophets in the Septuagint of Isaiah and the Letters of Paul," in *The Old Greek of Isaiah: Issues and Perspectives. Papers read at the Conference on the Septuagint of Isaiah, held in Leiden 10-11 April 2008*, eds. Arie van der Kooij and Michaël N. van der Meer (CBET; Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 200.

⁵⁸⁷ Troxel, *LXX-Isaiah as Translation and Interpretation*, 228 n. 117.

⁵⁸⁸ Wilk, "Between Scripture and History," 200.

primary justification that the LXX reflects such an arrangement can no longer be confidently employed.

Uncharitably, one could render v.5b as “a staff is it in their hand, my wrath.” Those seeking to make the best of a difficult stitch, translate something like “my wrath, it is the rod in their hand.”⁵⁸⁹ One of the more popular solutions is to understand the *mem* of *yādām* as an enclitic-*mem* instead of a pronominal suffix and thus translate “a rod is he in the hand of my wrath.” This still results in breaking the poetic pairing of *šēbet* and *maṭṭeh* as instruments of Yahweh’s ire and results in what B. Childs calls an “odd sense.”⁵⁹⁰ Freedman gets around this “odd sense” by arguing that Isa 10:5b is an example of a broken construct chain and thus *maṭṭeh* and *za mī* do go together but are interrupted for poetic effect by our problematic phrase *hū’ bəyādām*.⁵⁹¹ This view is taken up by W. Watson and Childs.⁵⁹² While this does resolve the difficulties of the text and retains a meaning that fits both verse and passage, one feels like too much effort is required, appealing to enclitic-*mem* and a case of a broken construct, in order to carve out meaning.

Chan has recently presented another solution. Instead of considering the *mem* of *bəyādām* as an enclitic *mem*, he takes it as the MT vocalizes, a third masculine plural. He considers this to be a reference to Assyria as a collective noun.⁵⁹³ In Chan’s view, this

⁵⁸⁹ Machinist translates: “As for the staff, it is my anger in their hand.” See, Machinist, ““Ah, Assyria...,”” 184 n. 2.

⁵⁹⁰ Childs, *Isaiah*, 89-90.

⁵⁹¹ David Noel Freedman, “The Broken Construct Chain,” *Bib* 53 (1972): 534-535.

⁵⁹² Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1984; repr., London: T&T Clark, 2007), 232; Childs, *Isaiah*, 87.

⁵⁹³ Chan, “Rhetorical Reversal and Usurpation,” 720 n. 10.

reading is compelling because it “may be purposefully depicting the king as both the weapon and the weapon bearer.”⁵⁹⁴ As we have seen, the motifs of the divine weapon bestowal and the king-as-weapon are staples of Neo-Assyrian royal rhetoric. Yet, only one of these themes, if we concede Chan’s view that both are present in v.5, is elaborated upon elsewhere in the chapter. The motif of the king-as-weapon is picked up again in v.15. One might consider v.24, in which Assyria beats the people of Zion with *šēbet* “staff” and *maṭṭēhû* “his rod,” to concern the king’s use of divine weapons, but the rod is specified as his own and not Yahweh’s. Of course, the relation of vv. 24-27 is debated. With Machinist, I think there is good reason to see it as the conclusion of vv. 5-15.⁵⁹⁵ This distinction is further emphasized in v.27, in which Yahweh will raise *maṭṭēhû* “his rod” against Assyria. So, if v.5 is meant to evoke the weapon bestowal motif, the critique and subversion of this trope is left undeveloped. Additionally, this reading depends on the third masculine plural suffix referring to Assyria collectively. The noun *’aššûr*, however, is normally treated as a masculine singular noun or rarely as a third feminine singular.⁵⁹⁶ In each other case of the noun’s use in Isaiah 10, *’aššûr* is treated as a masculine singular noun.⁵⁹⁷ This also fits with the general pattern throughout First Isaiah, in which the noun

⁵⁹⁴ Chan, “Rhetorical Reversal and Usurpation,” 720 n. 10.

⁵⁹⁵ Though Machinist considers vv. 24-27 to be the best choice for the ending of vv. 5-15 (compared to 10:16-19 and 14:24-27), he ultimately considers them all later additions. See, Machinist, “Ah, Assyria...,” 187.

⁵⁹⁶ For *’aššûr* as a third masculine singular noun: Isa 10:24; 14:25; 19:23; 23:13; 30:31; 31:8; 52:4; Ezek 31:3; Hos 14:4; Mic 5:4-5; and Ps 83:9. For *’aššûr* as a third feminine singular noun: Num 24:22 and Ezek 32:22.

⁵⁹⁷ V.6: I will dispatch him (*’āšalləhennû*), I will command him (*’āšawwennû*); v.7: he does not (*wəhû’ lō’*), his heart (*ūləbābô, bilbābô*); v.8: he says (*yō’mar*).

'aššûr is almost exclusively taken as a singular.⁵⁹⁸ Chan himself agrees with Blenkinsopp that *'aššûr* in Isaiah 10 refers to the person of the king.⁵⁹⁹ Thus, the plural suffix is awkward without any natural referent.

There is no easy solution to the problems of v.5b. As is clear from my transliteration and translation, I have opted to redivide the *bydmz* 'my so that the *mem* is attached to the beginning of *za* 'mî and functions as the preposition *min*, resulting in the meaning, "he is the rod in (my) hand because of my wrath." In this way, *mizza* 'mî would be similar to the psalmist who suffers *mippānê za* 'mekā "because of your wrath" (Ps 38:4)⁶⁰⁰ or *mizza* 'am *lāšônām* "because of the curse of their tongue" (Hos 7:16). There are several advantages to this option. It avoids emending the text, contentious grammatical particles, and unconventional syntactic constructions. At the same time, it better fits the context of Isa 10:5-15 (as well as vv.24-26) with its focus on the king of Assyria as Yahweh's weapon rather than translations in which Yahweh's weapon is also in the king's hand. Of course, no solution is without its shortcomings (or else this stitch would no longer be a crux). In this case, the parallelism is less symmetrical than what one might expect, since one would want to see *maṭṭēh za* 'mî in the B-line to reflect *šēbet* 'appî in the A-line. Another short coming is that this translation is nowhere reflected in the ancient versions. Additionally, one might want to see a first person pronominal suffix on *yād* to emphasize Yahweh's control, though we do not always get pronominal suffixes

⁵⁹⁸ The exception to this is Isa 23:13 both singular and plural verbs are used for *'aššûr*: *yāsādāh* "he founded it" and *šāmāh* "he made it" but also *hēqîmû* "they erected" and *'ōrārû* "they stripped."

⁵⁹⁹ Chan, "Rhetorical Reversal and Usurpation," 721 n. 14. See Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 252.

⁶⁰⁰ See, also, Ps 102:11.

on body parts.⁶⁰¹ As we have seen, every option suffers from problems of one kind or another. But, for all its shortcomings, this interpretation seemed to me to be the simplest and best solution.

Returning to the message of Isaiah 10:5-15, again, the Assyrian king takes on the role of Yahweh's instrument. In contrast to Isa 7, here in verses 7-14 the king is chastised for misunderstanding his role. Scholars often frame the point of the prophet's criticism in one of two ways. First, they find the king's position as a divine instrument to serve as a demotion in status. He is only a staff or a rod.⁶⁰² Secondly, they view the substitution of Aššur with Yahweh, in the role of divine commissioner, as a challenge to Aššur's dominance.⁶⁰³ Certainly, there is merit in each perspective, though each misses out on a critical element.

For the former view, the king's reduction in status comes not from his role as a divine weapon. Quite the contrary, the king is often happy to be the catastrophic weapon of the gods. Instead, it is *what kind* of weapon and *how* it is wielded that constitute the primary criticism. As the rod/staff of Yahweh's anger, the king is denied the role of mythological weapon of the gods (or Yahweh). This is tantamount to denying the king his role as the warrior-king. While the staff was part of the royal regalia bestowed by the gods, and in the case of the *šibirru* "staff" in Neo-Assyrian royal ideology, the object frequently had martial associations, the Assyrian king himself was never equated with a

⁶⁰¹ See 1 Sam 19:9; Isa 8:11; Ezek 12:7.

⁶⁰² Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 262. See, also, Childs, *Isaiah*, 93; Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 165.

⁶⁰³ Machinist, "Assyria and its Image in First Isaiah," 734; Machinist, "Final Response," 298; Chan, "Rhetorical Reversal and Usurpation," 725.

scepter, rod, or staff.⁶⁰⁴ A further demotion appears in Isa 7:20, in which the king functions as a shaving blade. This is a far cry from a mythological flood weapon or all-encompassing net.

Not only is the type of divine weapon a demotion for the Assyrian king, how the weapon is used reduces the king's agency and eliminates his role as pious hero. In fact, the notion of pious hero is attacked on two fronts in the king's role as weapon and his motivation (vv.6-14). In Neo-Assyrian inscriptions, we saw that when the king is portrayed as a divine weapon, it emphasizes his role as a warrior like Ninurta. Though he is the weapon, it is not a weapon in the hands of another. The king-as-weapon acts on his own to defeat and destroy the enemies of the gods. In Isa 10:5-15, however, his heroic role is completely obscured. From the beginning, he is a rod in the hand of Yahweh (v.5b). When he does exert greater agency, the results are negative and he is chastised for misunderstanding his role as just an instrument in v.15:

15. *hăyitpā'ēr haggarzen 'al haḥōšēb bō 'im-yitgaddēl hammaśśōr 'al-mānîpō kəhānîp šēbeṭ wə'et-mārîmāyw kəhārîm maṭṭeh lō' - 'ēš*

15. Does the axe boast over the one hewing with it; or does the saw exalt itself over the one brandishing it; As if the staff brandishes the ones raising it aloft; as if the rod lifts what is not wood.

Here the king's role as a common instrument. He is a tool in divine hands.

Additionally, this prophetic critique functions as a reversal of typical royal

rhetoric. He is taken to task for boasting (*yitpā'ēr*) and magnifying (*yitgaddēl*)

himself over the one wielding him. In contrast, royal inscriptions present the king

⁶⁰⁴ There is one Mesopotamian example, to this author's knowledge, in which a god is identified with a scepter. In Šulgi T 16 Ninurta takes on the epithet *ġidru maḥ kalam-e zag dib-ba* "mighty scepter rising above the land" (*ETCSL* 2.4.2.20). The text is fragmentary so it is not entirely clear that this is Ninurta's epithet, but context makes this reading likely.

as one whom the gods exalt (*šurbû*)⁶⁰⁵ and make glorious (*šurāḫu*).⁶⁰⁶ This fits with Machinist's view that Isaiah 10 makes use of Assyrian royal motifs in a "deliberate inversion of those Assyrian conventions."⁶⁰⁷

The latter critique, that Yahweh usurps Aššur's role vis-à-vis the king, is taken up by Machinist and Chan. In fact, for Chan, this is nothing short of a "theological and rhetorical coup d'état, whereby the Assyrian king is stripped of his title as an agent of the Assyrian pantheon and is conscripted, rather, by Yahweh."⁶⁰⁸ Unsurprisingly, the god Aššur is nowhere to be seen in Isaiah 10, nor is any other god or even non-god seen to be behind the Assyrian king's actions. Instead, the king is sent to seize the kingdoms of non-gods (*mamlākōt hā'ēlīl*), Samaria and its non-gods, as well as Jerusalem and its idols (*'āšabbēhā*; v.10). The direct prophetic criticism of the king is not that he worshipped the wrong god or non-gods, it is his pride (v.12). Like the stereotypical enemies in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, the king is portrayed as trusting in his own strength instead of relying upon divine support. The fact that Yahweh is positioned as the ultimate source of the king's success, seems less a coup d'état and more a part of the natural worldview of a Yahwistic Judean prophet. Aššur does not appear even in

⁶⁰⁵ See Esar 54 r.19 (RINAP 4, 117); 98 8 (RINAP 4, 182).

⁶⁰⁶ See Esar 98 r. 32 (RINAP 4, 185).

⁶⁰⁷ Machinist, "Final Response," 298.

⁶⁰⁸ Chan, "Rhetorical Reversal and Usurpation," 726.

the guise of a non-god because the gods of Assyria, in contrast to gods of people in closer proximity (such as Samaria), are not on the prophet's radar.⁶⁰⁹

Additionally, the notion that Yahweh himself gave the Assyrian king orders to march against God's own people fits well within Mesopotamian royal ideology and Neo-Assyrian rhetoric especially. One of the prominent motifs of Assyrian royal rhetoric was the portrayal of the king as a pious and devoted servant of the gods, whether they be Assyrian, Babylonian, or in some cases even foreign gods. B. Oded observes that "[t]he Assyrian king, the chief priest and god's viceroy, the intermediary between gods and men, is extravagantly praised for his unique closeness to the gods."⁶¹⁰ As we saw in the royal titulary, the king is often described as "beloved" (*narām*), "chosen" (*nibīt*), "favorite" (*migir*), or "treasured" (*namad*) of a variety of gods. This closeness is not limited to the gods of the Mesopotamian pantheon. The tradition of receiving help from a foreign god to conquer that god's people goes back to an inscription of Sargon of Akkad, who receives the upper lands, including Mari and Ebla, from Dagan after visiting the god's temple in Tuttul (E2.1.1.11 17-29).⁶¹¹ L. Feliu argues that "there is an important symbolic meaning in Sargon's prostration before Dagan and the concession, by the Syrian god, of the whole region to the Mesopotamian

⁶⁰⁹ Contrast this with polemics against inefficacy of man-made idols in Isa 40:18-20; 44:6-23; 46:5-7 and Jer 10:1-16.

⁶¹⁰ Bustanay Oded, "'The Command of God' as a Reason for Going to War in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," in *Ah, Assyria... Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor*, eds. Mordechai Cogan and Israel Eph'al (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), 227.

⁶¹¹ This numbering follows the Akkadian version. See RIME 2, 28-29.

kingship.”⁶¹² The inverse of this scenario appears to explain the downfall of Mesopotamian kingdoms. For example, in the Sumerian “Lamentations over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur,” Enlil sends the Gutians and Elamites as his agents of destruction.⁶¹³ Similarly, the Old Babylonian composition “The Curse of Agade” seeks to explain the downfall of Sargonic rule due to the sins of Narām-Sîn. In order to achieve this destruction, Enlil sends the Gutians against his own land.⁶¹⁴ This tradition continued into the Neo-Assyrian period, as both Sargon II and his grandson, Esarhaddon, claim that it was the patron god of Babylon, Marduk, who bid Assyria to punish Babylonia.⁶¹⁵ Though Marduk is hardly a foreign deity to the Assyrian kings, who often claimed his patronage, as the god of Babylon, his permission was necessary to justify Sennacherib’s actions. Similarly, a Neo-Assyrian astrological report describes a disastrous scenario, in which the enemy will be victorious because Enlil will give them his weapons

⁶¹² Feliu, *The God Dagan in Bronze Age Syria*, 45.

⁶¹³ Michalowski, *The Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur*, 40-41, 46-47.

⁶¹⁴ Jerrold S. Cooper, *The Curse of Agade* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 55-59 (lines 155-159).

⁶¹⁵ For Sargon II, see Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargon aus Khorsabad*, 138, 327 (264-265). Sargon II also takes the hand of Marduk in a procession before attacking, which is also at the command of Marduk during his 12th-13th regnal year (ll. 320-343). See Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargon aus Khorsabad*, 158-161 and 332-334. For Esarhaddon’s justification of Sennacherib’s sacking of Babylon, see Esar 104 i 34 – ii 9a (RINAP 4, 196); Esar 106 i 10-26 (RINAP, 250); and Esar 113 8-15a (RINAP, 267). Though Sennacherib does not give Marduk as the one instigating the sack of Babylon in 689 (Senn 24 vi 1’-16’; RINAP 3.1, 205; and Bavian Inscription, Senn 223 43b-54a; RINAP 3.2, 316-317), in descriptions of the battle of Halulê (Senn 22 v 31-37a; 62b-67a; RINAP 3.1, 181-182), whose rhetoric Weissert has argued was meant to serve to create “the right political climate” for Sennacherib’s plan of destruction, Sennacherib’s actions are framed by the Babylonians’ despicable actions of selling Marduk’s silver and gold from the Esagil temple to pay for Elamite aid. Additionally, before attacking, Sennacherib prays to and receives aid from several gods including Bel and Nabû. For Weissert’s interpretation of the battle of Halulê, see Weissert, “Creating a Political Climate,” 202.

(^gis^rTUKUL.MEŠ-š_{u2}).⁶¹⁶ The precise enemy is not specified, though the general nature of the report means that any enemy could fulfill that role. As we saw in the case of Sargon and Dagan of Tuttul, this need not be limited to Mesopotamian gods. For example, Assurbanipal credits an Arabian goddess with helping his grandfather, Sennacherib:

1. *a-na* ^d*dil-b*[*ad* ...] ^r*na*¹-*mir-tu* š_{a2} KU[R¹ *a-ri-bi*]
2. *ša it-ti* ^m*ḥa*-^r*za*¹[-DINGIR MAN] KUR *a-ri-bi tas-bu*-[*su* ...] A₂ [...]
3. *ina* ŠU^{II} ^{md}30.PAP.MEŠ.SU AD.AD DU₃-*ia tam-nu-šu*-[*ma*] ^r*taš*¹-*ku-na* BAD₅.[BAD₅-š_u]
4. *la a-ša₂-ab-ša₂ it-ti* ^rUN. ^rMEŠ¹ KUR *a-ri-bi taq-bu-u₂ a-na* KUR AN.ŠAR₂^{ki} *ta-aš-ba*-[*ta* ...]

For the goddess Dilb[at ...] [ra]diant one of the la[nd of Arabia], who was angry with Haz[a-ilu king] of the land of Arabia [...]She delivered him into the hand of Sennacherib [and] [in]flicted a defe[at upon him.] She decided not to remain with [the people] of the land of Arabia (and) se[t out] to the land of Assyria [...].

(*IWA* pl. 34 + 38 1-4)⁶¹⁷

According to the Assyrian claims, it was the Arabian king Hazael's own goddess, Dilbat, who gave Sennacherib victory over her people.⁶¹⁸ The reason exact for the goddess's wrath is missing or left unsaid and nothing is said of why Sennacherib was chosen to enact her retribution. By implication Sennacherib is distinguished from Hazael, since the goddess grants the Assyrian king victory and decides to relocate to Assyria. Immediately following, the inscription presents Esarhaddon's great piety explicitly as the favorite of

⁶¹⁶ SAA 8 502 11-12.

⁶¹⁷ K 3405 + K 3087. For treatments of this text, see Morton Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.* (SBLMS 19; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974), 16-17; *BIWA*, 69-70; Reettakaisa Sofia Salo, "Assur als Werkzeug Gottes im Alten Testament," in *Religion und Krieg*, ed. Manfred L. G. Dietrich, et al. (MARG 22; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2015), 65-66.

⁶¹⁸ A fragmentary account of this encounter without a reference to the help of Dilbat survives in Esar 35 53'-59' and 1''-9'' (RINAP 3.1, 232-233).

the gods (*migir ilānī*) and one who is rewarded because of his fear of the gods (*ina palāḥ ilānī*).⁶¹⁹ The text relates that Esarhaddon returned the captured gods and had taken good care of them while they were in his possession. This he did to receive their blessing and permission to rule, presumably over their own lands and people (*IWA* pl. 34 + 38 16-19). Of course, these descriptions, if true, tell us less about the king's actual piety and more about how they sought to portray and justify their actions. As Cogan cogently explains, "We may assume that a prime factor motivating Assyrian consideration of the Arabian goddess was the positive propaganda value of such a move in Arabian territories."⁶²⁰ For our purpose, what matters is only that the Assyrian kings claimed support from foreign gods in conquering the gods' territory and people. Thus, Yahweh's commissioning of the Assyrian king would hardly be an inversion of Assyrian royal rhetoric.

Furthermore, even from the Judean point of view, this claim fits within how Judean authors present Assyrian rhetoric. This is made clear through the speech of the Rab-Shakeh to Hezekiah's officials (and people on the wall) and Nebuzaradan's words to Jeremiah (2 Kgs 18 || Isa 36 & Jer 40:2-3).⁶²¹ Beginning with the Rab-Shakeh, after chastising the Judeans for trusting in Egypt for help, he explains that Yahweh is the one who commanded Sennacherib to come:

⁶¹⁹ *IWA* pl. 34 + 38 5-6.

⁶²⁰ Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 20.

⁶²¹ The literature on the Rab-Shakeh's speech is voluminous. For important representative treatments, see Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 11; New York: Doubleday, 1988), 246-251; Peter Machinist, "The Rab Šāqēh at the Wall of Jerusalem: Israelite Identity in the Face of the Assyrian 'Other,'" *HS* 41 (2000): 151-168; William R. Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah: New Studies* (SHCANE 18; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 160-239; Peter Dubovský, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies: Reconstruction of the Neo-Assyrian Intelligence Services and its Significance for 2 Kings 18-19* (BibOr 49; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2006), 1-9, 232-241.

22. wākî-tō 'mārûn 'ēlay 'el-yhwh 'ēlōhēnū bāṭāḥnū ḥālō '-hū ' 'āšer hēsîr
 ḥizqīyyāhū 'et-bāmōtāyw wə 'et-mizbāḥōtāyw wayyō 'mer lîhūdā
 wəlîrûšālaïm lipnē hammizbēaḥ hazzeh tištaḥwū bîrûšālāïm
 23. wə 'attā hit 'āreb nā ' 'et- 'ādōnî 'et-melek 'aššûr wə 'ettanā lākā
 'alpayim sūsîm 'im-tûkal lātet lākā rōkəbîm 'ālêhem
 24. wə 'ék tāsîb 'ēt pənē paḥat 'aḥad 'abdē 'ādōnî haqqəṭannîm wattibṭaḥ
 lākā 'al-miṣrayim lərekeb ûləpārāšîm
 25. 'attā ḥāmibbal 'ādē yhwh 'ālîṭî 'al-hammāqôm hazzeh ləhašḥîṭō yhwh
 'āmar 'ēlay 'ālêh 'al-hā 'āreṣ hazzō 't wəhašḥîṭāḥ

22. But if you say to me, “We trusted in Yahweh our God.” Is it not he, Hezekiah, who removed his high places and altars and (then) said to Judah and Jerusalem, “You will worship before this altar in Jerusalem?”
 23. Now, make a deal with my lord, the king of Assyria. I will give you 2,000 horses if you can put riders on them.
 24. How will you reject the official of one of my lord’s smallest servants and trust in Egypt for chariots and horsemen?
 25. Now, is it without Yahweh that I have come up against this place to destroy it? Yahweh said to me, “Go up to this land and destroy it!”
 (2 Kgs 18:22-25)⁶²²

Here, as in K 3405, the arrival of the Assyrian king is predicated on some offense given to the people’s god. In this case, it is Hezekiah’s religious reformation, i.e. the removal of high places and the centralization of worship in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18:22 || Isa 36:7).⁶²³

⁶²² See also parallel text in Isa 36:7-10.

⁶²³ Hezekiah’s offense to Yahweh, at least as presented by the Rab-Shakeh, could be approached in several ways. One approach would be to see the Assyrian understanding of Hezekiah’s reform as misunderstanding the general character of Israelite worship. In this view, the Assyrians would see Hezekiah’s destruction of traditional places of worship and assume that the god(s) would not be pleased. In this case, the Rab-Shakeh’s message would undercut his intent in an ironic way. The Rab-Shakeh intends to present the Assyrian king’s invasion as credibly the work of Yahweh, which cannot be the case if Yahweh himself authorized Hezekiah’s reform. This, of course, assumes that most Judeans saw Hezekiah’s reforms as a positive development.

Another approach would be to assume that Hezekiah’s reforms were in part aimed at removing local manifestations of Yahweh and were not entirely well received and thus to some Judeans Hezekiah’s actions were contrary to Yahweh’s intentions. For more on Yahweh’s local manifestations, see P. Kyle McCarter Jr., “Aspects of the Religion of the Israelite Monarchy: Biblical and Epigraphic Data,” in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, eds. Patrick D. Miller, Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 139-143. Dubovský wonders if some of the Judean clergy who lost power and influence due to the reform might have served as informants for the Assyrians. Machinist, likewise, considers Hezekiah’s reforms to have been divisive and argues that placing the criticism to such reforms in the mouth of the invading enemy was a way to externalize an internal Judean debate in such a way as to cast those in opposition to the reforms in the same camp as the hated Assyrians. See, respectively, Dubovský, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies*, 189 n. 410; and Machinist, “The Rab Šāqēh at the Wall of Jerusalem,” 164.

Likewise, after Jerusalem's fall to Nebuchadnezzar II, Nebuzaradan, the chief of the guards, lays the blame with the people who sinned against Yahweh:

1. *haddābār 'āšer-hāyâ 'el-yirmayāhû mē'ēt yhw' aḥar šallah 'ōtô nābūzar 'ādān rab-ṭabbāhīm min-hārāmā bəqaḥtô 'ōtô wəhû'-'āsūr bā'ziqqīm bəṭōk kol-galūt yərūšālam wihūdā hammuglīm bābelā*
2. *wayyiqqaḥ rab-ṭabbāhīm ləyirmayāhû wayyō'mer 'ēlāyw yhw' 'ēlōhēkā dibber 'et-hārā'ā hazzō't 'el-hammāqôm hazzeh*
3. *wayyābē' wayya'as yhw' ka'āšer dibbēr kī-ḥāṭā'tem layhw' wəlō'-'šama'tem bəqōlō wəhāyâ lākem dābār hazzeh*
4. *wə'attā hinnēh pittaḥtikā hayyôm min-hā'ziqqīm 'āšer 'al-yādekā 'im-tōb bə'ēnekā lābō' 'ittī bābel bō' wə'āsīm 'et-'ēnī 'ālēkā wə'im-ra' bə'ēnekā lābō'-'ittī bābel ḥādāl rə'ēh kol-hā'āreṣ ləpānēkā 'el-tōb wə'el-hayyāšār bə'ēnekā lāleket šāmmā lēk*

1. The word which came to Jeremiah from Yahweh, after Nebuzaradan, the chief of the bodyguards, freed him from Ramah when/because he had taken him, bound in manacles in the midst of all the exiles of Jerusalem and Judah being deported to Babylon.
2. The chief of the bodyguards took Jeremiah and said to him, “Yahweh, your God, threatened this place with this disaster.
3. He brought (it), Yahweh acted as he threatened because you sinned against Yahweh. You did not listen to his voice and thus this thing happened to you.
4. Now, look, I have released you today from the manacles which are on your arms. If it seems good to you to come with me to Babylon, come! and I will keep my eye on you. If it seems bad to you to come with me to Babylon, refrain (do not)! Look the whole land is before you, go wherever seems good and just to go!
(Jer 40:1-4)

Because the people did not obey Yahweh, according to Nebuzaradan, *dābār hazzeh* “this thing” happened presumably referring to the invasion, siege and exile. Elsewhere in the book of Jeremiah, he places the knowledge of Judah's sins in the mouths of outsiders (Jer 50:7). Unlike the direct assertion given by the Rab-Shakeh that Yahweh had sent the Assyrian king, the connection between Yahweh and the Babylonian king's actions are left implied. This disaster (*hārā'ā hazzō't*) is all the work of Yahweh. The implication, of

course, being that Nebuchadnezzar II's actions were directed or approved by Yahweh, if not directly commanded by the deity. Elsewhere in Jeremiah, Yahweh's relationship to Nebuchadnezzar II is made clearer (e.g. Jer 27:6), but the Babylonian propaganda expressed by Nebuzaradan fits with the general message of the Rab-Shakeh, though it is less specific.

Taken together these examples demonstrate that claiming the assistance of foreign deities in conquering those deities' territory and people was one of the many tools in a Mesopotamian king's arsenal of propaganda. This would remain a viable option even after the Neo-Babylonian empire, when Cyrus the Great would claim that Marduk had sent him against Babylon to restore proper worship.⁶²⁴ Not only was this a legitimate Mesopotamian motif, it corresponds with how Judeans presented Neo-Assyrian (2 Kgs 18:22-25 || Isa 36:7-10) and Neo-Babylonian (Jer 40:1-4) propaganda. For these reasons, it seems unlikely that Yahweh's commissioning of a Mesopotamian king would, in and of itself, serve as a meaningful critique of Mesopotamian royal ideology. While one could argue that as the staff of Yahweh's anger, Aššur's role is being denied, certainly he is completely absent from the prophetic message, this does not seem to be the prophet's main target. If Aššur was really the target, one would expect him to be dismissed as the gods of the other nations were (2 Kgs 19:18 || Isa 37:19). Or as Jeremiah shames Bēl, he could single out Aššur for rebuke (Jer 50:2). Instead, it is the fact that the king is merely a

⁶²⁴ R. J. van der Spek, "Cyrus the Great, Exiles and Foreign Gods: A Comparison of Assyrian and Persian Policies on Subject Nations," in *Extraction and Control: Studies in Honor of Matthew W. Stolper*, ed. Wouter F. M. Henkelman, Michael Kozuh, and Christopher Woods (SAOC 68; Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2014), 233-264.

tool in Yahweh's hands and not even a particularly good tool, since it must be punished or destroyed afterwards. This becomes clear when examining other examples of the trope.

Both the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel portray the Babylonian king as Yahweh's blameworthy weapon. For Jeremiah, the king of Babylon functions as both Yahweh's *paṭṭiš* "hammer" and his *mappēs* "mace." Beginning with Jeremiah 51, we see the relation between Yahweh and his weapon demonstrated:

20. *mappēs-`attā lī kəlē milhāmā wənippaštī bəkā gōyim wəhišhattī bəkā mamlākōt*
 21. *wənippaštī bəkā sūs wərōkəbō wənippaštī bəkā rekeb wərōkəbō*
 22. *wənippaštī bəkā `iš wə `iššā wənippaštī bəkā zāqēn wānā `ar wənippaštī bəkā bāhūr ūbətūlā*
 23. *wənippaštī bəkā rō `eh wə `edrō wənippaštī bəkā `ikkār wəšimdō wənippaštī bəkā pahōt ūsəgānīm*
 24. *wəšillamtī ləbābel ūləkōl yōšəbē kaśdīm `ēt kol-rā `ātām `āšer-`āsū bəšiyyōn lə `enəkem nə `um yhw*
 25. *hinnī `elēkā har hammašhīt nə `um-yhw hammašhīt `et-kol-hā `āres wənāṭīṭī `et-yādī `alēkā wəgilgaltikā min-hassəlā `im ūnətattikā ləhar šārēpā*
 26. *wəlō `yiqhū mimmakā `eben ləpinnā wə `eben ləmōsādōt kī-šimmōt `ōlām tihyeh nə `um-yhw*

20. You are my mace, my instruments of war; I will smash the nations with you; I will annihilate the kingdoms with you.
 21. I will smash horse and its rider with you; I will smash chariot and its rider with you.
 22. I will smash man and woman with you; I will smash old and young with you; I will smash young man and young woman with you.
 23. I will smash the shepherd and his flock with you; I will smash tenant farmer and his team with you; I will smash governors and officials with you.
 24. I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldaea all their evil (deeds) which they did in Zion before your eyes, utterance of Yahweh.
 25. Here I am against you, destroying mountain, utterance of Yahweh, the destroyer of all the earth; I will stretch out my hand against you; I will roll you down from the cliffs; I will make you into a burned-out mountain;
 26. They will not take a stone from you for a corner or a stone for a foundation walls; for/indeed you will be an eternal ruin, utterance of Yahweh.
 (Jer 51:20-26)

Here Yahweh lists the many victims of his mace, i.e. the king of Babylon. I take Yahweh's mace and instruments of war as a reference to Nebuchadnezzar II and not some as-of-yet unnamed power,⁶²⁵ Israel,⁶²⁶ or the prophet Jeremiah.⁶²⁷ In this matter I agree with Lundbom's more recent interpretation of the passage that sees Nebuchadnezzar as the weapon.⁶²⁸ Even Thompson, who considers the *mappēs* to be an unnamed power, explains that "[i]n context it seems to refer to Babylon since at the time of Jeremiah the only power in view that had shattered nations and destroyed kingdoms was Babylon."⁶²⁹ Like Isa 10:5-15, after its job is finished, Yahweh's destructive weapon will receive its punishment. In these verses, Babylon is singled out for "all their evil deeds, which they did in Zion before your eyes" (Jer 51:24). Presumably, this goes beyond the work for which Yahweh himself was responsible in vv.20-23. Again, it is worth noting the king's passive role throughout these verses. Yahweh is the only one with agency, while the king is nothing more than an instrument, albeit a devastating one.

The mace would be a fitting reference for a Mesopotamian king-as-weapon given its long history of textual and iconographic significance. Lundbom notes that "the mace was in common use among the Assyrians and Babylonians."⁶³⁰ Though this is true, some

⁶²⁵ J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 756.

⁶²⁶ William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 26-52*, ed. Paul D. Hanson (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1989), 407.

⁶²⁷ Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric*, 2nd ed. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 121.

⁶²⁸ Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37-52: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21C; New York: Doubleday, 2004), 452.

⁶²⁹ Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 756.

⁶³⁰ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37-52*, 454.

clarification is in order. As a weapon for war, the mace had ceased to be used by the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods. Instead, it had a more symbolic role, marking military officers as well as being part of the royal regalia. Additionally, as we have noted elsewhere, the mace as a divine weapon, especially for Ninurta, continued to be productive.

Turning to an earlier point in Jeremiah's oracles against Babylon, we see the king depicted as a devastating hammer:

21. *'al-hā'āreṣ mārātayim 'ālēh 'ālēhā wə'el-yōšabē paqôd ḥārōb wəhahārēm 'ahārēhem nə'um-yhwh wa'āsēh kəkōl 'āšer šiwwitīkā*
 22. *qôl milhāmā bā'āreṣ wəšeber gādōl*
 23. *'ēk nigda 'wayyiššābēr paṭṭiš kol-hā'āreṣ 'ēk hāyātā ləšammā bābel baggōyim*
 24. *yāqōštī lāk wəgam-nilkadt bābel wə'at lō' yādā'at nimšē't wəgam-nitpašt kī bayhwh hitgārīt*
 25. *pātaḥ yhwh 'et-'ōšārō wayyôšē' 'et-kalē za'mô kī-malā'kā hī' la'dōnāy yhwh šabā'ôt bə'ereṣ kaśdīm*
 26. *bō'û-lāh miqqēš pithû ma'ābusēhā sollûhā kəmə- 'ārēmīm wəhahārīmûhā 'al-tāhī-lāh šə'erīt*
 27. *ḥirbû kol-pārēhā yērādû laṭṭābaḥ hōy 'ālēhem kī-bā' yômām 'ēt pəquddātām*
 28. *qôl nāsīm ûpālētīm mē'ereṣ bābel ləhaggîd bəšīyyôn 'et-niqmat yhwh 'ēlōhēnû niqmat hēkālô*

21. Against the land, Merataim, come up against it and against the inhabitants of Pekod; slay and put to the ban after them, utterance of Yahweh. Do according to everything I have commanded you.
 22. The sound of war will be in the land and a great collapse.
 23. How the hammer of the whole earth is cut to pieces and shattered! How Babylon has become a horror among the nations!
 24. I set a trap for you and you were snared, O Babylon, but you did not know (it). You were found and even caught because you battled with Yahweh.
 25. Yahweh opened his storehouse/armory and he brought out the instruments of his wrath; for it is the business of the lord, Yahweh of Hosts in the land of the Chaldeans.
 26. Come against her from every side, open its granaries, pile it up like heaps; put it under the ban, may it not have a remnant!
 27. Slay all its bulls, descend to slaughter! Woe upon them for their day has come, the time of their punishment.

28. The sound of those fleeing and escaping from the land of Babylon to make known in Zion the vengeance of Yahweh our God, the vengeance of his temple.
(Jer 50:21-25)

With Lundbom, I take the hammer to be a reference to the Babylonian king. This fits the general precedent we have seen in both Mesopotamian and Hebrew sources.⁶³¹ Though Holladay and Thompson consider the hammer to be a reference to Babylon itself, fitting in with v.23b,⁶³² Lundbom explains that while both refer to Babylon in a general sense, “a better reading has the masculine figure as the Babylonian king, and the feminine figure as Babylon the nation.”⁶³³ He goes on to note that the Targumic reading supports this interpretation by adding “the king” as the subject of the first stitch.⁶³⁴ Additionally, as we have seen, depicting the king as a divine weapon has a rich history in Mesopotamia and even in the Hebrew prophets. Nebuchadnezzar II’s role as a hammer against the whole earth is in keeping with the Hebrew versions of the motif, as the king does not enjoy the elevated status of a great mythological weapon. Instead, he is rendered as a smith’s tool. Certainly, there is nothing inherently insulting about being a hammer of Yahweh/the gods. One could imagine that in the hands of a craftsman god, a hammer could be prestigious. For example, ^d*nin-a₂-gal₂* wields anvil and hammerstone in the epic of Erra (Erra i 159). Depending on the context, a hammer could be a heroic weapon, such as in

⁶³¹ It is possible, however, that the hammer refers to Babylon as a whole. If this is the case and the king standing for his nation, then it would serve as further demotion of the king’s status, as he is no longer the weapon of the gods (or Yahweh), his army/people are.

⁶³² Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 406, 419; Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 741.

⁶³³ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37-52*, 400.

⁶³⁴ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37-52*, 400. It is worth noting, however, that the king’s status as hammer does not survive the targumic translation, as the Hebrew *paṭṭîš* is replaced completely by *mlk*’.

the case Jael and the tent-peg (Judg 5:26; 4:21). Yahweh compared his word to a fire or a hammer that pulverizes flocks (Jer 23:29). In this context, however, we are not discussing one of Yahweh's prestigious weapons (e.g. sword, bow, arrows, spear). Unlike the reference to the king as a mace, these verses do not dwell upon the king's action as the hammer, except in its wide-ranging impact. In fact, the absence of Yahweh's direct involvement in commissioning or directly wielding the hammer create a sense in which the Babylonian king has been operating as a rogue weapon. This weapon then went as far as to challenge its master v.24. This is reminiscent of the Assyrian king, as staff, who did not come to understand the nature of his role as Yahweh's weapon (Isa 10:5-15). Against such a force Yahweh brings forth the arsenal of his wrath (v.25). Yahweh turns his weapons against his former weapon. Though foreign kings often are depicted as less prestigious instruments of Yahweh's wrath, they are occasionally treated as Yahweh's sword, with which he defeated Leviathan (Isa 27:1).

The Foreign king-as-sword

While the motif of king-as-weapon is rarely used in connection with Yahweh's sword, his most common weapon, there is one fairly certain reference in addition to some passages in which the connection between the king and the sword are implied. After examining these passages, I will address why such references were rare. The clearest example of a king serving as Yahweh's sword takes place within the so-called Song of the Sword passage in the book of Ezekiel:

33. *wə`attā ben-`ādām hinnābē` wə`āmartā kōh`āmar`ādōnāy yhw`el-bənē`ammōn wə`el-herpātām wə`āmartā hereb hereb pātūhā lətebah mərūtā ləhākīl ləma`an bārāq*
 34. *baḥāzōt lāk šāw` biqšām-lāk kāzāb lātēt`ōtāk`el-šawwə`rē hallē rāšā`īm`āšer-bā`yōmā bə`ēt`āwōn qēš*

35. *hāšab 'el-ta 'rāh bimqôm 'āšer-nibrē 't bə 'ereš məkurōtayik 'ešpōt 'ōtāk*

36. *wəšāpaktī 'ālayik za 'mī bə 'ēš 'ebrātī 'āpīah 'ālāyik ūnətattīk bəyad 'ānāšīm bō 'ārīm hārāšē mašhīt*

37. *lā 'ēš tihyeh lə 'oklā dāmēk yihyeh bātōk hā 'āreš lō ' tizzākērī kī 'ānī yhw h dibbartī*

33. But as for you, son of man, prophesy and say, "Thus the Lord God has said concerning the Bene Ammon and concerning their taunt, say 'A sword, a sword is opened for slaughter, polished to end for the sake of lightning.

34. When seeing empty vision(s) for you, when divining lie(s) for you, in order to set you upon the necks of the corpses of wicked men, whose day has come at the time of the final punishment.

35. Bring (it) back to its sheath. In the place where you were created, in the land of your origin, I will judge you.

36. I will pour upon you my indignation. I will fan the fire of my rage upon you. I will give you into the hand of brutish (or burning) men, craftsmen of destruction.

37. You will become a target⁶³⁵ for the fire, your blood will be in the midst of the land. You will not be remembered for I Lord have spoken.
(Ezek 21:33-37)

Because the reference to the sword's destruction comes immediately after an oracle against Ammon, older scholarship saw Ammon as the target of vv.35-37.⁶³⁶ The present consensus places the king of Babylon, represented as the sword of Yahweh, as the subject of destruction.⁶³⁷ Like many, I see the reference to a feminine singular entity (*ta 'rāh ... nibrē 't ... məkurōtayik ... 'ōtāk*) as referring to the sword, itself a feminine singular noun. This in turn represents the king of Babylon. In fact, Greenberg considers the reference to the Ammonites to be a way in which to conceal Babylon's destruction,

⁶³⁵ Literally "food" or "consuming."

⁶³⁶ D. Johannes Herrmann, *Ezekiel* (KAT 11; Leipzig: Deichert, 1924), 134; G. A. Cooke, *The Book of Ezekiel* (ICC; New York: Scribners, 1937), 1:235-236.

⁶³⁷ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 449-450; Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, 306; Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48* (WBC 29; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 24; Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 697; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 436; Paul Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 158; Bowen, *Ezekiel*, 131.

explaining that “[i]t was dangerous to speak explicitly of Babylonia’s ultimate destruction at the height of its power.”⁶³⁸—though Greenberg considers the sword of vv.35-37 to be Nebuchadnezzar’s sword, referring to his military.⁶³⁹ Elsewhere he stresses Nebuchadnezzar’s parallelism with Yahweh’s sword.⁶⁴⁰ Nebuchadnezzar as the sword makes for a more compelling antagonist, since if only the king’s army is to face destruction, this would leave the king relatively unpunished. Block connects the description of the sword’s homeland as an obvious reference to “Nebuchadnezzar’s return to Babylon.”⁶⁴¹

Of course, drawing a sharp distinction between the king, his forces, and the empire is an artificial one from Ezekiel’s point of view. One readily thinks of Louis XIV’s declaration, “L’etat c’est moi.” Often the king is portrayed as a metonym for his forces, such as when the Babylonian king comes to Jerusalem and takes the Judean king back to Babylon (Ezek 17:12) or when he besieges Jerusalem (Ezek 24:2). Additionally, this same conflation between a nation and its ruler works its way into scholarship. For example, in discussing this passage Block states that “[b]oth Judah and Bene Ammon disappear from view as attention returns to the sword itself, Babylon.”⁶⁴² He goes on, however, to explain how v.36 depicts “the nature of Nebuchadnezzar’s punishment.”⁶⁴³

⁶³⁸ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 436.

⁶³⁹ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 437, 445.

⁶⁴⁰ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 437, 447.

⁶⁴¹ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 697.

⁶⁴² Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 697.

⁶⁴³ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 698.

Does the sword represent Babylon or Nebuchadnezzar? Of course, it is both. Similar overlapping conceptions appear in other scholarly treatments of this passage.⁶⁴⁴ The point is not to bring up any scholarly inconsistencies, but to highlight the fluidity of identification between Babylon the city, the empire, its army, and its ruler in both ancient and modern thought.

As many scholars have noted, the sword's (Nebuchadnezzar's) destruction evokes imagery associated with metallurgy. In this way, Yahweh's weapon is smelted down in the furnace of divine wrath (cf. Ezek 22:21-22).⁶⁴⁵ This serves as a fitting counter balance to the preparation of the sword for its work in Ezek 21:14-16, 33. Instead of craftsmen preparing it for battle, now it is in the hands of craftsmen of destruction.⁶⁴⁶ Like the reference to Nebuchadnezzar II as the hammer against the whole world, this oracle against the sword, taken on its own, is primarily negative. The sword is summoned against the Ammonites, who rejoiced in Judah's suffering (Ezek 25:1-7).

The sword also is to be placed on the necks of infamous sinners, though the context of v.34 makes it unclear who is doing the false divining (Nebuchadnezzar II or the Judeans) and whose necks are meant. Greenberg thinks it is the ruling class, based on

⁶⁴⁴ Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48*, 28.

⁶⁴⁵ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 450; Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 698; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 437-438; Bowen, *Ezekiel*, 131.

⁶⁴⁶ Recently, N. Amzallag has written about the restorative and rejuvenative aspects of metallurgical imagery in the Hebrew Bible, especially concerning the term *qannā'*. One readily thinks of Ezek 22:17-22, in which the removal of negative aspects from God's people is compared to how metals are purified through fire, removing unwanted elements. This smithing imagery normally concerns God's own people. See Nissim Amzallag, "Furnace Remelting as the Expression of YHWH's Holiness: Evidence from the Meaning of *qannā'* (קנן) in the Divine Context," *JBL* 134 (2015): 233-252. In Ezek 21:36-37, the melting down of Yahweh's sword (i.e. the Babylonian king) is not concerned with the king's restoration. One could argue that the destruction of the sword is a necessary step in the rejuvenation of the Judeans, though the text does not make this explicit.

the similar phrasing of 21:28ff.⁶⁴⁷ After the sword's works is done, it is destroyed in the land of its creation. Block sees in this a reference to Yahweh's creation of Nebuchadnezzar II as an agent of Yahweh's wrath, citing Yahweh's connection with Cyrus in Isa 44:28. This may also play into an emblematic aspect of Mesopotamian kingship, the king as a special creation to rule by the gods. In the Nabû acrostic, in which the king receives divine weapons to subdue his enemies, he is described as the creation of Marduk:

36. *u₂-ša-ab-ši a-na ma-li-ku-u₂-tu* ^{d+AG-NIG₂.DU-URU₃} *mu-ṭi-ib lib₃-bi-šu ru-bu-u₂ pa-li-ih-šu bi-nu-tu qa-t[i-šu]*
(*PSBA* 20, 36)⁶⁴⁸

36. He (Marduk) created Nebuchadnezzar for rulership, the one who pleases his heart, the prince, the one who fears him, the creation of his hand.

Unlike Nebuchadnezzar's creation by Marduk, Yahweh did not create the king to rule, but to be a weapon, itself to be melted down after its task was complete. Like the weapons of Gog (Ezek 39:9-10) or the mighty rod of Judah (Ezek 19:12), Nebuchadnezzar as weapon is consigned to the fire, a reversal of the fire Yahweh brings against the Negev (Ezek 21:1-5) interpreted as Yahweh's sword (Ezek 21:6-10). The sword, born in fire, is to meet its final fate within the flames. Ultimately, Nebuchadnezzar's fate, according to Ezekiel, is to be completely forgotten, a horrific notion for rulers concerned with their enduring legacy. Unlike Isa 10:5-15; Jer 50:21-28; and 51:20-26, the reason for Nebuchadnezzar's punishment is not given. Block speculates that "one may suspect a problem with the manner in which he carried out his

⁶⁴⁷ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 437.

⁶⁴⁸ BM 55469; Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 475-476.

charge.” Almost the exact same phrasing for Nebuchadnezzar’s demise is used to describe Judah’s punishment for their sinful ways (Ezek 22:31), including consuming people, taking treasure, and shedding blood (Ezek 22:25-29). Being guilty of many of the same crimes, could Nebuchadnezzar expect to escape similar judgment, even if he acted at Yahweh’s command?

Function of the Rhetoric

The use of the king-as-weapon motif both serves as an explanation of Judah’s current predicament and promises a future in which justice will be restored. In this restoration, the instrument of punishment will be put away and destroyed. As we have seen, the trope of the king-as-weapon was common within Assyrian imperial rhetoric. For this reason, the motif likely had powerful symbolic capital both within the empire and those interacting with it. Tapping into this symbolic capital to fashion a trauma narrative allows the prophets to establish the true power dynamic, dehumanize the foreign king, and provide a future for a progressive trauma narrative.

True Power Dynamic

The message of the king-as-weapon motif in Mesopotamian sources simultaneously highlights the king’s talent and ability to dominate through bloodshed and validates his use of violence by aligning his actions with the will of the gods. In these cases, the king acts as the agent of the gods and his actions are beyond reproach. This establishes a power dynamic in which the Mesopotamian king is hierarchically right below the gods due to his great piety. He is the representative of the divine world and those who do not follow him or find themselves in opposition to him are by extension in

rebellion against the gods. This would have function as a kind of trauma narrative that the conquering group might have imposed upon their new subjects in exile. According to this narrative, those Judeans in Babylonia were there because of their sins against their own God and against the king of Babylon. For this reason, Yahweh punished them in his anger. In this scenario, the king's relation to the divine world is as the chosen representative and instrument of punishment. This serves to justify any and all violence undertaken by the king. Alexander argues that this kind of power dynamic is an important component for trauma narratives: "This cultural process is deeply affected by power structures and by the contingent skills of reflexive social agents."⁶⁴⁹

As we have seen, the prophetic use of the king-as-weapon trope keeps the outward structure of the Mesopotamian dynamic, while changing the underlying meaning. In the Judean presentation, the nature of the role of divine agent is dramatically changed. No longer is the king's selection due to his great piety; no longer does such selection serve as *carte blanche* for the king to do whatever he wants. Like the Mesopotamian version of the motif, the prophetic rendition affirms the punishment of Judah, but makes clear that the king cannot expect to avoid similar punishment. In this way, the power dynamic between the people, the king, and the divine world is significantly changed. Now, Yahweh's people occupy a position much closer to God than does the foreign king. The king's role is an expendable one, while Yahweh's people, though they are punished, will always survive through a remnant. It is the relationship between the Yahweh and his people that is important, not the relation between Yahweh and the foreign king.

⁶⁴⁹ Alexander, "Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 10.

Dehumanization

The Judean presentation of the king-as-weapon motif serves to dehumanize the person of the foreign king. In one sense, the trope of king-as-weapon has an inherent element of dehumanization, since the king is equated with an inanimate object. As made clear in the Mesopotamian examples, the king's weapon status is associated with prestige (he is a mythological weapon of the gods) and notions of justified agency (the king is like warrior-king, Ninurta). This serves to counteract or nullify the dehumanizing nature of the trope. In fact, one might consider the comparison a move in the opposite direction of dehumanization, since the king becomes something more than human through his comparison with Ninurta.

Yet, the prophetic version of the motif lacks these positive associations and the foreign king literally becomes an instrument in divine hands. Just as we saw with the weapon bestowal trope in chapter three, the king-as-weapon motif denies the foreign king meaningful agency. He becomes an inanimate tool in Yahweh's hands, whose actions come under criticism when he tries to deviate from Yahweh's plan. This serves to refocus the ultimate responsibility for Judah's punishment with Yahweh, allowing the foreign king little to no credit. This provides yet another way of answering Alexander's fundamental question of responsibility, "Who is the antagonist?"⁶⁵⁰ Additionally, dehumanizing the conquering king can serve to salvage national pride. As Erikson elucidates, disasters caused by humans not only hurt in special ways but bring in their wake feelings of injury and vulnerability from which it is difficult to recover.⁶⁵¹ In

⁶⁵⁰ Alexander, "Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 15.

⁶⁵¹ Erikson, *A New Species of Trouble*, 237-238.

contrast to Aššurbanipal's recounting of Sennacherib's relation to the Arabian goddess, Yahweh had not chosen a foreign king over his own people, nor had he abandoned them. As we will see in chapter five, reframing the governing trauma relationship as between Yahweh and his people provides the possibility for forgiveness and a progressive trauma narrative. This same process is at work in the fate of Yahweh's punishing weapon.

The Future of Yahweh's Weapon

In the traditional depiction of the king-as-weapon trope, the future beyond immediate victory is not in view. To be sure, the king's secure and stable future are taken up elsewhere in royal inscriptions. In the prophetic examples, the king's future, as weapon, is usually in view, much to the king's detriment.⁶⁵² The king as the "hammer of the whole earth" is to be broken into pieces (Jer 50:23); Yahweh's mace will meet the same fate as its former victims (Jer 51:24); the sword of Yahweh's punishment will be to return to its sheathe in order to be smelted down (Ezek 21:35-37). As Frechette has demonstrated, the punishment of antagonistic nations, especially Babylon, for Judean exiles demonstrates Yahweh's continued concern for his people: "YHWH's empathy for Judah also finds expression in the portrayal of YHWH as severely punishing the Babylonian perpetrators of the traumatic events; this portrayal dramatizes condemnation of their violations."⁶⁵³ By taking vengeance upon the instruments of his wrath, Yahweh shows that his punishment will come to an end and there will be a possibility of restoring the divine-human relationship.

⁶⁵² Isa 7:20 serves as a counter example to this, since the king as razor is not punished.

⁶⁵³ Frechette, "The Old Testament as Controlled Substance," 31.

This demonstration of Yahweh's interest in his ongoing relation with this people may also explain why such punishment of his tools can come across as illogical. Why would Yahweh punish Assyria or Babylon for doing the very thing he commissioned them to do? In some instances, the offense (often pride) is made clear (e.g. Isa 10:5-15), but in other cases the rationale behind the punishment is opaque (e.g. Ezek 21:35-37). If, however, the purpose of such retribution is to assure the exiles of Yahweh's continued interest in them, it functions to condemn what they had to endure in a way that allows Yahweh to avoid direct blame. Thus, it does not matter if Assyria or Babylon deserved or earned their punishment, it is a necessary part of the narrative to show Yahweh is on the side of his people and that his anger at them will not last forever. Additionally, the punishment and eventual defeat of their captors is a vital component in the prophetic progressive trauma narrative, which envisions a future in which the sins of Judah are forgiven and they can return home.

Conclusion

The Hebrew prophets drew upon Mesopotamian royal rhetoric (primarily Neo-Assyrian) both to shape their own understanding of their relationship with empire and to subvert the claims of the dominant outside force. To these ends, the prophets employed the motif of the king-as-weapon. Among the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, this trope serves to emphasize the prestige and martial skill of the king. In addition, by identifying with mythological divine weapons, the king evokes the image of those gods, whose weapons also served as weapons for human royalty. Thus, when the king claims to be the *šuškal lā māgirī* "net against the insubmissive," he is assuming the role of Ninurta, who both uses and was himself the *šuškal tāhāzi* "battlenet" (Lugale 122). This identification

casts the king in the role of divine hero and his enemies as mythological fiends. Though he may assume a weapon epithet, he is not portrayed as being wielded or even in the hands of the gods. The king has complete agency to strike and defeat enemies.

In contrast, in the hands of the Hebrew prophets, this motif loses its aggrandizing purpose. True, the king is still the divine weapon, but his status as preeminent warrior is dramatically diminished. The usual power dynamic is reversed, with the king's relation to the divine world is subordinated to Yahweh's relation to his people. The main blow to the king's status is not that he is a weapon, in and of itself, or even Yahweh's weapon; it is the kind of weapon and how it is used (and discarded) that matter. First, with the exception of Ezek 21:35-37, Assyrian and Babylonian kings are not portrayed as Yahweh's elite mythological weaponry. The Assyrian king who portrayed himself as a mighty flood weapon becomes a shaving razor in Yahweh's hand. Secondly and most importantly, these foreign kings are dehumanized and lose their agency as they become weapons in Yahweh's hands. It is Yahweh who does the shaving (Isa 7:20) and it is Yahweh who smashes with the mace that is Nebuchadnezzar II (Jer 51:20-23). The mighty weapon becomes just a tool in Yahweh's hand. This dehumanization concentrates the responsibility for Judah's fate in the hands of God, not the foreign king. Not only that, but in almost every case the fate of the destructive weapon is to be destroyed itself. Instead of using the motif to tap into mythological time and ensure the enduring victory of the king, the prophetic version emphasizes the temporary nature of the power imbalance. The foreign king is in his current position due entirely to Yahweh's plan and his elevated status, such as it is, will not last forever. He will eventually face the same

punishment he delivered to Yahweh's people. This allows the prophets to construct a progressive trauma narrative that can envision a better future.

Chapter Five: Divine Weapons in Curses

Ecce gladius Domini super terram, cito et velociter
- Girolamo Savonarola⁶⁵⁴

The sword appears frequently in the Latter Prophets, especially Jeremiah and Ezekiel, as a complex sign of Yahweh's punishment. In the various contexts connected with Near Eastern curses, divine weapons could function as iconic signs of divine presence, indexical signs of war and death, and symbols of divine justice/punishment. In this last role, the sword often appears in various groups of punishments, the most common of which is the triad (*hereb* "sword," *rā'āb* "famine," and *deber* "pestilence"), hereafter referred to as the SFP triad.⁶⁵⁵ This triad appears almost exclusively in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.⁶⁵⁶ Lundbom refers to the SFP triad as a "stereotyped

⁶⁵⁴ Philip Schaff and David S. Schaff, *The Middle Ages: From Boniface VIII., 1294, to the Protestant Reformation, 1517*, vol. 6 of *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 688.

⁶⁵⁵ Though the abbreviation is based on the order sword, famine, pestilence (the most common order for the three punishments), it will be used to refer to these punishments no matter their order. For an in-depth treatment of the literary history of the SFP triad, see Helga Weippert, *Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches* (BZAW 132; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973), 149-191.

⁶⁵⁶ There are two exceptions from late sources: 1 Chron 21:12 and 2 Chron 20:9. There are many different groupings of disasters and punishments in the Hebrew Bible. Often, they appear in clusters of two, three, or four, though longer lists are possible (e.g. Deut 28:22). Other triads include *hereb* "sword," *mawet* "death," and *šəbī* "captivity" (Jer 43:11); *mawet* "death," *hereb* "sword," and *rā'āb* "famine" (Jer 15:2; 18:21; Job 5:20); *hereb* "sword," *ōp haššamayim* "birds of the sky," and *bəhēmôt hā'āreš* "beasts of the earth" (Jer 19:7); *milhāmā* "war," *rā'ā* "disaster," *deber* "pestilence" (Jer 28:8); *deber* "pestilence," *dām* "bloodshed," and *hereb* "sword" (Ezek 28:23). Some scholars see *mawet*'s place in lists of punishments and terrors in Jeremiah and elsewhere (e.g. Job 27:15; Lam 1:20) as a substitution or equivalent for *deber* "pestilence." See, Édouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, trans. Harold Knight (1921; repr., Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984, 394; William L. Holladay, "Prototype and Copies: A New Approach to the Poetry-Prose Problem in the Book of Jeremiah," *JBL* 79 (1960): 362; Weippert, *Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches*, 157; Habel, *The Book of Job*, 386. For a contrary view, see Marvin H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 15; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965; repr., New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 192. An inversion of this relation appears in the LXX translation of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, in which *deber*, when it is translated, is overwhelmingly translated with *thanatos* "death." The one exception to this is Jer 32:36, where *deber* is seemingly translated with *apostolē* "dispatching."

accumulatio.”⁶⁵⁷ Block considers them Yahweh’s “agents of death.”⁶⁵⁸ I. Eph‘al characterizes the SFP triad as “the three characteristics of war, and particularly of siege.”⁶⁵⁹ Although these interpretations are undoubtedly accurate in a variety of contexts, they miss the depth of meaning embedded in the SFP triad, which becomes a polyvalent, metasemiotic sign for Israel’s punishment concerning covenantal infidelity. This particular triad, and even among most of its derivations and similar collections, is used exclusively to describe Yahweh’s punishment of Israel. First, the language of punishment, as has been noted by many scholars, reflects the curse language of covenantal codes (Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26).⁶⁶⁰ Though the punishing agents sword/enemies, famine, and disease appear in the covenantal curses, the exact SFP triad does not appear prior to the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. As scholars have long noted, the covenantal curse language shares motifs and themes with Neo-Assyrian international *adē* agreements, especially Esarhaddon’s Succession Treaty.⁶⁶¹ The treaty curses seem to have evolved from oaths, which in Mesopotamia could be taken in the presence of a

⁶⁵⁷ Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21A; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 707.

⁶⁵⁸ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, 125.

⁶⁵⁹ Israel Eph‘al, *The City Besieged: Siege and Its Manifestations in the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 66.

⁶⁶⁰ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 331-333; Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 189, 212 n.37; Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 262, 308; Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 194; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 390; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 3B; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2348-2362; Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12* (WBC 6B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 681; Jack R. Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 769-770, 889-890.

⁶⁶¹ Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, 309, 316-317.

divine weapon, which function both as a manifestation of divine presence and a physical promise of the punishment that awaited any oath-breaker. In both Mesopotamian and biblical sources, the sword functions as a complex symbol with multiple different and competing fields of meaning.

To this end I will explore the use of weapon imagery in curses and oaths from Mesopotamia to demonstrate the ancient Near Eastern backdrop for the references in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Having established this background, I will demonstrate that the sword references in Jeremiah and Ezekiel follow a similar pattern. Then I will explore the functions of the figurative language of the sword and the SFP triad through the fields of Semiotics and the cultural sociological model of trauma. The references to Yahweh's sword as a manifestation of punishment serve three purposes: First, using traditional weapon imagery it frames the conceptualization of trauma. Evoking Yahweh's weapon creates a dramatic representation of the pain and suffering that the Judean exiles, from the point of view of the narrative, will endure. This in turn allows for a narrative of the events to be constructed, a vital step in the claim making process, according to Alexander's trauma process.⁶⁶² Secondly, employing weapon imagery assigns responsibility for the traumatic to the divine realm by dehumanizing the forces of punishment. Thirdly, the ambiguity of the weapon as symbol allows diverse individual experiences to be encapsulated under one symbol that serves to create a sense of shared experience and a community out of the "survivors of the sword."

⁶⁶² Alexander, "Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 11.

Divine Weapons in Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty

I will begin by examining some of the references to divine weapons in Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty (EST). EST is known from a group of documents commissioned by Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, in 672 BCE to secure the throne for his son, Assurbanipal. The group of tablets is comprised of ten exemplars and three fragments found in Nimrud, Aššur, and recently at Tell Tayinat. The *adê*-agreement is part oath, part treaty, though Lauinger demonstrates that neither term is a sufficient translation for the semantic range of the term *adê*.⁶⁶³ Lauinger considers the *adê* to express "a duty or obligatory behavior that was transformed and projected into the divine realm so that it became a destiny."⁶⁶⁴ The *adê*-agreement was given to those on Assyria's periphery (provincial governors and independent city rulers), Assyrian royal officials, and all of Assyria. The oath itself takes up a relatively small portion of the tablet (19 out of 670 lines), while the two different sets of curses that occur before and after the oath consist of 230 lines. The curses that appear before the oath are referred to as the "Standard Curse Section" because the curses are generic and can be found in other sources, such as boundary stelae (*kudurru*) and royal stelae. The second and longer curse section follows the oath and is described as the "Ceremonial Curse Section" due to its inclusion of curses that suggest performative elements.

References to divine weapons can be found in both curse sections. Beginning with the Standard Curse section, a passage invoking several gods and goddesses of war provides some parallels to the biblical curses and examples of divine judgment:

⁶⁶³ Lauinger, "The Neo-Assyrian *adê*," 99-115.

⁶⁶⁴ Lauinger, "The Neo-Assyrian *adê*," 114-115.

453. ^dIŠ.TAR *be-lit* MURUB₄ u ME₃ *ina* M[E₃] *dan-ni* ^{giš}BAN-ku-nu *liš-*
bir
454. *i-di-ku-nu* *lik-si* *ina* KI.TA ^{lu2}KUR₂-ku-nu *li-še-šib-ku-nu*
455. ^dU.GUR *qar-rad* DINGIR *ina* GIR₂-š_{u2} *la ga-me-li nap-šat-ku-nu*
456. *li-bal-li ša₂-ga-aš₂-tu₂ mu-t[a-a]-nu* *ina* ŠA₃-bi-ku-nu *liš-kun*
457. ^dNIN.LIL₂ *a-ši-bat* ^{uru}NINA^{ki}
458. *pat-ru ḥa-am-tu it-ti-ku-nu li-ir-ku-su*

May Ištar, lady of battle and combat, break your bow in fierce combat!
May she bind your arms! May she make you sit under your enemy! May
Nergal, hero of the gods, extinguish your life with his merciless sword!
May he place slaughter (and) pestilence among you! May Mullissu, who
dwells in Nineveh, tie a flaming sword to you!
(SAA 2 6 453-458, §48-50, p. 48)⁶⁶⁵

Ištar's curse, though it does not involve one of her own weapons, features the destruction of the perpetrator's bow, itself a symbol of power.⁶⁶⁶ This motif of breaking an enemy's weapon appears frequently in ancient Near Eastern curses and several times throughout the Hebrew Bible. For example, in Hab 1:5 Yahweh declares that he will break the bow of Israel (*wəšābartī 'et-qešet yiśrā 'ēl*).⁶⁶⁷ In curses of the Sefire inscriptions (mid-eight cent. B.C.E.),⁶⁶⁸ we find Hadad and Inurta (Ninurta) invoked to break the bow and arrows of Matī 'ēl:

w'yk zy tšbr qšt' whšy' 'ln kn yšbr 'nrt whdd [qšt mt 'l] wqšt rbwh

⁶⁶⁵ The parallel in the Tayinat exemplar runs: ^dIŠ.TAR *be-let* M[URU]B₄ ME₃ *ina* ME₃ *dan-ni* ^{giš}BAN-ku-nu *liš-b[i]r* ^r*i¹-di-ku-nu* *lik-si* *ina* KI.TA ^{lu2}*KUR₂-ku-nu* *lu li-še-šib-ku-nu* ^dU.GUR *qar-rad* ^rDINGIR *ina* ^rGIR₂ ^rš_{u2} *la ga-mi₃-li nap-šat-ku-nu li-bal-li šag-gaš-tu₂ NAM.UŠ₂.MEŠ* *ina* ŠA₃-ku-n[u] [*liš*]-^r*kun* ^r^dNIN^r.LIL₂ *a-ši-bat₂ <uru>NINA^{ki} [G]IR₂ ḥa-an-tu it-ti-ku-nu li-ir-ku-us* (*JCS* 64, 101 vi 32-39).

⁶⁶⁶ Othmar Keel, "Der Bogen als Herrschaftssymbol: Einige unveröffentlichte Skarabäen aus Ägypten und Israel zum Thema 'Jagd und Krieg,'" in *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palastina/Israel III: Die frühe Eisenzeit: Bin Workshop*, eds. O. Keel, M. Shuval, and C. Uehlinger (OBO 100; Freiburg: Academic Press, 1990), 29-65.

⁶⁶⁷ See also, 1 Sam 2:4; Jer 49:35; Ps 46:10; 76:4.

⁶⁶⁸ See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967), 46-47.

Just as the bow and these arrows are broken, thus may Inurta and Hadad break [the bow of Matī'ēl] and the bow of his nobles.
(Sefire I iv 38-39a)

Perhaps most significant for our purposes is the curse involving Nergal, who is called upon to inflict the oath-breaker with his sword (*pataršu*), slaughter (*šaggaštu*), and pestilence (*mūtānu*). Nergal's triad is reminiscent of Yahweh's triad since both feature the sword and pestilence, though there is no term corresponding to the notion of famine. In Ezekiel's oracle against Sidon, variation on the classic triad (*hereb*, *deber*, *rā'āb*) comes closer to Nergal's curse:

wəšillahtī-bāh deber wādām bəḥûšôtéhā wəniplal hālāl bətokāh bəhereb
'āléhā missābīb wəyādə 'û kī- 'ānī yhw

I will send pestilence against it and bloodshed in its streets. The slain will fall in its midst by the sword that is against it from all sides. Then they will know that I am Yahweh.
(Ezek 28:23)⁶⁶⁹

In this verse pestilence (*deber*) and bloodshed (*dām*) are paired together with the sword (*hereb*) in a similar manner to Nergal's curse above. Mullissu's curse, vivid and imaginative as it is, illustrates the connection between fire and the sword, which appears in both Mesopotamian and Hebrew texts, perhaps most famously in the flaming sword of Gen 3:24.⁶⁷⁰ As we will see below, the god Sîn threatens Assurbanipal's enemies with a flaming sword.

Moving on to the Ceremonial Curse Section, the opening to this new series of curses begins by invoking Aššur and his weapons:

⁶⁶⁹ For a similar pairing that includes famine and wild beasts in addition to pestilence, sword, and bloodshed, see Ezek 5:17.

⁶⁷⁰ Ronald S. Hendel, "The Flame of the Whirling Sword": A Note on Genesis 3:24," *JBL* 104 (1985): 671-674.

513. *šum-ma at-tu₂-nu ina ŠA₃ a-de-e an-nu-te ša₂ ^maš-šur-PAP-AŠ MAN KUR aš-šur EN-[ku-nu]*
 514. [*ina*] UGU ^maš-šur-DU₃-A DUMU MAN GAL-u ša₂ E₂-UŠ-te
 515. [ŠEŠ].MEŠ-šu₂ DUMU [AMA-šu₂ ša ^maš-š]ur-D[U₃-A] DUMU MAN GAL-u ša₂ E₂-UŠ-te
 516. *u re-e[ḥ-ti DUMU.MEŠ] ši-it ŠA₃-bi ša₂ ^maš-šur-[PAP-AŠ] KUR aš-šur*
 517. EN-ku-nu is-si-ku-nu [*iš-kun-u*]-ni ta-ḥa-ṭa-[a-n]i
 518. ^daš-šur AD DINGIR.MEŠ *ina* ^{giš}TUKUL.ME[Š-šu₂] ez-zu-u-ti li-[šam]-qit-[ku-nu]

If you sin against this *adē*, which Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, your lord, concluded with you concerning Assurbanipal, great son of the king, crown prince, his brothers, son(s) of the mother of Assurbanipal, great son of the king, crown prince, (and) the rest of the sons, the offspring of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, your lord, may Aššur, father of the gods, strike you down with his furious weapons!
 (SAA 2 6 513-518, §58 p. 50)⁶⁷¹

A similar imprecation, which occurs later in the Ceremonial Curse Section, also begins with a *šumma* clause and ends with a weapon related threat.

632. *šum-ma at-tu-nu ^maš-šur-PAP-AŠ MAN KUR aš-šur*
 633. *u₃ ^maš-šur-DU₃-A DUMU MAN GAL-u ša₂ E₂ UŠ-te*
 634. *tu-ram-ma-a-ni a-na ZAG u KAB tal-lak-a-ni*
 635. *ša₂ a-na ZAG il-lak-u-ni GIR₂.MEŠ le-kul-a-šu₂*
 636. *ša₂ a-na KAB il-lak-u-ni GIR₂.MEŠ-me le-kul-a-šu₂*

If you forsake Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, and Assurbanipal, great son of the king, crown prince, (and) you go to the right or the left, may swords consume the one who goes to the right! May swords consume the one who goes to the left!
 (SAA 2 6 632-636, §96, p. 57)⁶⁷²

⁶⁷¹ The parallel in the Tayinat copy has: [š]um-ma at-tu-nu ina ŠA₃ ^ra-de¹-[e an-nu-te ša₂ ^maš-šur-PAP-AŠ] [M]AN KUR aš-šur ina UGU ^maš-šur-DU₃-A DU[MU MAN GAL-u ša₂] ^rE₂-UŠ-te¹ ^ru₃¹ ŠEŠ.MEŠ-šu₂ DUMU AM[A-šu₂ ša₂ ^maš-šur-DU₃-A] [DU]MU MAN GAL-u ša₂ E₂ UŠ-^rte u¹ [re]-^rḥ-ti DUMU¹. [MEŠ] [š]i-it ŠA₃-bi ša₂ ^maš-šur-[PAP-A]Š MAN K[UR aš-šur] ^rEN¹-[ku]-^rnu¹ <<^ra¹-de-e>> is-si-ku-[nu i]š-k[un]-u-ni ^rta-ḥa-ṭa-a-ni¹ ^d[aš-šur AD] DINGIR.MEŠ [G]AL.MEŠ [ina] ^{giš}TUKUL.MEŠ-šu₂ ^re¹-[zu]-ti li-^ršam¹-qit-ku-nu (JCS 64, 104 vii 1-8).

⁶⁷² Here I depart from the composite text of SAA 2 6, which includes three extra lines (633a-c), which are taken from ND 4452E but occur in no other exemplars. The parallel in the Tayinat copy has: [š]u-m-^rma¹ at-tu-nu ^maš-šur-PAP-AŠ MAN KUR aš-šur ^ru₃¹ ^maš-šur-DU₃-A DUMU MAN GAL-u ^rša₂ E₂¹ UŠ-te ^ru₃¹ re-ḥ-ti DUMU.MEŠ ši-it ŠA₃-bi ^rša₂¹ ^maš-šur-PAP-AŠ ^rMAN KUR aš-šur tu-ram¹-ma-a-ni a-na ZAG ^rGUB₃¹ tal-lak-a-ni ša₂ a-na ZAG il-lak-u-ni GIR₂.MEŠ le-ku-la-šu [š]a₂ a-na GUB₃ il-lak-u-ni GIR₂.MEŠ-me le-ku-l[a-šu] (JCS 64, 110 viii 26-32).

In these lines the weapons are portrayed as devouring forces that await anyone who deviates from the terms of the *adê*-agreement. Although the swords, as portrayed in the text, are not explicitly associated with a specific deity,⁶⁷³ the very nature of a curse is to lay the responsibility of punishment at the divine realm.⁶⁷⁴ This becomes clear in a letter to Esarhaddon whose sender cites these lines to explain the submission of the king's enemies.⁶⁷⁵ Itti-Šamaš-balaṭu, an Assyrian official in northern Phoenicia, writes to the king to provide assurances that he has acted in accordance with the *adê*-agreement. After expounding upon the king's many laudable attributes as the justification for the king's divine support, he quotes EST directly:⁶⁷⁶

17. *u₃ ma-ri na-ka₃-ru-ti-ni [ša] LUGAL be-li₂-ia*
18. *i-na sa-pal GIR₃^{II} ša LUGAL EN-[ia u₂-šak-nu]-šu₂*
19. *a-ki-i ša i-na ŠA₃-bi a-de-^re¹ [qa-bu-u-ni]*
20. *ma-a ša a-na 15 il-la-^rku¹-[u₂-ni GIR^{II}.MEŠ le-ku-la-šu₂]*
21. *ma-a ša a-na 150 il-la-[ku-u₂-ni GIR^{II}.MEŠ le-kul-šu₂]*
22. *ma-a ina kaq-qar^r šu¹-[ma-mit lap-lap-tu₂]*
23. *na-da-te-ku-ni lu^r ta¹-[hi-bi]*

They (the gods) will make all the enemies of the king, my lord, bow at the feet of the king, my lord. As it says in the *adê*: “May swords consume the one who goes to the right! May swords consume the one who goes to the left! May your water-skins break in a parched and waterless land!”

⁶⁷³ As we have already seen in EST, swords are associated with Nergal and Mullissu. Additionally, the sword (GIR₂.AN.BAR) can be one of Šin's weapons as well.

⁶⁷⁴ S. Ito connects a reference to Aššur's sword in a letter (ABL 292) from the king to the swords mentioned in EST based on similar language of swords consuming (*akālu*). See, Sanae Ito, “A Letter from Assurbanipal to Enlil-bāni and the Citizens of Nippur,” *Inter Faculty* 4 (2013): 24-25. While this is certainly possible, the motif of the consuming sword is widespread enough to be insufficient to establish a certain reference.

⁶⁷⁵ In M. Luukko and G. Van Buylaere's translation they connect the citation of EST with Itti-Šamaš-balaṭu's assertion that he has kept the *adê*, which follows the quote. This is entirely possible, though the association of the king's enemies and the curses of the *adê* is appropriate and appears more explicitly in SAA 18 143 below.

⁶⁷⁶ For more on Itti-Šamaš-balaṭu, see Heather D. Baker ed, *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire: Volume 2, Part I: H-K* (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2000), 589.

(SAA 16 126 17-23, p. 112)

By juxtaposing the king's support by the strong gods (*ilānī ša šarri bēliya dannūti*), mentioned in line 13, and the curse of the consuming swords from EST, Itti-Šamaš-balaṭu demonstrates the divine provenance of the swords. Thus, whether or not the consuming swords are meant to represent hostile armies, warfare, or violent death in general, the gods are the responsible party. Additionally, the imagery, employed in EST 632-636, is not chosen at random. The motif of the divine weapon that pursues oath breakers is well established in Mesopotamian literature and will be taken up below. A more general reference to the *adē*-agreement via its punishments occurs in a letter from Nabû-šumu-lišir, an official operating near Birtu, to Esarhaddon concerning the Qedarites:

r.2 *ap-¹pi₂¹-tim-ma ki-i*
r.3 *im-ḥa-aš-šu₂-nu-ti ig-da-ru*
r.4 *u₃ a-de-e ša₂ LUGAL be-li₂-ia₂*
r.5 *ki-i ik-šu-du-šu₂-nu-ti*
r.6 *ša₂ la-pa-an GIR₂ AN.BAR u₂-še-zi-bu*
r.7 *ina bu-bu-tu i-ma-ti*

Just as he defeated them (and) they became scared and so the *adē* of the king, my lord, will reach them. The one who saves himself from the sword will die by famine.

(SAA 18 143 r.2-7, p. 118)

The pairing of sword and famine is similar to the summaries of the forestalled doom that are put into the mouths of the false prophets with which Jeremiah must contend. For example, in Jer 14:13 the prophet exclaims:

*wā`ōmar`āhāh`ādōnāy yhw hinnēh hannabī`im`ōmarīm lāhem lō`-tir`ū
ḥereb wārā`āb lō`-yihyē lākem kī-šālōm`ēmet`ettēn lākem bammāqōm
hazzē*

I said, "Ah, Lord Yahweh. Look the prophets are saying to them, 'You [the people] will not see a sword and famine will not come to you. Indeed, true peace, I will give you in this place.'"

Not only does this language appear in treaties and letters referring to treaties, in the royal inscriptions of Assurbanipal similar language is used to describe the fate of those who rebel against the king. After Assurbanipal's fifth campaign, he received word that his brother, Šamaš-šumu-ukīn, who was placed in charge of Babylonia, had not kept the *adê*-agreement of the king (*lā iššuru adêya*) and incited the people to rebel.⁶⁷⁷ In a dream from Sīn sent to a man, Assurbanipal then received assurances that the traitors would receive divine justice:

- iii 121. *um-ma (ina^l) UGU ki-gal-li ša₂ ^d30 ša₂-tir-ma*
- iii 122. *ma-a ša₂ it-ti ^man-šar₂-DU₃-A LUGAL KUR an-šar₂^{ki}*
- iii 123. *ik-pu-du MUNUS-HUL ip-pu-šu₂ še-e-lu-u₂-tu₂*
- iii 124. *mu-u-tu lem-nu a-šar-rak-šu-nu-ti*
- iii 125. *ina GIR₂-AN-BAR ḥa-an-ti mi-qit ^dGIŠ-BAR SU-GU₇*
- iii 126. *TAG-it ^der₃-ra u₂-qat₂-ta-a nap-šat-su-un*
- iii 127. *an-na-a-te aš₂-me-e-ma at-kil a-na a-mat ^d30 EN-ia*

“It was written on the pedestal of Sin: Those who plot evil against Assurbanipal, king of Assyria, (and) act in hostility, I will give them an evil death! I will end their life with a flaming sword, conflagration of fire, famine, and plague!” I (Assurbanipal) listened to these things (and) I trusted in the word of Sin, my lord.
(RC A III 118-127)⁶⁷⁸

After this, in Assurbanipal's sixth campaign he reports that he marched against Šamaš-šumu-ukīn and defeated him:

- iii 133. *qe₂-reb URU u EDIN ina la me-ni as₂-tak-ka-na BAD₅-BAD₅-šu₂*
- iii 134. *si-it-tu-u-ti ina TAG-it ^der₃-ra*
- iii 135. *su-un-qu bu-bu-ti iš-ku-nu na-piš-tu*

I continually defeated him countless times in the city and steppe land.
Those who remained died by plague, famine, and want.
(RC A III 133-135)

⁶⁷⁷ Rassam Cylinder A III 96-97.

⁶⁷⁸ Hugo Winckler, *Sammlung von Keilschrifttexten*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: E. Pfeiffer, 1893), 12f.; Streck, *Assurbanipal*, 32-33; *BIWA*, 40-41.

As framed by the narrative of Assurbanipal's annals, it is possible to see the defeat of Šamaš-šumu-ukīn by Assurbanipal and his army as the flaming sword (*patri ḥanṭi*) and perhaps even the conflagration of fire (*miqit girru*), which Sîn had promised. The plague (*lipit Erra*) and famine promised by the god dispatched the rest.⁶⁷⁹ As we saw in chapter four, the king could often be portrayed as the weapon of the gods. Parpola and Watanabe consider that the Assyrian army might be the referent or signified for the sword of Aššur: "On the ideological level, every broken treaty was a sin against the god Assur, and thus the invading Assyrian army could be portrayed as the 'sword of Assur' which the perfidious vassal himself had called upon his land."⁶⁸⁰ An explicit reference to the sword of Aššur, however, does not occur in the extant Neo-Assyrian treaties, though Aššur's weapons appear in the generic term ^{giš}TUKUL.MEŠ. On one level, Parpola and Watanabe's position is fundamentally true, since the Assyrian army would be the most likely real-world organization tasked with rendering punishment upon those who broke their *adê*-agreements with the king. On a metasemiotic level, however, the various curses of the *adê* are framed as the work of the divine world. The consuming swords of EST 632-636 function as part of the vast array of divine punishments called down upon the breakers of the *adê*-agreement. This is part of the essence of curse rhetoric, in which the response to various actions transcend the human world to include the divine. The presence of divine weapons in curses stems in part from the use of such weapons for oath-taking.

⁶⁷⁹ We do encounter a different word for famine. In iii 125, it is *ḥušahhu*, whereas in iii 135 the pair *sunqu* and *bubūtu* are used. All three terms appear together in EST 480 D in combination with *mūtānu* "plague."

⁶⁸⁰ Simo Parpola and Kazuko Watanabe eds., *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths* (SAA 2; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988), xxiv.

Weapons in Oaths

Many scholars have noted that the appearance of divine weapons in curses draws its inspiration from the use of divine weapons in the swearing of oaths.⁶⁸¹ This practice, which is especially well documented during the Old Assyrian and Old Babylonian periods, involved swearing upon the weapon of a god, either in a temple or with a rented divine weapon. Old Assyrian merchants took oaths before the sword of Aššur (GIR₂ ša a-šur₃).⁶⁸² According to S. Holloway, in the presence of Aššur's weapon "oaths were administered, legal testimony given and documents drawn up and sealed."⁶⁸³ That this weapon was a real object rather than only an emblematic presence is indicated by a text which describes the theft of a golden sun disk and the sword of Aššur from the Aššur temple.⁶⁸⁴ Old Babylonian letters, legal texts, and contracts attest to the fact that divine symbols (often in the form of the weapon of a god) were used for taking oaths, presumably as a proxy for the presence of the invoked deity.⁶⁸⁵ These oaths could take place in a temple or outside of the temple, for which the weapon was taken on a

⁶⁸¹ Harris, "The Journey of the Divine Weapon," 217-224; Steven Holloway, "The ^{gis}Kakki Aššur and Neo-Assyrian Loyalty Oaths," in *Proceedings of the XIve Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale: Historiography in the Cuneiform World* (ed. Tzvi Abusch, et al.; Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2001), 253-256; Kathryn E. Slanski, "Representation of the Divine on the Babylonian Entitlement Monuments (kudurrus): Part I: Divine Symbols," *AfO* 50 (2003/2004): 317-321.

⁶⁸² Kt n/k 32 31-43. See Veysel Donbaz, "Some Remarkable Contracts of 1-B Period Kültepe Tablets," in *Anatolia and the Ancient Near East: Studies in Honor of Tahsin Özgüç* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1989), 77.

⁶⁸³ Holloway, "The ^{gis}Kakki Aššur and Neo-Assyrian Loyalty Oaths," 254.

⁶⁸⁴ Bab 6 no. 7:7-11 cited in Hans Hirsch, *Untersuchungen Zur Altassyrischen Religion* (*AfO* 13/14; Graz, 1961), 14.

⁶⁸⁵ Michael B. Hundley, "Here a God, There a God: An Examination of the Divine in Ancient Mesopotamia," *AoF* 40 (2013): 79.

journey.⁶⁸⁶ For an example of an oath in a temple, a school text of a letter/prayer from Old-Babylonian Ur records the complaint of an individual whose silver he had lent has not been repaid, despite the fact that lendee swore an oath:⁶⁸⁷

18. *la a-ḥa-ba-lu-ka-ma it-ma*
19. *i-na KA₂ MAḤ ša-pa-al* ⁶⁸⁶TUKUL
20. *ša ta-ra-mu it-ma*
21. ŠA₃ KISAL.MAḤ *me-eḥ-re-et* E₂.KIŠ.NU.GAL₂
22. *me-eḥ-ri-it* ⁶⁸⁷NIN.GAL ša E₂.GA.DI
23. IGI ⁶⁸⁷NIN.ŠUBUR ŠUR KISAL.MAḤ
24. IGI ⁶⁸⁷a-la-mu-uš
25. IGI ⁶⁸⁷NANNA IGI.DU u, ⁶⁸⁷NANNA A₂.TAḤ *it-ma-a-am*
26. *ka-a-ti u, ma-ru-ka*
27. *la a-ḥa-ba-lu-ka-ma it-ma*
28. DINGIR.E.NE *an-nu-tum*
29. *lu ši-bu-u₂-a-mi iq-bi*

“‘I will not wrong you,’ he swore. At the exalted gate, below the weapon, which you love, he swore. (At) the courtyard, before Ekišnugal before Ningal of Egadi before Nin-šubur. (At the courtyard) before Alammuš, before Nanna-Leader, and Nanna-Helper he swore to me. ‘You and your sons, I will not wrong you,’ he swore. ‘May these gods be my witnesses,’ he said.”

(UET 6 402 18-29)

R. Harris mentions an example in which two men are convicted of stealing pigs by means of oaths taken before a divine weapon brought from the temple for this purpose.⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁶ Harris, “The Journey of the Divine Weapon,” 217-224.

⁶⁸⁷ J. Lauinger notes that this text was discovered at no. 1 Broad Street and was found with other literary and administrative texts. He adduces many features that suggest the text was a scribal exercise, such as lacking the introductory formula. For more, see Jacob Lauinger, “The Curricular Context of an Akkadian Prayer from Old Babylonian Ur (UET 6 402),” in *Extraction and Control: Studies in Honor of Matthew S. Stolper*, ed. Michael Kozuh et al. (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2014), 189-196. For earlier treatments of this text, see C. J. Gadd, “Two Sketches from the Life at Ur,” *Iraq* 25 (1963): 178-181; William L. Moran, “UET 6, 402: Persuasion in the Plain Style,” *JANES* 22 (1993): 113-120; Kai Alexander Metzler, *Tempora in altbabylonischen literarischen Texten* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002), 772-776.

⁶⁸⁸ YOS VIII, no. 159 cited in Harris, “The Journey of the Divine Weapon,” 218.

In later periods, however, we find one Neo-Babylonian direct reference and indirect references in other literary genres from both Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian contexts. In these oaths, the weapons functioned both as a physical manifestation of the presence of the god or goddess to whom the weapon belonged and the manifestation of the punishment that any oath breaker could expect. As we saw in chapter four, a divine weapon in the form of a net plays a crucial role in E-anatum's victory over the ruler of Umma. E-anatum makes his enemy swear by the great battle nets (*sa-šuš-gal*) of five gods (Enlil, Ninḫursag, Enki, Suen, and Utu). This oath involved a self-directed curse that if the oath is violated the battle net on which he swears will descend upon his city Umma.⁶⁸⁹ This same imagery of the net avenging an oath appears in the Etana myth, known from Old Babylonian, Middle Assyrian, and Neo-Assyrian recensions, though some version of the story may go back to the later part of the third millennium as there are depictions of man riding an eagle in the Sumerian King List and in Old Akkadian cylinder seals.⁶⁹⁰ As the Neo-Assyrian version is the most complete and the closest chronologically to the biblical prophets, this is the version I will use. In the Etana myth, an eagle and snake swear an oath with one another:

- ii 14. *al-ka¹ ni-zaq-pa-am-ma* [*ša₂-da-a ni-li*]
- ii 15. *ni-it-ma-a KI-tim* [*DAGAL-tim*]
- ii 16. *ina ma-ḫar* ^dUTU *qu-ra-di ma-mit it-[mu-u₂]*
- ii 17. [*ša₂ i-ta-a* *ša₂* ^dUTU [*it-ti-qu*]
- ii 18. ^dUTU *lem-niš ina qa-at ma-ḫi-ṣ* [*i li-mal-li*]
- ii 19. *ša₂ i-ta-a* *ša₂* ^dUTU [*it-ti-qu*]
- ii 20. *li-is-su-šu-ma ne₂-re-* [*be₂-ti* *ša₂ KUR-e*]
- ii 21. ^{giš}TUKUL *mur-tap-pi-du* UGU-šu [*li-še-er*]

⁶⁸⁹ E1.9.3.1 xvi 12 – r. iii 1. See RIME 1, 132-137.

⁶⁹⁰ Jamie R. Novotny and Simo Parpola, *The Standard Babylonian Etana Epic: Cuneiform Text, Transliteration, Score, Glossary, Indices and Sign List* (SAACT 2; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001), ix.

ii 22. *giš-par-ru ma-mit* ^dUTU *lib-bal-ki-tu-šu-ma l[i-ba-ru-šu]*

“Come, let us go up to the high mountain! Let us swear by the underworld!” Before Šamaš, the warrior, they swore an oath. “The one who transgresses the limit of Šamaš, may Šamaš viciously hand (him) over to the hunter! The one who transgresses the limit of Šamaš, may the mountain passes recede from him! May the roving weapon charge at him! May the trap (and) the curse of Šamaš overcome him and hunt him down!”

(Etana SB ii 14-23)⁶⁹¹

Among the many punishments, an oath breaker must be concerned with the roving weapon (*kakku murtappidu*), the trap (*gišparru*), and the curse of Šamaš (*māmīt Šamaš*). Notably, the trap, as well as the net which will appear later, are especially threatening for a bird. In spite of these dire warnings and the benefits of his friendship with the snake, the eagle turns his eyes on the snake’s children. As we saw above in chapter four (pages 170-171), the eagle’s child warns him against his present course of action with a reference to the net (*šētu*), the trap (*gišparru*), and the curse (*māmītu*) of Šamaš (Etana SB ii 45-50).⁶⁹² In the hatchling’s admonition, the net, trap, and curse of Šamaš are equated as they each will hunt down (*ba’āru*) the offender. In spite of his child’s caution, the eagle violates his oath and consumes the snake’s offspring. Devastated, the snake comes before Šamaš and pleads his case (Etana SB ii 67-71).⁶⁹³ In the snake’s petition for justice the underworld becomes Šamaš’ net and his trap becomes the distant heavens. In this way, the god’s tools/weapons of justice are expressed by a merism. From the heavens to the earth there is no place for the eagle to hide. Yet by connecting the net of

⁶⁹¹ Novotny and Parpola, *The Standard Babylonian Etana Epic*, 17.

⁶⁹² Novotny and Parpola, *The Standard Babylonian Etana Epic*, 17.

⁶⁹³ For a treatment of the text, see chapter four page 170.

Šamaš with the underworld (lit: “wide earth” *eršetum rapaštum*), the snake connects the net with the object by which he and the eagle swore the original oath (ii 15) just as the ruler of Umma had to swear by different battle nets belonging to the gods.

Additionally, if Holloway is correct in his understanding of the weapon of Aššur, which was set up in various cities conquered by Assyria, the weapon functioned as part of the apparatus for administering *adê*-agreements.⁶⁹⁴ Other indirect evidence is known from the Neo-Assyrian period. In the Šurpu tablets found in Aššurbanipal's library, there are references to various oaths taken either upon or with some connection to weapons:

- 27. *ma-mit* ^{giš}BAN *u* ^{giš}GIGIR *u*₂
- 28. *ma-mit* GIR₂ UD.KA.BAR *u* ^{giš}šu-kur-ri *u*₂
- 29. *ma-mit* ^{giš}az-ma-re-e *u* til-pa-nu [*u*₂]

- 27. the oath of bow or chariot,
 - 28. the oath of sword or spear,
 - 29. the oath of lance or bow
- (Tablet III 27-29)⁶⁹⁵

Moving to later periods, M. Roth notes the only example of swearing upon a divine weapon in the Neo-Babylonian period, in which a man swears by the sword (GIR₂ AN.BAR) of the Lady of Uruk concerning missing grain:⁶⁹⁶

- 4. *ina* GIR₂ AN.BAR ša₂ ^dGAŠAN ša₂ UNUG^{ki} *it-ti-mu*

He swore by the sword of the Lady of Uruk
(YOS 7 22 4)⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹⁴ Holloway, “The ^{giš}Kakki Aššur and Neo-Assyrian Loyalty Oaths,” 265.

⁶⁹⁵ Erica Reiner, *Šurpu: A Collection of Sumerian and Akkadian Incantations* (Graz: Im Selbstverlage des Herausgebers, 1958), p. 19.

⁶⁹⁶ YOS 7 22:4 cited in Martha T. Roth, “‘She Will Die by the Iron Dagger’ Adultery and Neo-Babylonian Marriage,” *JESHO* 31 (1988): 203.

⁶⁹⁷ Denise Cocquerillat, *Palmeraies et Cultures de L’Eanna d’Uruk (559-520)* (ADFU 8; Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1968), 85.

This demonstrates that the practice of swearing by the weapon of a deity continued to be practiced into the Neo-Babylonian period. A full study would be necessary to draw out all the implications from the Old Assyrian and Old Babylonian tradition of using divine weapons during oaths. That said, however, a few observations are apparent. First, the weapon of a god could stand metonymically for the god himself. According to Harris, weapons were rented from temples so that the divine presence could adjudicate matters via oaths.⁶⁹⁸ An example of this can be seen in a letter from Hammurabi to Šamaš-hāzir:

31. ^{giš}TUKUL ša DINGIR a-na A.ŠA₃-im li-ri-id-ma
 32. at-tu-nu a-lim u₃ ši-bu-tum
 33. a-wa-a-tim ša A.ŠA₃-im šu-a-ti
 34. ma-ḥar DINGIR bi-ir-ra-ma

Let the weapon of the god go down to the field, and you, the city and the elders establish the matter of that field before the god.
 (TCL 7, 40:31-34)⁶⁹⁹

This would also be an example of the non-anthropomorphic representation of deities. Secondly, I suspect the reason that weapons feature frequently in oaths is due to the inherent physical threat present in a weapon, whose primary function is to cause death. One would then take an oath on a divine weapon with the understanding that breaking the oath would cause the weapon to come and find the oath-breaker. Whether or not some of the gods brought out for the *adê*-agreement (as in SAA 13 32) took the form of divine weapons or if the sword of Aššur played a role of the swearing/renewing of the *adê*-agreements among certain vassals of the Neo-Assyrian empire, the reference to divine

⁶⁹⁸ Harris, “The Journey of the Divine Weapon,” 217-218.

⁶⁹⁹ See Harris, “The Journey of the Divine Weapon,” 219.

weapons in the *adê* derives from oath taking in which weapons play to role of agents of divine punishment.

The Sword of Yahweh in His Family of Judgments

Like the Assyrian examples above, the SFP triad in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel encapsulates divine punishment drawn from the language of treaty and oaths. As Carr and others have argued, the connections between the covenant curses, especially those of Deuteronomy 28, and Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty place the composition of such material in the Neo-Assyrian period.⁷⁰⁰ Concerning the SFP triad, it appears more than twice as often in Jeremiah compared to Ezekiel.⁷⁰¹ Due to its frequent use in the book of Jeremiah, some scholars consider the expression to be Jeremian.⁷⁰² The symbolic pairing also appears in a more static formation in Jeremiah, in which the order is usually sword (*hereb*), famine (*rā'āb*), and pestilence (*deber*).⁷⁰³

The SFP Triad and the Relationship of MT Jeremiah and LXX Jeremiah

Before delving into the use of the SFP triad, given the predominance of occurrences in the book of Jeremiah, it is necessary to say something about the relation of the longer, MT version of Jeremiah and the shorter, LXX version. There is also the issue of the ordering of the texts, with the placement of the Oracles Against the Nations being

⁷⁰⁰ Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, 316-317.

⁷⁰¹ It appears fifteen times in Jeremiah versus six occurrences in Ezekiel, cf. Jer 14:12; 21:7, 9; 24:10; 27:8, 13; 29:17, 18; 32:24, 36; 34:17; 38:2; 42:17, 22; 44:13 and Ezek 5:12; 6:11, 12; 7:15 (x2); 12:16.

⁷⁰² Holladay, "Prototype and Copies," 361 and Weippert, *Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches*, 191.

⁷⁰³ Two exceptions to this appear in Jer 21:7 with the order pestilence, sword, and famine and Jer 34:17 with the order sword, pestilence, and famine.

different for each manuscript tradition (at the end for MT vs. in the middle for LXX). The exact relation between the two textual traditions is difficult to establish with certainty, though the discoveries of Jeremiah manuscripts at Qumran, especially 4QJer^b and 4QJer^d, have done much to clarify the topic and reinvigorate scholarly interest in it.⁷⁰⁴ Without getting into all the complexities of the issue, one can summarize two basic camps of opinion: the first camp views the short LXX as the earlier and better manuscript and therefore understands the longer MT text as due to a combination of later editorial expansions and textual transmission.⁷⁰⁵ The second camp considers the MT as the earlier and better manuscript with the LXX's shortness being due to scribal omissions (e.g. haplography)⁷⁰⁶ or intentional shortening by the Old Greek translator.⁷⁰⁷ Aside from general exegetical relevance, this is of interest because a few passages in which MT has the full SFP triad the LXX only retains two of the punishments (sword and famine). In each case in which the MT has the full SFP triad and the LXX does not, the LXX always lacks an equivalent for *deber* "pestilence." While this might suggest that the MT contains expansions to fill out a perceived cycle, it is not so straightforward.

⁷⁰⁴ For a thorough and current summary of some of the issues, see Armin Lange and Emanuel Tov, eds., *The Hebrew Bible: Pentateuch, Former and Latter Prophets*, vol. 1B of *Textual History of the Bible*, ed. Armin Lange (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 495-555.

⁷⁰⁵ Standout representatives of this view include: Holladay, A. Lange, E. Tov, and R. D. Weis. See, respectively, Holladay, *Jeremiah 2, 8*; Armin Lange, *Die Handschriften biblischer Bücher von Qumran und den anderen Fundorten*, vol. 1 of *Handbuch der Textfunde vom Toten Meer* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 297-324; Emanuel Tov, *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 363-384; R. D. Weis, "The Textual Situation for the Book of Jeremiah," in *Sófer Mahîr: Essays in Honour of Adrian Schenker Offered by Editors of Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, eds. Y. Goldman, A. van der Kooij, and R.D. Weis (VTSup 110; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 269-293.

⁷⁰⁶ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 57-62.

⁷⁰⁷ Georg Fischer, *Jeremia 1-25* (HThKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2005), 39-46.

Both MT and LXX contain examples of the full SFP triad (Jer 14:12; 21:7; 24:10; 34:17) and examples of the sword/famine dyad.⁷⁰⁸ One example in which the LXX has a dyad in place of MT's triad seems to be a case of haplography. In Jer 21:7-9, Yahweh promises to give Zedekiah hiding behind Jerusalem's walls over to the Babylonian king through the SFP triad. The triad is present in both the MT and LXX text forms of v. 7. In v. 9, however, when the same message is directed to the people in general the LXX preserves only two punishments for those in the city, sword and famine. Since the SFP triad is already present in the LXX text of v. 7 as a punishment for those remaining in Jerusalem, it seems less likely that v. 9 would lack a reference to the aforementioned pestilence (v. 7), especially since it is part of Yahweh's personal attack on his people in v. 6 of both MT and LXX text forms.

Additionally, of the number of shorter lists of punishments in the LXX compared to MT the majority come only in the later portions of the book.⁷⁰⁹ This is significant because the shift to exclusively using the sword and famine dyad occurs alongside a change in translation of *ḥereb* "sword" from *machaira* "short sword, dagger" to *rhomphaia* "broad sword." This complicates the usual division of the book into two sections (chapters 1-28 and 29-51) based on a change in translation practice for certain Hebrew words, since *machaira* appears in the triad in Jer 34:17. Whether the translation

⁷⁰⁸ For examples in both the MT and the LXX: Jer 5:12; 11:22; 14:13, 15, 16, 18; 42:16; 44:12, 18, 27. For examples in only the LXX: Jer 21:9; 32:24; 38:2; 42:17, 22; 44:13.

⁷⁰⁹ In chapters 1-34, there are two clear cases (Jer 21:9 and Jer 32:24) and one ambiguous case in Jer 32:36. The text of Jer 32:36 is not as clear because it does contain a triad, just not the same triad as the MT. In the LXX version the triad of punishments is sword, famine, and dispatching (*apostolē*). This is difficult since *apostolē* is not used elsewhere to translate *deber* "pestilence," instead it is commonly used to translate nouns from the root *šlh* "send." This same triad (including *apostolē*) is found in Bar 2:25. In chapters 35-52, there are four clear cases (Jer 38:2; 42:17, 22; 44:13).

change is due to a different author or the work of a redactor is uncertain. But it does serve to cast doubt on a simplistic view that in the case of the SFP triad the MT is expansionistic.⁷¹⁰ That having been said, with one exception I have limited myself to referencing texts in which the triad appears in both the MT and the LXX. For the exception, I have made it clear that I am referring only to the MT version.

The Meaning of the SFP Triad

Applying semiotic theory to the motif of the SFP triad, we can see a series of three signs that together signify something greater than their individual elements. Of the three signs that make up the SFP triad, the sword (*hereb*) has the most numerous and complex field of meaning. In various contexts, *hereb* can be a symbol, index, icon, or hybrid (e.g. indexical icon) sign. As we have seen in previous chapters, the sword functions as an icon for battle power; a symbol for the king, his permission to conquer, royal piety, ideal kingship; and an index for prestige. As mentioned in chapter two, perhaps the most often cited figurative meaning for *hereb* is war. Many commentators understand the sword in these references to be a metaphor for war in general and soldiers of the enemy in specific. Though, more precisely, the sword as war or soldiers serves as an indexical sign based on synecdochic and metonymic relation, respectively. The best example of *hereb* serving as a synecdoche (part for the whole) for war appears Yahweh's restating of the position of those who want to flee to Egypt:

14. *lē`mōr lō` kī`eres mišrayim nābō` `āšer lō`-nir`eh milhāmā wəqōl šōpār lō` nišmā` wəlallehem lō`-nir`āb wəšām nēšēb*

⁷¹⁰ Since long and short versions of Jeremiah co-existed at Qumran, it may be better to think of multivalences in the textual tradition in place of a quest for the “original” or earliest, i.e. most authentic version. For an in-depth discussion of this approach, see Gary D. Martin, *Multiple Originals: New Approaches to Hebrew Bible Textual Criticism* (TCSt 7; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010).

15. *wə'attā lākēn šim'û dābar-yhwh šə'ērît yəhûdā kōh-'āmar yhwh
šəbā'ôt 'ēlōhē yiśrā'ēl 'im-'attem sôm tāsīmûn pənēkem lābō' mišrayim
ûbā'tem lāgûr šām*

16. *wəhāyātā haḥereb 'āšer attem yərē'im mimmennā šām taśśīg 'etkem
bə'ereš mišrayim wəhārā'āb 'āšer-attem dō'āgîm mimmennû šām yidbaq
'aḥārekem mišrayim wəšām tāmūtû*

14. No, we will go to Egypt, where we will not see war, nor will we hear the sound of the shofar, we will not hunger for bread; we will remain there.

15. Now therefore hear the word of Yahweh, O remnant of Judah, thus says Yahweh of Hosts, God of Israel, if you truly set your face to go to Egypt and go to sojourn there,

16. The sword, which you were fearing, will overtake you there in the land of Egypt, the famine of which you were anxious, will pursue you there, to Egypt and you will die there.

(Jer 42:14-16)

In these verses, Yahweh rephrases the people's words and their desire not to see war (*milḥāmā*) is described as fear of the sword (*ḥereb*). Similarly, the people are worried about hungering (*nir'āb*) for bread, which Yahweh recasts as famine (*rā'āb*). At other times, however, *ḥereb* is the indexical sign for enemy forces, usually enemy armies, as can be seen after Ezekiel is brought to the temple to see the leaders of the people:⁷¹¹

8. *ḥereb yərē'tem wəḥereb 'ābî' 'ālêkem nə'um 'ādōnāy yhwh*

9. *wəhōšē'tî 'etkem mittōkāh wənātattî 'etkem bəyad-zārîm wə'āsîtî bākem
šəpā'îm*

8. You have feared a sword and a sword I will bring against you, utterance of the Lord.

9. I will lead you out from its midst, I will place you into the hand of foreigners, and I will carry out judgments against you.

(Ezek 11:8-9)

In this example, the sword is equated with the foreigners that surround the city and into whose power Yahweh will deliver his people. In this way, the sword functions as a metonymy of object for user, where the sword represents those who usually wield it, i.e.

⁷¹¹ Other examples include: Jer 6:25; 15:9; 19:7; 20:4; 33:4; 46:13-14.

soldiers. In yet other passages *hereb* signifies violent death, as when Yahweh promises king Zedekiah:

4. 'ak šama ' dābar-yhwh šidqîyāhû melek yəhūdā kōh- 'āmar yhwh 'ālēkā lō' tāmût beḥāreb

5. bəšālôm tāmût ūkəmišrəpôt 'əbôtēkā hamməlākîm hāri 'šōnîm 'āšer-hāyū ləpānēkā kēn yišrəpû-lāk wəhōy 'ādôn yispədû-lāk kî-dābār 'ānî-dibbartî nə 'um-yhwh

4. However, hear the word of Yahweh, o Zedekiah, king of Judah. Thus says Yahweh concerning you, “You will not die by the sword.

5. You will die in peace. Like the burning (of incense for) your fathers, the former kings who were before you, thus they will burn (incense) for you. ‘Alas, o lord!’ they will lament. For I myself have spoken it, utterance of Yahweh.”

(Jer 34:4-5)

Here death by the sword is contrasted with a peaceful death. In this case, *hereb* serves as an indexical sign for violent death based on a metonymic relation (cause for effect). The distinction between violent death and war is blurry by nature, since war is an activity whose success can be measured in dead bodies. Scarry understands war to be a context in which “the goal is to out-injure the opponent.”⁷¹² Yet, not every reference to death by the sword in the Hebrew Bible takes place in the context of war. For example, after a prophetic contest, Elijah slaughters the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18:40). This event is later summarized as Elijah killing the prophets of Baal with a sword (*beḥāreb*) (1 Kgs 19:1). Similarly, when Jeremiah was threatened with death for predicting that the Jerusalem temple would become desolate like Shiloh (Jer 26:6), the elders brought up examples of previous prophets who had spoken against the city and its temple. Among these examples was Uriah son of Shemaiah, whom king Jehoiakim struck (*nkh*) with the sword and cast

⁷¹² Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 63.

away his body (Jer 26:23). Thus, death by the sword does not imply, in and of itself, death during war or battle.

Looking beyond these three examples from Jeremiah and Ezekiel reveals there are yet more meanings for which the sword is the sign-vehicle. The sword functions as a telescoping sign signifying war in general, enemy combatants, and violent death for individuals. In a different context, the sword of Yahweh often refers to vengeance of God upon Israel's enemies (Deut 32:41-43; Judg 7:20). Often throughout the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, this sword has been bitterly turned against Israel (i.e. Judah) itself. There are many passages in which the exact context does not clearly delimited the multiplicity of possible meanings. In these situations, *ḥereb* can represent many different sign-objects (or signifieds in Saussurian terminology) at the same time, thus evoking images of war, foreign enemies, and violent death all at once.

In addition to the multitude of culturally conditioned meanings associated with the sword as a sign, there is also a superior level of meaning associated with the word *ḥereb*. As we saw for Barthes, his category of myth, exists on a level above normal signification, in which an entire sign becomes a signifier (representamen in Pearce's terminology) with an additional layer of meaning.⁷¹³ L. Helmslev connects the metasemiotic level, similar to Barthes "myth," to historical, political, sociological, psychological, and religious views.⁷¹⁴ At the metasemiotic level, the sword, at least in

⁷¹³ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 118.

⁷¹⁴ Louis Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, trans. Francis J. Whitfield (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), 125.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel, signifies divine punishment. This will be addressed in more detail below, as the sword can be used to refer to the SFP triad itself.

Aside from being the most complex and polysemous sign among the SFP triad, the sword's special status is indicated by its order in triad and other groups of punishments as well as its frequency of occurrence. Looking at the order of the triad, it should be remembered that the most common sequence is sword, famine, pestilence (18x). Even when a different order is presented (5x), the sword is still first in two out of five examples (Jer 34:17 and Ezek 7:15). Perhaps more telling, is the fact that in all of Jeremiah and Ezekiel's lists of punishments, the sword (*ḥereb*) is always included. Pestilence (*deber*) and famine (*rā'āb*) do not occur together in the prophets without the sword. This taken together with the fact that the sword can signify the SFP triad itself as a metonymy demonstrates the special status of the sword within the triad.

In the case of the prophets, the SFP triad represents punishment resulting from covenant infidelity. This becomes most clear in an example from Jeremiah 34, in which the people of Jerusalem went back on their covenant to release their Hebrew slaves in the seventh year:

16. *wattāšubû wattəḥalləlû 'et-šamî wattāšībû 'iš 'et-'abdô wə'iš 'et-šiphātô 'ăšer-šillaḥtem ḥāpāšîm lənapšām wattikbāšû 'otām lihyôt lākem la'ābādîm wəlišpāḥôt*

17. *lākēn kōh-'āmar yhwḥ 'attem lō'-šama'tem 'elay liqrō' dərōr 'iš lə'āḥîw wə'iš lərē'ēhū hinnî qōrē' lākem dərōr nə'um-yhwḥ 'el-haḥereb 'el-haddeber wə'el-hārā'āb wənātattî 'etkem lizwā'ā ləkōl mamləkōt hā'āreṣ*

18. *wənātattî 'et-hā'ānāšîm hā'ōbərîm 'et-bərītî 'ăšer lō'-hēqîmû 'et-dibrē habbərît 'ăšer kārətû ləpānāy hā'ēgel 'ăšer kārətû lišnayim wayya'abrû bēn bātārāyw*

19. *šārē yəhūdā wəsārē yərūšālam hassārîsim wəhakkōhānîm wəkōl 'am hā'āreṣ hā'ōbərîm bēn bitrē hā'ēgel*

20. *wəṇātattî 'ôtām bəyad 'ōyābēhem ūbəyad məbaqšē napšām wəhāyətā
niblātām ləma 'ākāl lə 'ōp hāššāmayim ūləbehēmat hā 'āreš*
 21. *wə 'et-šidqīyāhū melek-yəhūdā wə 'et-šārāyw 'ettēn bəyad 'ōyābēhem
ūbəyad məbaqšē napšām ūbəyad hēl melek bābel hā 'ōlīm mē 'ālékem*
 22. *hinnī məšawweh nə 'um-yhwh wahšībōtīm 'el-hā 'ir hazzō 't
wənilhāmū 'ālēhā ūləkadūhā ūšərapuhā bā 'ēš wə 'et- 'ārē yəhūdā 'ettēn
šəmāmā mē 'ēn yōšēb*

16. But you've turned back (again) and profaned my name. Each of you brought back his servant and each of you his maidservant, whom you let go free according to their desire; You forced them to be your servants and maidservants.

17. Therefore, thus says Yahweh, "You have not listened to me for calling the release, each for his brother and his companion; Here I am calling your release, utterance of Yahweh, to the sword, pestilence, and famine. I will make you a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

18. I will make the men who were transgressing my covenant, who did not keep the words of the covenant, which they made before me; the young bull which they cut in two and passed between its pieces.

19. The leaders of Judah, the leaders Jerusalem, the high officials, the priests and all the people of the land who were passing between the pieces of the young bull.

20. He will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those pursuing their lives; Their corpses will become food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the land.

21. I will give Zedekiah, king of Judah, and his leaders into the hand of their enemies, into the hand of those pursuing their lives; into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon, who are departing from you.

22. Here I am commanding, utterance of Yahweh, I will bring them back to this city so they will fight against it, capture it and burn it with fire; I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without an inhabitant.

(Jer 34:16-22)

Because the people broke their covenant with Yahweh and did not release (*dərôr*) their slaves, Yahweh proclaims their release (*dərôr*) to the SFP triad. While the triad refers symbolically to their punishment, the unpacking of the punishment in verses 20-22 demonstrate that we should be cautious in taking the triad of punishments literally. For what follows describes the enemies of Jerusalem, namely forces of the king of Babylon, who will return and destroy Jerusalem and the cities of Judah. There is no mention of famine or pestilence. Though one might argue that such disasters may be implied in the

very nature of a siege, the way the siege is described here lacks any clear reference to famine or pestilence. In fact, according to the narrative, the siege progresses very rapidly, leaving little time for famine. The army of Babylon in quick succession is described as fighting, capturing, and burning the city (v.22). The SFP triad represents divine punishment for breaking covenant, regardless of what the actual series of punishments ended up being.

Similar to Jer 34:16-22, in Jer 14:10-12 the SFP triad is invoked as punishment for Judah's breaching of covenant. After a confession of sin (14:7) and a plea for aid (14:8-9), which includes asking why Yahweh is like a stranger (*gēr*) in the land, Yahweh responds:

10. *kōh-`āmar yhw h lā`ām hazzeh kēn `āhābū lānūa` raglēhem lō` hāsākū wayhwh lō` rāšām `attā yizkōr `āwōnām wəyipqōd haṭṭō` tām*
 11. *wayyō`mer yhwh `elāy `al-titpalēl bə`ad-hā`ām hazzeh laṭōbā*
 12. *kī yāšumū `ēnenni šōmēa` `el-rinnātām wəkī ya`ālū `ōlā ūminhā `ēnenni rōšām kī baḥereb ūbārā`āb ūbaddeber `ānōkī məkalleh `ōtām*

10. Thus Yahweh said concerning this people: Thus, they love to wander; they do not restrain their feet. And Yahweh is not pleased with them. Now, he will remember their iniquity and punish their sin.
 11. Yahweh said to me, “Do not pray for good on behalf of this people.
 12. When they fast, I do not listen to their wailing and when they offer burnt offering and cereal offering I am not pleased with them. Indeed, by the sword, by famine, by pestilence I myself will finish them.”
 (Jer 14:10-12)

Although the covenant is not explicitly mentioned in these verses, the reference to the iniquity (*`āwōn*) and sin (*hāṭṭā`t*) of the people points in this direction. Additionally, Lundbom notes that in Jeremiah, Yahweh's rejection of offerings is a response to disdain of his word and covenant.⁷¹⁵ As noted above, many scholars have rightly noted the

⁷¹⁵ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 707.

similarities in language between Jeremiah and Ezekiel's portents of disaster and the covenant curses in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26, usually with the notion that Jeremiah borrows more heavily from Deuteronomy while Ezekiel borrows from Leviticus. This fits within Alexander's view, in which carrier groups draw upon their traditions and symbolically charged cultural work to compose their trauma narratives.⁷¹⁶ While it seems clear that Jeremiah and Ezekiel use the rhetoric of the covenantal curses as a rich cultural foundation to explain Judah's troubles, a closer examination of the covenantal curses reveals that the triad as a motif and symbol, though clearly composed of elements from the curses, is a creation and adaptation of these two prophets to summarize and distill covenantal punishment.⁷¹⁷

⁷¹⁶ Alexander, "Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 12.

⁷¹⁷ More precisely, it is likely a creation of the authors/editors of the book of Jeremiah, which was subsequently adapted in the book of Ezekiel. The conclusion that the SFP triad cannot be traced exactly back to earlier Israelite curse traditions raises the question of the relationship of Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's use of the SFP triad. Holladay suggests that it is possible that Jeremiah drew upon an existing oral tradition, though our evidence really begins with Jeremiah's use of the motif. See William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 1-25*, ed. Paul D. Hanson (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1986), 434-435. While an oral tradition is certainly possible, at this point the notion merely introduces an additional element that cannot be accounted for in trying to understand the development of the SFP triad motif.

The consensus among scholars is that the triad is Jeremiah's creation. This conclusion is based on the presumed anteriority of Jeremiah to Ezekiel and Ezekiel's more developed use of the triad in terms of ordering and purpose. To the first point, scholars such as Block and Greenberg often consider certain passages in the book of Ezekiel to be adaptations or reworkings of Jeremian passages or conceptions (e.g. the prophet's commission). See Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 22; New York: Doubleday, 1983), 78, 303; Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1-24*, 443 n. 29, 517. It should be noted that neither scholar uses the SFP triad as an example of this phenomenon. Concerning the second point, Weippert suggests that the fluid ordering of elements (sword, famine, pestilence) in Ezekiel and Ezekiel's development of the SFP triad in connection with the notion of "coming to know Yahweh" offers evidence of Ezekiel's dependence upon Jeremiah. See, Weippert, *Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches*, 177-179. I find these arguments generally persuasive and so I am working from the presumption that Ezekiel borrowed this motif from Jeremiah.

As to how this motif could have reached Ezekiel, there are a few possibilities. First, depending on when one dates some of Jeremiah's messages, Ezekiel may have heard of this motif (directly or indirectly) while in Jerusalem. Secondly, we know from both the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel (e.g. Ezek 33:21) that there was some communication between the exiles in Babylonia and the community in Jerusalem. Jeremiah's letter to the exiles (Jer 29:1-23) is one such example. Interestingly, the passage contains two references to the SFP triad (Jer 29:17, 18). This passage, however, is absent from the LXX version of Jeremiah, so it should not be relied upon too heavily. That said, there is a good case to be made for the continuing communication between the two groups.

Turning to the covenantal curses of Deuteronomy and Leviticus, the connections between Jeremiah and Ezekiel’s language of punishment and the language of the covenantal curses has been well documented by scholars.⁷¹⁸ These parallels are both thematic and more importantly based on the use of rare words and expressions. This observation is nothing new and thus I will briefly explore a few representative examples before I elaborate on the new encapsulation of divine punishment in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Starting with Ezekiel and Leviticus, there is a sword related turn of phrase unique to the two sources. In the curses of Leviticus 26 we find:

33. *wə`etkem `ezāreh baggōyim wahāriqōtī `ahārekem hāreb wəhāyātā
`arsakem šamāmā wə`ārēkem yihyū horbā*

33. I will **scatter** you among the nations. I **will unsheathe the sword after** you. Your land will become a desolation; your cities will become ruins.

(Lev 26:33)

The phrase of import in this verse is to “unsheathe the sword after someone.” The verb translated “unsheathe” (*rīq* “empty” in the *hiphil*) is unusual.⁷¹⁹ Normally, the verb *šlp* “pull, draw” is used to express the unsheathing of a sword (e.g. Josh 5:13; 1 Sam 17:51). With the exception of Exod 15:9, *rīq* is used of swords only in Lev 26:33 and Ezekiel.⁷²⁰ Unique to Leviticus and Ezekiel is addition of the preposition “after” (*`aḥar*) and in many cases this phrase follows directly after a reference to scattering (*zrh*) a people. For example, in Ezek 5:12 and 12:14:

⁷¹⁸ Lundbom explores the connections between the book of Jeremiah and Deuteronomy 28 and 32. See, respectively, Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, 41-42; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 110-114.

⁷¹⁹ This observation is also noted by Levine, who notes that a similar expression is used of a spear in Ps 35:3. See Levine, *Leviticus*, 189, 212 n. 37.

⁷²⁰ Ezek 5:2, 12; 12:14; 28:7; 30:11.

12. *šālīšītēk baddeber yāmūtū ūbārā ‘āb yiklū batōkēk wəhaššālīšūt
baḥereb yippəlū səbībōtāyik wəhaššālīšūt ləkōl-rūaḥ ’ēzāreh wəḥereb ’ārīq
'aḥrēhem*

12. A third of you will die by plague, and they will perish by famine in your midst. One third will fall by the sword around you, one third I will **scatter** to every wind and I **will unsheathe the sword after** them.
(Ezek 5:12)

14. *wəkōl ’āšer səbībōtāyiw ’ezrōh/’ezrō wəkōl-’āgappāyiw ’ēzāreh ləkōl-
rūaḥ wəḥereb ’ārīq ’aḥrēhem*

14. Everyone around him, his helpers and his all his troops, I will **scatter** to every wind. I **will unsheathe the sword after** them.
(Ezek 12:14)

While Ezekiel’s use of the phrase “unsheathe the sword” makes use of the SFP triad, the triad element is missing from Lev 26:33. This would make sense if the triad, as a set expression, was developed by Jeremiah and Ezekiel afterwards and out of the covenantal curses in the process of creating a trauma narrative concerns to the threat of exile.⁷²¹

Turning to another example, the Deuteronomist uses the word *za ’āwā* “fright, terror” to describe what Israel will become after breaking the covenant:⁷²²

25. *yittenkā yhwḥ niggāp lipnē ’ōyābēkā ’eḥād tēšē’ ’ēlāyiw ūbāšib ’ā
dərākīm tānūs ləpānāyiw wəḥāyītā ləza ’āwā ləkōl mamləkōt hā ’āreṣ*

25. Yahweh will cause you to be struck before your enemies; You will go out by one road against him, but you will flee by seven roads before him; You will become a **fright to all the kingdoms of the earth**.
(Deut 28:25)

⁷²¹ This also fits Milgrom’s view that Ezekiel was borrowing from Leviticus, instead of the other way around, and that Ezekiel probably had “the entire MT of Lev 26:3-39 before him.” See Milgrom, *Leviticus* 23-27, 2352.

⁷²² While the meaning of *za ’āwā*, from the root *zw* “tremble,” is generally agreed upon, it appears in two different forms: *za ’āwā* in Deut 28:25 and Ezek 23:46 and *zəwā ’ā* in Jer 15:4; 24:9; 29:18; 34:17; and 2 Chron 29:8. Each of the latter verses is accompanied with a *qere*, correcting the reading to that of Deut 28:2 and Ezek 23:46. For the sake of simplicity I will be following the *qere*.

In the entire Hebrew Bible, this word occurs once in Deuteronomy, once in Ezek 23:46, once in 2 Chron 29:8, and four times in Jeremiah.⁷²³ Additionally, the attestations in Jeremiah, contra the Ezekiel and 2 Chronicles examples, all contain the prepositional phrase “to all the kingdoms of the earth” (*lākōl mamlākôt hā’āreṣ*) like Deut 28:25. For example, in Jer 29:18 we find:

18. *wārādaptî ’aḥārêhem baḥereb bārā’āb ûbaddāber ûnātattîm
lizwā’â/lāza ’āwâ lākōl mamlākôt hā’āreṣ lā’ālâ ûlāšammâ wəlišrēqâ
ûlāḥerpâ bākōl-haggōyim ’āšer-hiddaḥtîm*

18. I will pursue after them with the sword, famine, and pestilence; I will make them into a **fright to all the kingdoms of the earth**, into a curse, into a horror, into a hissing, and into a taunt among all the nations in which I will scatter them.
(Jer 29:18)

Like the example from Ezek 5:12, the SFP triad makes its way into this reference to covenantal cursing. As mentioned above, similar examples of borrowing could be multiplied.⁷²⁴ This will come as no surprise, as Jeremiah has long been connected with the Deuteronomic school and Ezekiel with P and the Holiness Code.⁷²⁵ For our purposes, the significance lies in the fact that both Jeremiah and Ezekiel turned to the rich tradition of the covenant curses to make sense of dire situation of both the first-stage exiles (597 BCE) and those remaining in Judah. Yet, as we have seen in the examples above, the

⁷²³ Jer 15:4; 24:9; 29:18; and 34:17.

⁷²⁴ For examples, see Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 320-361, esp. 359-361.

⁷²⁵ Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19* (WBC 28; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 92-96. For the dependence of Ezekiel upon the Holiness source (H), see Risa Levitt Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul: Ezekiel, the Exile and the Torah* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 79; Michael Lyons, *From Law to Prophecy: Ezekiel's Use of the Holiness Code* (LHBOTS 507; London: T&T Clark, 2009), 35-46 (contra. Carr); and Eve Levavi Feinstein, *Sexual Pollution in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 134-141.

prophets were never content simply to repeat the covenant curses. They drew from a deep well of tradition to fashion their new, highly evocative symbolic imagery. One element that they add is the SFP triad as a representation of divine punishment.

The first and most obvious point to make is that the SFP triad as a set phrase never occurs among the covenantal curses of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. To be sure, there are references to the components of the triad individually among the many punishments that the triad does not seem to explicitly cover. The SFP triad, in its individual components, does not cover the rich multitude of curses of Deuteronomy and Leviticus. Yet, as a symbol for the punishment of covenantal infidelity, it comes to represent all these curses and more. Though the SFP triad does not occur as a set phrase, scholars do find its reflection in certain passages, for example Deut 28:20-26.⁷²⁶ Lundbom considers this particular collection of curses to be the earliest supplement to what he considers the core blessings and curses (vv. 1-6, 15-19):⁷²⁷

20. *yəšallah yhw̄h bəkā 'et-hammə 'ērā 'et-hamməhūmā wə 'et-hammig 'eret bəkol-mišlah yādəkā 'āšer ta 'āseh 'ad hiššāmedkā wə 'ad- 'ābodkā mahēr mippənē rōa ' ma 'ālālēkā 'āšer 'āzabtānī*
 21. *yadbēq yhw̄h bəkā 'et-haddāber 'ad kallōtō 'ōtəkā mē 'al hā 'ādāmā 'āšer- 'attā bā '-šāmmā lərištāh*
 22. *yakkəkā yhw̄h baššaḥepet ūbaqqaddaḥat ūbaddalleqet ūbaḥarḥur ūbaḥereb ūbaššiddāpōn ūbayyērāqōn ūrādāpūkā 'ad 'obdekā*
 23. *wəhāyū šāmēkā 'āšer 'al-rō 'šəkā nəḥōšet wəhā 'āreš 'āšer-taḥtēkā barzel*
 24. *yittēn yhw̄h 'et-məṭar 'aršəkā 'ābāq wə 'āpār min-haššāmīm yērēd 'ālēkā 'ad hiššomdāk*
 25. *yittenkā yhw̄h niggāp lipnē 'ōyabēkā 'eḥād tēšē' 'ēlāyw ūbāšib 'ā dərākīm tānūs ləpānāyw wəhāyitā ləza 'āwā ləkōl mamləkōt hā 'āreš*
 26. *wəhāyətā niblātəkā ləma 'ākāl ləkōl- 'ōp haššāmayim ūləbehēmat hā 'āreš wə 'ēn maḥārīd*

⁷²⁶ Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 262 and Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12*, 681.

⁷²⁷ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 757.

20. Yahweh will send against you curse, panic, and threat in every undertaking of your hand which you do, until you are destroyed, until you perish quickly because of the evil of your deeds, which you abandoned me.
21. Yahweh will cause pestilence to cling to you until it finishes you from upon the land to which you are going to possess.
22. Yahweh will strike you with consumption, inflammation, fever, burning heat, sword/drought, scorching, and mildew. They will pursue you until you perish.
23. Your skies, which are over your head, will become bronze; The earth, which is under you, (will become) iron.
24. Yahweh will make the rain of your land dust, soil will descend from the sky upon you until you are destroyed.
25. Yahweh will cause you to be struck before your enemies; You will go out by one road against him, but you will flee by seven roads before him; You will become a fright to all the kingdoms of the earth.
26. Your corpse will be food for every bird of the sky and every beast of the land; with none frightening (them away).
- (Deut 28:21-26)

In these verses, pestilence (*deber*) appears clearly, but sword and famine appear only with a little interpretation. Of the two, the sword is perhaps the easiest to perceive. Verse 25 describes Israel's route before their enemies, which functions as the inverse of the blessing in v.7. As we saw above, the sword (*hereb*) can serve as a sign for enemy forces and warfare in general. D. Christensen sees in verse 26 a reference to "ignoble death in warfare where the corpses remain unburied."⁷²⁸ Though this is possible, coming at the end of this series of curses seems to a summary of the death caused by all the previous curses, which will so completely devastate Israel that no one will be left to bury the dead. Additionally, though lack of burial can be a result of war (e.g. 1 Sam 17:44 and Jer 19:7), it can be the result of multiple disasters, such as famine and disease (Jer 16:4 and EST 481-484). Famine, if present in the passage, is evoked through famine's causes, a lack of fertility in the land, represented by a metal sky and earth and dust in place of rain (vv. 23-

⁷²⁸ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12*, 681.

24). The focus seems to be less upon famine itself, rather it is the transformation of the promised land, a land proverbial for its fecundity, into an alien landscape of metal and dust. It is also equally likely that vv. 23-24 may refer to drought rather than famine, as is the case in Jer 14:1-6. In fact, it is not clear to me that these verses reflect the triad of sword, famine, pestilence any more than another similar grouping, such as Ezekiel's tetrad of sword (*hereb*), famine (*rā'āb*), wild animals (*ḥayyā rā'ā*), and pestilence (*deber*). The point is there are any number of ways a prophet could choose to summarize the curses in Deut 28:20-26, which could include curse (*mā'ērā*), panic (*māhūmā*), or diseases.

Similarly, scholars find in Lev 26:25-26 a reference to the triad of sword, famine, and pestilence:⁷²⁹

25. *wāḥēbē 'tī 'ālēkem ḥereb nōqemet naqam-bərīt wāne 'ēsaptem 'el-
'ārēkem wāšillaḥtī deber bātōkkem wānittattem bəyad- 'ōyēb*
26. *bāšibrī lākem maṭṭeh-leḥem wā 'āpū 'ešer nāšīm laḥmākem bātannūr
'eḥād wāḥēšībū laḥmākem bammišqāl wa 'ākaltē wālō ' tišbā 'ū*

25. I will bring against you a sword which takes the revenge for covenant and (though) you gather in your cities I will send pestilence in your midst and you will be given into the power of an enemy.

26. When I break your staff of bread, ten women will bake your bread in one oven and they will give out your bread by weight you will eat but not be satisfied.

(Lev 26:25-26)

This formulation is as close as we come to the SFP triad in the covenantal curses. The sword and pestilence are clearly paired together in v. 25. Famine appears if we take breaking the staff of bread to be a metaphor for famine. This phrase “breaking the staff of bread” is rare and appears in this verse, Ezekiel (4:16; 5:16; 14:13), and Ps 105:16.

⁷²⁹ Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 417 and Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2311-2313.

Though there is some disagreement about the real-world referent for the phrase, it is thought to represent a food shortage.⁷³⁰ Ezekiel clearly associates the phrase with famine:

16. *bəšalləḥî ʿet-ḥiṣṣê ḥārā ʿāb ḥārā ʿim bāhem ʿāšer ḥāyû ləmašḥîṯ ʿāšer-ʿāšallah ʿōtām ləšaḥetkem wəṛā ʿāb ʿōsēp ʿālêkem wəšābartî lākem maṭṭēh-lāḥem*

16. When I send out deadly arrows of famine against them, which will become destruction, which I will send them to destroy you, I will increase the famine upon you and I will break your staff of bread.
(Ezek 5:16)

13. *ben-ʿādām ʿereṣ kî teḥēṯā ʿ-liš lim ʿāl-ma ʿal wənāṯīṯî yādî ʿālêḥā wəšābartî lāḥ maṭṭēh-lāḥem wəḥiṣlaḥṯî-bāḥ rā ʿāb wəḥikrattî mimmennā ʿādām ūbəḥēmā*

13. O, son of man, if a land sins against me by committing infidelity, I will stretch out my hand against it. I will break its staff of bread. I will send famine against it, so that I exterminate man and beast from it.
(Ezek 14:13)

Though the elements of the SFP triad are present in Lev 26:25-26, its classic formulation is a development of the latter prophets. The *accumulatio* (to borrow Lundbom’s phrase) of sword, famine, pestilence does not occur in the covenantal curses, though, as we have seen, the elements of the triad do appear among a variety of gruesome curses. In fact, the word “famine” (*rā ʿāb*) does not ever appear in the book of Leviticus. To be clear, my point is not to deny any reference to sword, famine, and pestilence in these verses, but merely to point out that summarizing this passage with the SFP triad is to read back into the covenant curses the symbolic triad that Jeremiah and Ezekiel hewed from it.

⁷³⁰ Koehler and Baumgartner take the staff (*maṭṭeh*) to refer to a pole on which bread was hung to keep it out of the reach of rodents, see *HALOT*, s.v. *maṭṭeh*, 573. On the other hand, Dahood understands *maṭṭeh* to refer to the stem of the grain. See Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms III 101-150: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 17A; New York: Double Day, 1969), 56.

Having demonstrated that Jeremiah and Ezekiel drew from the language of the covenant curses to frame their understanding of disaster, while at the same time shaping these traditions into something new to encapsulate divine punishment, I will explore how the prophets approached this process. Concerning the SFP triad itself, it is used exclusively to represent Yahweh's punishment of his own people. The expression takes on a more static order in the book of Jeremiah compared to Ezekiel. Of the fifteen occurrences in Jeremiah, thirteen appear in the order sword, famine, and pestilence.⁷³¹ In Ezekiel's six references, half have the order sword, famine, and pestilence, while the remaining three occurrences each have their own sequence.⁷³² Variations or alternatives to the SFP triad appear with different numbers of destructive forces, though none occur with the same frequency as sword, famine, and pestilence. Two of these alternative groupings are worthy of special mention. First is the tetrad of the families (*mišpāḥôt*) or judgments (*špāḥîm*) of God in Jer 15:3 and Ezek 14:21, respectively:

15:3 *ûpāqadtî 'ălêhem 'arba' mišpāḥôt nâ'um-yhwh 'et-haḥereb lahārōg wâ'et-hakkālābîm lišḥōb wâ'et-'ōp haššāmayim wâ'et-beḥēmat hā'āreṣ le'ēkōl ûlahašḥîṭ*

15:3 I will appoint over you four families, utterance of Yahweh, the sword to slay; dogs to drag away; birds of the sky and beasts of the earth to devour and to destroy.
(Jer 15:3)

14:21 *kî kōh 'āmar 'ādōnāy yhwh 'ap kî-'arba' at špāṭay hārā'îm ḥereb wārā'āb wəḥayyâ rā'â wādeber šillaḥtî 'el-yərûšālāim ləhokrîṭ mimmennâ 'ādām ûbəḥēmâ*

⁷³¹ In Jer 21:7 we find the order: pestilence, sword, and famine. Jer 34:17 presents the triad as sword, pestilence, and famine.

⁷³² Pestilence, famine, sword (Ezek 5:12); pestilence, sword, famine (6:12); sword, pestilence, famine (7:15).

14:21 Indeed, thus says lord Yahweh, "How much less if I released my four terrible judgments: sword, famine, wild animals, and pestilence against Jerusalem to exterminate man and beast from it."
(Ezek 14:21)

Both lists have in common the sword and wild animals, either as a collective or listed more specifically (dogs, birds, beasts). Ezekiel's tetrad is the SFP triad with the addition of wild animals (*ḥayyā rā'ā*). These tetrads of punishments are not repeated outside these verses, though individual elements in different combinations do appear.⁷³³ They have received special attention due to the fact that they are numerically and typologically categorized.⁷³⁴ The second group worthy of mention is the dyad of sword and famine, which appear often in the book of Jeremiah and once in Lam 4:9. In Jeremiah the dyad is primarily put into the mouths of Jeremiah's opponents, before being subsequently turned upon them.⁷³⁵ The dyad of sword and famine first appears in the words of false prophets who promise "we will not see sword or famine" (*wəḥereb wārā'āb lō' nir'eh*) in Jer 5:12. The contrast between the dyad and the triad appears in Jeremiah 14:

12. *kī yāšumū 'énennî šōmēa' 'el-rinnātām wəkī ya'ālū 'ōlā ūminḥā 'énennî rōšām kī baḥereb ūbārā'āb ūbaddeber 'ānōkī məkalleh 'ōtām*
13. *wā'ōmar 'āhāh 'ādōnāy yhwh hinnēh hannābī'im 'ōmarīm lāhem lō'-tir'ū ḥereb wārā'āb lō'-yihyē lākem kī-šəlōm 'ēmet 'ettēn lākem bammāqōm hazzeh*

⁷³³ The closest parallel to Ezek 14:21 is Ezek 5:17, which adds bloodshed (*dām*) to famine, pestilence, wild animals, and sword.

⁷³⁴ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1-24*, 443-445; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 721-722.

⁷³⁵ There are two exceptions to this. In Jer 11:22, God promises to punish the people of Anathoth with sword and famine because they threatened Jeremiah. There is no mention of them claiming, like the false prophets, that they would not see sword or famine, though their attempts at silencing Jeremiah may make them implicit allies to those who preached safety. The second example, is Jer 14:18, in which either has a vision of the devastation both within and outside the city characterized by sword and famine. Weippert considers this verse to be under the influence of the quoted words of the false prophets. See Weippert, *Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches*, 160. It is not clear that the lament itself, encompassing Jer 14:17-19, has any contextual association with the fate of the false prophets and their audience in Jer 13-16.

14. wayyō`mer yhwh `ēlay šeḡer hannəbī`im nibbə`im bišmī lō` šəlaḥtīm wəlo` šiwwitīm wəlo` dibbartī `ălêhem ḥəzôn šeḡer wəḡesem we`ēlil wətarmit libbām hēmmā mitnabbə`im lākem

15. lākēn kōh-`amar yhwh `al-hannəbī`im hannibbə`im bišmī wa`ānī lō`-šəlaḥtīm wəhēmmā `omərīm ḥereb wərə`āb lō` yihyeh bā`āreṣ hazzō`t baḥereb ūbārā`āb yittammū hannəbī`im hāhēmmā

16. wəhā`ām `āšer-hēmmā nibbə`im lāhem yiḥyū mušlākīm bəḥuṣōt yərūsālam mippənē hārā`āb wəhaḥereb wə`ēn məqabbēr lāhēmmā hēmmā nəšêhem ūbənêhem ūbənōtêhem wəšāpaktī `ălêhem `et-rā`ātām

12. When they fast, I do not listen to their wailing and when they offer burnt offering and cereal offering I am not pleased with them. Indeed by the sword, by famine, by pestilence I myself am finishing them.

13. I said, “Ah, Lord Yahweh. Look the prophets are saying to them, ‘You will not see a sword and famine will not come to you. Indeed, true peace, I will give you in this place.’”

14. Yahweh said to me, “(It is) a lie of the prophets prophesying in my name. I did not send them, I did not command them, I did not speak to them. A lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their heart they are prophesying to you.

15. Therefore, thus Yahweh said, “Concerning the prophets prophesying in my name, though I have not sent them. They are saying a sword and famine will not come into this land. By the sword and by famine those prophets will come to an end.

16. The people to whom they are prophesying will be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword. There will be no one to bury them, themselves, their wives, their sons, and their daughters. I will pour out upon them their wickedness.

(Jer 14:12-16)

When we examined the beginning of this passage above, it was in the context of covenantal infidelity as the reason for Yahweh’s punishment via the SFP triad. In examining what follows v. 12, we can see the contrast between Yahweh’s prediction of punishment and the words of the false prophets. Yahweh promises to bring an end to his people via the SFP triad, but the false prophets offer a counter-message, predicting that neither sword nor famine would strike the people. This false hope incenses Yahweh and he turns the message of peace (no sword, no famine) against its messengers (v. 15). Not

only will the false prophets suffer an inversion of their predictions, so will those who listened to them. A contentious, yet striking example can be found in the MT of Jeremiah

42:

13. *wə 'im- 'ōmərîm 'attem lō ' nēšēb bā 'āreš hazzō 't ləbiltî šəmōa ' baqôl yhw̄h 'ēlōhēkem*

14. *lē 'mōr lō ' kî 'eres mišrayim nābō ' 'āšer lō '-nir 'eh milhāmā wəqôl šōpār lō ' nišmā ' wəlallehem lō '-nir 'āb wəšām nēšēb*

15. *wə 'attā lākēn šim 'û dəbar-yhw̄h šə 'ērît yəhūdā kōh- 'āmar yhw̄h šəbā 'ôt 'ēlōhē yišrā 'ēl 'im- 'attem sôm təsimûn pənēkem lābō ' mišrayim ūbā 'tem lāgûr šām*

16. *wəhāyətā haḥereb 'āšer attem yərē 'im mimmennā šām taššîg 'etkem bə 'eres mišrayim wəhārā 'āb 'āšer-attem dō 'āgîm mimmennū šām yidbaq 'aḥārēkem mišrayim wəšām tāmūtū*

17. *wəyihyû kol-hā 'ānāšîm 'āšer-šāmū 'ət-pənēhem lābō ' mišrayim lāgûr šām yāmūtū baḥereb bārā 'āb ūbaddāber wəlō '-yihyeh lāhem sārîd ūpālît mippənē hārā 'ā 'āšer 'ānî mēbî ' 'ālēhem*

13. But if you say, 'We will not remain in this land, not obeying Yahweh your God,

14. No, we will go to Egypt, where we will not see war, nor will we hear the sound of the shofar, we will not hunger for bread; we will remain there.”

15. Now therefore hear the word of Yahweh, o remnant of Judah, thus says Yahweh of Hosts, God of Israel, if you truly set your face to go to Egypt and go to sojourn there,

16. The sword, which you were fearing, will overtake you there in the land of Egypt, the famine of which you were anxious, will pursue you there, to Egypt and you will die there.

17. Every man who sets his face to go to Egypt to sojourn there will die by the sword, by famine, by pestilence. They will have no escapee and no survivor because of the disaster, which I am bringing upon them.

(Jer 42:13-17)

The commanders and all of the people ask Jeremiah to beseech Yahweh on their behalf and promises to do whatever they are instructed. In his response, Yahweh outlines the consequences of disobedience, highlighting their presumably previously stated rationale for wanting to go to Egypt. The war (*milhāmā*) and lack of bread that the people want to avoid are reframed by Yahweh as fear of the sword and famine. Additionally, what they

fear in Judah will follow them to Egypt: the sword will overtake them and famine will pursue them. As if that was not bad enough, Yahweh promises that those who go to Egypt will die by sword, famine, and pestilence.⁷³⁶ The modes of punishment increase to include the SFP triad.

The SFP triad is often considered to be emblematic of foreign invasion and siege warfare. On the one hand, this comes across as both intuitive and reasonable. For this reason, it is no surprise that this general interpretation has gained traction throughout the academic community. On the other hand, as I have demonstrated above, *hereb* functions as a polysemous sign. To flatten the possibilities of meaning, even within the SFP triad, sacrifices a wealth of cultural associations for ease of translation. Furthermore, even if one wanted to understand *hereb* as “warfare,” when the analogy is pressed difficulties begin to manifest. There are two main issues: inconsistent representation and interpreting away the function of supernatural language. I will explore both problems before arguing for a more general understanding of the triad as complete divine punishment, which is flexible enough to encompass siege warfare and a myriad of other disastrous scenarios.

Inconsistent Representation

In understanding the SFP triad as a reference to siege warfare, the sword is the enemy army, which has surrounded the city. The famine is a logical result of a protracted siege, as those remaining in the city run low on food and the enemy forces have devastated the surrounding area, through collecting or burning crops. Pestilence results from deteriorating and unsanitary conditions, usually inside the city, though there are a

⁷³⁶ This numerical increase from a dyad to triad only appears in the MT version of Jeremiah. The shorter, LXX version of v.17 has only the dyad of sword (*romaia*) and famine (*limō*).

few famous counter examples.⁷³⁷ Let's begin with what is, in my opinion, the standout case for the SFP triad as siege warfare in Ezekiel:

15. *haḥereb baḥûṣ wəhaddeber wəhārā 'āb mibbāyit 'āšer baśśādeh
baḥereb yāmût wa 'āšer bā 'îr rā 'āb wādeber yō 'kālennû*

15. The sword is outside; pestilence and famine are inside; the one who is in the field will die by the sword and famine and pestilence will devour the one who is in the city.
(Ezek 7:15)

Here the sword, i.e. the enemy, is outside the walls, while famine and pestilence attack those who elect to stay within the walls. Yet, as I. Eph'al notes, pestilence is not typically associated with siege in historical works.⁷³⁸ He goes on to suggest that this may be because the control of pestilence is relegated to the divine realm. Pestilence is beyond man's ability to control. This can be seen in Jer 21:6, in which Yahweh declares that he will afflict the people of Jerusalem with pestilence (*deber*). That the term pestilence can be problematic for this way of understanding siege warfare can be seen earlier in Ezekiel:

11. *kōh- 'āmar 'ādōnāy yhw hkkēh bəkappəkā ûraqa ' bəraglakā
we 'ēmār- 'āḥ 'el kol-tô 'ābôt rā 'ôt bêt yiśrā 'ēl 'āšer baḥereb bārā 'āb
ûbaddeber yippōlû*

12. *hārāḥôq baddeber yāmût wəhaqqārôb baḥereb yippôl wəhanniš 'ār
wəhannāšûr bārā 'āb yāmût wəkillêti ḥāmāti bām*

11. Thus says lord Yahweh, "Strike your palm and stamp your feet. Say, 'Alas over the wicked abominations of the house of Israel, who will fall by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence.'

⁷³⁷ For example, many scholars consider the angel of Yahweh that struck Sennacherib's forces assembled outside Jerusalem (2 Kgs 19:35-36 || Isa 37:36) to be a reference to plague. Eph'al, *The City Besieged*, 67 n.89; William R. Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah: New Studies* (SHCANE 18; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 242-267. Some see in 2 Kgs 19:35 an echo of a description by Herodotus of Sennacherib's forces being turned from invading Egypt at Pelusium by hordes of mice, which ate their quivers, bows, and shield straps (*Hist.* II, 141). This colorful description is thought to refer to plague, which would not have been understood to be borne by rodents at the time. See Stephen Langdon, "Evidence for an Advance on Egypt by Sennacherib in the Campaign of 701-700 B. C.," *JAOS* 24 (1903): 265-274; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 251.

⁷³⁸ Eph'al, *The City Besieged*, 67.

12. The one who is far will die by pestilence, the one who is near will fall by the sword, the one survives and is preserved will die by famine. Thus, I will complete my wrath upon them.
(Ezek 6:11-12)

First, we get a general pronouncement on the fate of the house of Israel, which is then unpacked in v. 12. In contrast to what we saw in Ezek 7:15, pestilence will strike those who are at a distance, while the sword will afflict those nearby. Famine seems to be relegated to clean up duty, as it is not assigned a geographic designation. Block interprets the triad here as a series of concentric circles representing distance from the city. Thus, pestilence is the outer circle, encompassing those outside the city environs, the sword represents enemy forces outside the wall, while famine represents the innermost circle. It afflicts those within the city walls. This interpretation, however, reads into Ezek 6:11-12 the scenario of famine from Ezek 7:15. Presumably, Block arrives at this interpretation based on the word “preserved” (*hannāšûr*), which he translates “protected.”⁷³⁹ This assumes that *hannāšûr* refers to protection offered by the city walls. The “preserved/protected” (*hannāšûr*) is paired with the one who remains (*hanniš’ār*) and thus describes those who managed to survive pestilence and the sword wherever they may be. In this way, the use of *hannāšûr* would be similar to the use in Isa 49:6 in which *nəšûrê yiśrā’ēl* refers to the remnant of Israel.⁷⁴⁰ Additionally, this is in keeping with a concern for survivors, as in Ezek 7:16 that addresses the fate of those who escape (*pl̄t*) to the mountains. Thus the easy geographic distinctions give way and pestilence is not confined to the city and famine afflicts those near and far. Furthermore, at different times

⁷³⁹ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 234.

⁷⁴⁰ This is based on the *qere* reading. The *ketiv* of *nšyry* presents an adjective form of the same root.

all three punishments are directed at those within Jerusalem's walls, e.g. Jer 21:9; 32:24; 38:2. Finally, in other examples each element of the triad is its own terrible punishment, independent of its relation to siege warfare. In Ezekiel 14, the prophet describes the hypothetical scenario in which Yahweh besets Jerusalem with one of his four judgments with three avatars of righteousness only able to save their own lives in the onslaught.

12. *wayhî dābar-yhwh 'ēlay lā 'mōr*
 13. *ben- 'ādām 'eres kî tehēṭā 'lî lim 'āl-ma 'al wənāṭitî yādî 'ālēhā wəšābartî lāh maṭṭēh-lāhem wəhišlaḥtî-bāh rā 'āb wəhikrattî mimmennā 'ādām ūbāhēmā*
 14. *wəhāyū šəlōšet hā 'ānāšîm hā 'ēlleh bəṭōkāh nōaḥ dāni 'ēl / dānîyē 'l wə 'îyōb hēm̄mā bəšidqātām yənaššəlū napšām nə 'um 'ādōnāy yhwh*
 15. *lū-ḥayyā rā 'ā 'a 'ābîr bā 'āreš wəšikkəlātā wəhāyətā šəmāmā mibbālî 'ōbēr mippānē haḥayyā*
 16. *šəlōšet hā 'ānāšîm hā 'ēlleh bəṭōkāh ḥay- 'ānî nə 'um 'ādōnāy yhwh 'im-bānîm wə 'im-bānôt yaššîlū hēm̄mā ləbaddām yinnāšēlū wəhā 'āreš tihyeh šəmāmā*
 17. *'ō ḥereb 'ābî 'al-hā 'āreš hahî' wə 'āmartî ḥereb ta 'ābōr bā 'āreš wəhikrattî mimmennā 'ādām ūbāhēmā*
 18. *ūšəlōšet hā 'ānāšîm hā 'ēlleh bəṭōkāh ḥay- 'ānî nə 'um 'ādōnāy yhwh lō' yaššîlū bānîm ūbānôt kî hēm̄mā ləbaddām yinnāšēlū*
 19. *'ō deber 'āšallah 'el-hā 'āreš hahî' wəšāpaktî ḥāmātî 'ālēhā bədām ləhokrît mimmennā 'ādām ūbāhēmā*
 20. *wənōaḥ dāni 'ēl / dānîyē 'l wə 'îyōb bəṭōkāh ḥay- 'ānî nə 'um 'ādōnāy yhwh 'im-bēn 'im-bat yaššîlū hēm̄mā bəšidqātām yaššîlū napšām*

12. The word of Yahweh came to me:
 13. O, son of man, if a land sins against me by committing infidelity, I will stretch out my hand against it. I will break its staff of bread. I will send famine against it, so that I exterminate man and beast from it.
 14. (if) these three men were in its midst, Noah, Daniel, Job they would save their own lives by their righteousness, utterance of the lord Yahweh
 15. Or if I cause wild animals to pass through the land and they bereave it, so that it becomes a ruin with no one passing through because of the animals.
 16. even if these three men were in its midst, as I live, utterance of Yahweh, they would not save (their) sons nor daughters. They alone would be saved. The land would become a ruin.
 17. or if I were to bring a sword upon that land and said, "May a sword pass through the land, so that I exterminate man and beast from it."

18. Even if these three men were in its midst, as I live, utterance of lord Yahweh, they would not save sons and daughters. Indeed, they alone would be saved.
19. Or if I release pestilence on that land and pour out my wrath upon it in bloodshed exterminating man and beast from it.
20. Even if Noah, Daniel, or Job were in its midst, as I live, utterance of lord Yahweh, they would not save either son or daughter. They would save their own lives by their righteousness.
- (Ezek 14:12-20)

Of course, the point of this is to illustrate that Jerusalem does not face just one of God's judgements but all four at the same time (Ezek 14:21). For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that famine and pestilence are not depicted as dependent upon or consequent on the sword or invasion, but function as independent threats. This conception of the independent status of punishments is reflected in the three punishments given to David in the Chronicles⁷⁴¹ version of the taking of the census:

10. *lēk wədibbartā 'el-dāwīd lē'mōr kōh 'āmar yhwš šālōš 'ānī nōṭeh 'ālēkā bəḥar-lākā 'aḥat mēhēnnā wə'e 'ēšeh-lāk*
11. *wayyābō 'gād 'el-dāwīd wayyō'mer lō kōh-'āmar yhwš qabbel-lāk*
12. *'im-šālōš šānīm rā 'āb wə'im-šālōšā hodāšīm nispeh mippānē-šārēkā wəḥereb 'ōyābekā ləmašseget wə'im-šālōšet yāmīm ḥereb yhwš wədeber bā 'āreš ūmal 'ak yhwš mašḥīt bəkol-gəbūl yiśrā'el wə'attā rə 'ēh mā-'āšīb 'et-šōlāḥī dābār*

10. "Go, speak to David, "Thus says Yahweh, I am laying out three (punishments) for you. Choose one of them and I will do it.
11. Gad came to David and said to him, "Thus Yahweh says, "Pick for yourself"
12. "A three-year famine, or three months of being carried away by your enemies; the sword of your enemy overtaking, or three days of the sword of Yahweh, namely pestilence in the land, the angel of Yahweh destroying

⁷⁴¹ Cf. 2 Sam 24:12-13. There are a number of differences in the Samuel and Chronicles versions of David's census. Relevant to the passage at hand is length of the famine and the characterization of the final two punishments: defeat by enemies and pestilence. Concerning the famine, 2 Sam 24:13 has a seven-year famine instead of 1 Chron 21:12's three years. This breaks the numerical parallelism among the punishments (three years, three months three days). The LXX, however, has a famine lasting three years (*tria etē*), agreeing with 1 Chron 21:12. Importantly, the 2 Samuel example does not use the image of the sword (*ḥereb*) in connection with either the defeat by enemies or pestilence. In fact, the term *ḥereb* does not appear at all in the 2 Samuel version of David's census.

throughout the border of Israel. Now, see. What shall I return to the one who sent me?”
(1 Chron 21:10-12)

In these verses, each element of the SFP triad is its own distinct punishment and not contingent upon the other. Though the threat of invasion and siege looms large throughout the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, I think it would be a mistake to see the SFP triad (or any triad, tetrad, etc.) as merely a reflection of the consequences of siege warfare. Additionally, the sword can be used to reference the totality of God’s punishment by itself. Often when describing the divine punishment of Israel, no matter how terrible things seem, the prophets leave room for hope, for a remnant to survive. Not only will this remnant function as a continuation of Israel, but they will serve as a reminder. As one might expect, since the SFP triad comes to symbolize God’s complete punishment, it should show up to summarize what the people have managed to escape:

16. *wəhōtartī mēhem ’anšē mispār mēḥereb mārā ’āb ūmiddāber ləma ’an yəsappərū ’et-kol-tō ’ābôtēhem baggōyim ’āšer-bā ’ū šām wəyādā ’ū kī- ’ānī yhw*

16. But I will leave over some few of them from the sword, from famine, and from plague so that they may make known all their abominations among the nations to which they have come. Then they will know that I am the Lord.
(Ezek 12:16)

However, it is more common to represent the totality of God’s punishment when it comes to the survivors, by just using a single reference to the sword—the clearest example of which appears in Jeremiah’s condemnation of those trying to flee to Egypt to escape God’s wrath:

27. *hinnī šōqēd ’ālēhem lārā ’ā wəlō’ ləṭōbâ wətammu kol- ’iš yəhūdâ ’āšer bə ’ereš-miṣrayim baḥereb ūbārā ’āb ’ad-kəlōtām*

28. *ûpālîṭê ḥereb yašubûn min- 'ereš mišrayim 'ereš yəhûdâ mâtê mišpār wəyādā 'û kol-šə 'ērît yəhûdâ habbā 'im lə 'ereš-mišrayim lāgûr šām dəbar-mî yāqûm mimmennî ûmēhem*

27. Here I am watching over them for disaster and not for good. Every man of Judah, who is in the land of Egypt, will perish by sword and by famine until they are finished.

28. The survivors of the sword will return from the land of Egypt (to) the land of Judah few in number. All the remnant of Judah, who came to the land of Egypt to sojourn there, will know whose word will stand/be confirmed mine or theirs.

(Jer 44:27-28)

In these verses, Yahweh promises the sword and famine, which the Judeans had fled their homeland to escape (Jer 42:16), will find and consume them. But as mentioned above, allowance is made for a remnant. In this case, in order to survive as witnesses to the truth of Yahweh's promise. Yet this group of survivors is called "the remnant of the sword," in which the word must represent sword and famine in the previous verse, since the surviving group is characterized in v. 28b as "all the remnant of Judah, who came to the land of Egypt." That the phrase "survivors of the sword" is a more generic description and not referring only to those who survived from the attack of the Babylonian army is supported by the LXX translation. In the LXX, the MT's phrase "survivors of the sword" (*pālîṭê ḥereb*) is translated as "survivors of the land" (*anasōzomenoi ek gēs*). Similarly, when it is time for Babylon to receive its punishment, Yahweh enjoins the Judean survivors to return to their homeland:

50. *pālēṭîm mēḥereb hilkû 'al-ta 'āmōdû zikrû mērāḥōq 'et-yhwh wîrûšālam ta 'āleh 'al-ləbabkem*

50. O survivors of the sword, go! Do not stop! Remember Yahweh from afar and bring Jerusalem to your mind.

(Jer 51:50)

In this verse, the remnant that was delivered into Nebuchadnezzar II's hands through sword, famine, and pestilence (Jer 21:7, 9; 27:8, 13; 32:36; 38:2) are characterized as survivors of the sword. This same kind of summarizing appears in Ezek 38:8, the distant future of the land, and by extension people in the land, that survives of God's punishment is called the "restored from the sword":

8. *mīyāmîm rabbîm tippāqēd bə`aḥārît haššānîm tābô` `el-`ereṣ
mašôbebet mēḥereb məqubbešet mē`ammîm rabbîm `al hārê yiśrā`ēl
`āšer-hāyû ləḥorbâ tāmîd wəhî` mē`ammîm hūšā`ā wəyāšəbû lābeṭaḥ
kullām*

8. After many days, you will be summoned, at the end years you will come to a land restored from the sword, gathered from many peoples upon the mountains of Israel, which had become a continual site of ruin, it was brought out from the peoples and they dwell in securely, all of them.
(Ezek 38:8)

This summarizing function of the sword symbol may also be at play in Jer 25:15-29, in which the cup of Yahweh's wrath is paralleled with the sword that he is sending against Judah and all the nations. Furthermore, this development toward the sword representing a diverse array of punishments may help to explain how the sword comes to reflect both punishment by means of enemy forces (*ḥereb`ōyābeka*) and pestilence sent by Yahweh (*ḥereb yhw̄h wədeber bā`āreṣ*) in 1 Chron 21:12.

As Ezek 14:21 demonstrates, the significance of combining sword, famine, and pestilence is their ability to represent complete and total divine punishment. In the Chronicles version of David's census, David for all his sins had only to pick one. In contrast, Jerusalem faces all of God's punishments whether represented by the SFP triad or any of the tetrads. This becomes all the clearer when we examine the language used for the triad.

Supernatural Language

The language used to describe the SFP triad and its individual elements points to something beyond enemy invasion. Yahweh lets loose (*šlh* in the *piel*) his disasters.⁷⁴² In this way, sword, famine, and pestilence are portrayed as Yahweh's agents of death, as personified forces. They overtake (*nšg*), pursue (*dbq* in *hiphil*), and follow (*hlk 'hr*) their intended targets.⁷⁴³ They devour (*'kl*) their victims.⁷⁴⁴ Such language casts the punishments in a mythological light. Though personification of the sword is the subject of chapter six, and thus will be taken up in detail there, I will briefly treat the subject here. The language of personification projects the threat to Jerusalem and Judah onto the mythic plane. These are not merely enemy soldiers and the consequences of invasion, they are quasi-demonic forces that Yahweh has unleashed against his own people. They are the very weapons of Yahweh Šēbā'ôt with which he pursues (*rdp*) his targets (Jer 29:18). It is the sword that he lets fly (Ezek 32:10).

Function of Figurative Language

Aside from evocative imagery and poetic rhetoric, what is the value of using the figurative imagery of the SFP triad? Specifically, why not refer to the sword as war (as in Jer 28:8) or enemy forces (as in 2 Sam 24:12-13)? Lakoff and Johnson demonstrate that figurative or metaphorical language goes far beyond merely dressing up more literal statements. They argue that human conceptual systems are primarily metaphorical and

⁷⁴² Jer 24:10; 29:17; 49:37; Ezek 5:17; 14:21.

⁷⁴³ See, respectively, Jer 42:16; and 48:2.

⁷⁴⁴ Ezek 5:17; 7:15; 14:19; 28:23; Jer 9:15; 12:12; 16:4; 44:12, 18, 27; 46:10, 14.

“[o]ur concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities.”⁷⁴⁵ Thus, how people choose to encode their conceptual systems matters. I propose that there are three primary benefits to the prophets using connotative language (i.e. the SFP triad) in their trauma narrative: typification, negative emotional framing, and shifting responsibility.

Typification

A disastrous event can attain to the level of social trauma when “social actors transform individual suffering into a matter of collective concern, of cultural worry, group danger, social panic, and creeping fear.”⁷⁴⁶ There are any number of ways to narrate the trauma of invasion and exile. Of course, the prophets made use of many such discursive devices, such as invaders as a mysterious nation from the north (e.g. Jer 1:13-15; 4:6-7; 6:1-2, 22-23; 10:22, etc.). One part of this complex cultural process is typification, which Alexander, drawing upon the work of E. Husserl and A. Schutz, defines as the process of explaining an event “as a typical and even anticipated example of some thing or category that was known about before.”⁷⁴⁷ The triad of sword, famine, and pestilence is one of the most frequent symbols employed. As demonstrated above, the SFP triad draws upon the language and concepts of the covenantal curses. The use of the language and images of their own curse traditions serves to typify the trauma

⁷⁴⁵ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 3.

⁷⁴⁶ Alexander and Breese, “Introduction,” xii.

⁷⁴⁷ Alexander, “Holocaust and Trauma,” 38.

narrative of Jerusalem's fall in two ways: first, the logic of divine curses operates within the familiar framework of divine cause and effect; second, by framing the events of 598-586 BCE as the long-ago promised punishment for covenantal infidelity, the prophetic authors cast current events as entirely predictable. For the former, situating the fall of Jerusalem within a sin and punishment schema affirms that the normal divine order of events is still in effect. Additionally, by its very nature the paradigm of sin and punishment clearly demarcates who is responsible. This is a common early trend within collective coping, "an almost inevitable first (and even continuing) response is to assign responsibility and blame."⁷⁴⁸ The SFP triad serves to give shape and form to the dread that the population of Judah faced.

Secondly, drawing upon the language of Israel's curse traditions typifies the events of the Babylonian exile by making them predictable. As we have seen above, the SFP triad as its own symbol comes to represent God's complete punishment, the totality of the covenant curses and all this implies. In this way, Jeremiah and Ezekiel cast the events of 598-586 B.C.E. as the anticipated outcome for "some thing or category that was known about before," namely breaking covenant with Yahweh. From the prophet's perspective, one had only to look at the behavior of the Judeans in contrast with the mandates of the covenant to see what would happen. Thus, it is not mere whim or human capriciousness that is at fault, but Judah's own actions. This returns a sense of control to those facing invasion, siege, and deportation. It was preventable and thus there is a lesson to be learned (e.g. Jer 44:27-28; Ezek 12:16).

⁷⁴⁸ Smelser, "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma," 52.

Negative Emotional Framing

The second function of the figurative language of the SFP triad is that it effectively intertwines the events of the Exile with powerful negative emotion. Claiming that the Babylonian exile would have a negative emotional reaction among Judeans appears to be a case of stating the obvious. This, however, is based on the benefit of hindsight and the successful adoption of Jeremiah and Ezekiel's trauma narratives. Yet within their established narratives, both prophets are portrayed as struggling against and competing with other prophetic interpretations of the events. Jeremiah and Ezekiel characterize these alternative carrier groups as predicting peace and Judah's triumphant resolution against Babylonian aggression, primarily before the fall of Jerusalem. In order to counter this triumphalist message, Jeremiah and Ezekiel would need to portray the looming fate of Jerusalem as profoundly disastrous. According to Smelser, an association with negative emotion is an essential characteristic for any trauma narrative: "We may go further: if a potentially traumatizing event cannot be endowed with negative affect (e.g., a national tragedy, a national shame, a national catastrophe), then it cannot qualify as being traumatic."⁷⁴⁹ One way the latter prophets are able to color the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem with strong negative emotion is by employing the language of the covenantal curses. Not only is being cursed a wellspring of negative emotions, the covenantal curses represent a rupture in the relationship between the people of Israel and their God. Israel becomes Yahweh's enemy such that he will delight (*yāśîś*) in destroying them (Deut 28:65). Unleashing the covenantal curses not only threatened individual lives, it threatened the existence of Israel itself. Though Yahweh's punishment always stops

⁷⁴⁹ Smelser, "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma," 40.

short of the complete destruction of Israel (Deut 28:62), their continued existence will be one of shame among the other nations (Ezek 36:20).

Shifting Responsibility

The third significant function of using the SFP triad is that it serves to shift the responsibility of the disaster from human to divine. Ultimately, this is achieved by dehumanizing the threat. By referring to Yahweh's punishment as sword, famine, and pestilence, one removes the human component. Only Yahweh is capable of marshalling forces such as sword, famine, and pestilence. He dispatches these monstrous punishments. As mentioned previously, pestilence was already a divine prerogative and not associated with human agency. Famine appears rarely outside of being combined with the sword. While it is clear that a human army is often the referent behind the multivalent sign sword (*hereb*), by framing it metonymically the prophets deny agency to Nebuchadnezzar and his forces. Their identity is not important, it is Yahweh's punishment that matters and Yahweh is the one who wields the sword. Dehumanizing enemy forces shifts the responsibility of the disaster from the human to the divine realm. Using the sword as a symbol for war, invasion, and enemy forces figuratively places the responsibility for what happened into Yahweh's hand. This portrayal fits neatly into the judgment and punishment narrative that Jeremiah and Ezekiel are crafting. The dehumanization of the threat has two consequences. First, it serves to soften the impact of trauma. Erikson notes that disasters caused by humans, "not only hurt in special ways but bring in their wake feelings of injury and vulnerability from which it is difficult to

recover.”⁷⁵⁰ Though it seems unlikely that the prophets would choose to use symbolic language for this reason, the practice of referring to invading enemy forces as weapons or natural forces (e.g. the storm) used by the gods has a long history, going back at least to the Lamentation of Sumer and Ur, in which rampaging Gutians are portrayed as the storm of Enlil.⁷⁵¹ Thus by more closely associating the disastrous events with divine intention, it increases the ability of those suffering through it to understand and endure. Secondly, dehumanizing the threat denies Judah the role of innocent victim or hero. Even in scenarios where the trauma community fights against an overwhelming force and loses, they still have the opinion of portraying themselves as valiant heroic figures struggling for their survival. Shifting the focus away from the Babylonians as independent actors threatening Judean existence to being a weapon in the hands of God eliminates heroic portrayal as a legitimate option. There is no way to fight heroically against the sword of Yahweh. Additionally, using the language of Yahweh’s terrible punishments highlights undercuts any chance of resistance. As Job phrases it, *hēn yahtōp mī yašībennū mī-yō`mar `ēlāyw mah-ta`āšeh* “If he robs, who can give it back? Who can say to him, ‘What are you doing?’” (Job 9:12). This emphasizes their part as transgressor and fits in with the punishment narrative by discouraging resistance, since it would be foolish and ultimately unsuccessful to try to resist Yahweh’s punishment. This is clearly reflected in

⁷⁵⁰ Erikson, *A New Species of Trouble*, 237-238. Erikson focuses on differentiating between what he calls natural disasters or acts of God and technological disasters. For Erikson, natural disasters are a category of disaster where no human is to blame. This division includes earthquakes, tornados, floods, etc. Technological disasters, in contrast, are due to human error, which leads to scape-goating and assigning blame. While this distinction works well in modern western societies, in the ancient Near East the dichotomy is not so neat. Acts of God in the ancient world were preventable and a cause for assigning blame, since the gods had complete control over the forces of nature.

⁷⁵¹ Michalowski, *The Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur*, 40-41, 46-47.

Jeremiah's call on the people of Jerusalem to surrender and submit (Jer 21:9; 27:8, 13; 38:2).

Conclusion

Faced with the threat of invasion and the destruction of Jerusalem, Ezekiel and Jeremiah drew upon traditional curse language and cultural frameworks to cast the horrific events in a way that could be meaningfully incorporated into experience. The prophets employed the language of the covenantal curses to fashion (in the case of Jeremiah) and develop (Ezekiel) a new symbol of God's complete and total punishment, the triad of sword, famine, and pestilence. The use of figurative language served to typify the events of the Babylonian exile, laden them with powerful negative emotions, and shift the responsibility for the punishment to the divine realm. This devastating divine chastisement is placed within the conventional understanding of divine cause and effect. This ancient approach to dealing with the cognitive dissonance of defeat and invasion serves two purposes. First, for those facing imminent traumatic events or those trying to make sense of the recent disaster, the use of the symbolic language of the triad serves to facilitate coping and recovery by framing the conceptualization and assigning responsibility. Secondly, the symbolic language used by Jeremiah and Ezekiel creates a progressive narrative of collective trauma. Though the divine punishment is extremely severe, being represented by the total annihilation signified by the SFP triad, they argue that this trauma will create a community of survivors who will be changed and restored.

In this way they enter into a contested battle over meaning, fighting with other prophetic voices (there will be no disaster) and other traditional understandings (we have been punished by the Queen of Heaven). Not only are their opponents those

contemporaneous to them, but also those who will come afterwards and interpret what happened. To this end, the ambiguity of the figurative language of the SFP triad and especially the sword serves to make the prophets' message continually relevant. Whoever is responsible becomes the sword of Yahweh. The ambiguity of the sword sign allows it to be deployed in many different contexts and at the same time unites all disparate references under one symbol of Yahweh's judgment, creating the appearance of a more unified experience. If Moab and Edom attack, this too is as much the sword of Yahweh, as Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. Though Israel's enemies may shift and change, they can always be represented by Yahweh's sword. In this way, the sword of Yahweh, which itself can represent the whole SFP triad, is a living sign. As we will see in the next chapter, the sword is often personified as a quasi-demonic force under Yahweh's control.

Chapter Six: Personification

*Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:
His truth is marching on.*
-“Battle Hymn of the Republic”

Introduction

As we saw in chapter five, Yahweh’s sword of vengeance often appears in groups of punishments, most commonly in a triad with famine (*rā’āb*) and pestilence (*deber*). Scholars often refer to such phenomena as Yahweh’s agents of destruction.⁷⁵² This viewpoint, as we have seen in examples concerning the SFP triad, is supported by the language used to describe the actions of sword, famine, and pestilence as quasi-independent forces that are commanded and deployed by Yahweh.⁷⁵³ The company that Yahweh’s sword keeps, such as *deber*, which appears as a personified force in Hab 3:5 or the infamous Lilith of Isa 34:5-14—in addition to the gruesome depictions of the bloodthirsty nature of the sword—raise the question of what kind of entity is intended by such references. Is the *hereb* of Yahweh a demonic force or are the authors of these passages employing evocative and mythopoetic language to make their point? Of course, the very question of whether the authors and editors of the Hebrew Bible acknowledge any demonic force is a contentious issue. This matter is further complicated by the

⁷⁵² J Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 258; Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1-24*, 440; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 721; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2312-2313.

⁷⁵³ For Yahweh’s anger as a hypostatized, independent force, see P. Kyle McCarter Jr., “When Gods Lose Their Temper: Divine Rage in Ugaritic Myth and the Hypostasis of Anger in Iron Age Religion,” in *Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy in the World of Antiquity*, eds. Reinhard G. Katz and Hermann Spieckermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebek, 2008), 78-91.

terminology employed to discuss it. The concept of “demon,” as a purely malevolent being operating outside of divine control and in opposition to the primary deity, is a foreign concept in ancient Mesopotamia and Israel. I will address this thorny topic briefly below, arguing that the term “daimonic” is the best option with the least cultural baggage. To anticipate my conclusion, I will argue that the sword of Yahweh functions as a quasi-daimonic entity under the complete control of the deity. In this role, the sword serves as a manifestation of Yahweh’s wrath and punishment. To establish this point, I will examine passages in which the sword is personified. These fall into three groups: 1) Yahweh dispatches the Sword; 2) The Sword Consumes; and 3) Direct Address of the Sword. Then I will compare these passages to similar examples of weapon personification in Mesopotamian traditions: 1) Weapons Marching at the Side of the King; 2) Weapons Consume; and 3) Divine Weapons as Gods. Finally, I will conclude by arguing that the function of using such rhetoric simultaneously removes Yahweh, if only slightly, from directly horrific acts, helps to give the trauma narrative greater resonance, and functions as powerful symbolic icon that drives home the inevitability of punishment.

Note on Terminology

Before beginning, a brief word on terminology is necessary. In discussing the sword of Yahweh and other potential supernatural entities, one encounters an almost immediate difficulty in the very terminology one uses to describe such phenomena. The term “demon” when applied to the worldview depicted in the texts of the Hebrew Bible is both foreign and anachronistic. The notion of an evil supernatural entity that exists in opposition to the divine realm and in hostility to humanity does not exist in the ancient Near East. The etic-ness of the category, however, is not the primary reason for rejecting

its use, as many foreign concepts can be useful heuristic tools for examining cultures if used carefully. The problem with the term “demon” is the vast baggage it has accumulated over the centuries from Jewish and Christian traditions. G. Konstantopoulos, in her investigation of the nature of the Sebettu as divine beings in Mesopotamian traditions, has summarized the options available to scholars as fitting within two camps: a) adopting a foreign term with caveats; or b) using untranslated native terms, in her case Akkadian and Sumerian. She rejects the latter for being awkward and cumbersome.⁷⁵⁴ Of the foreign terms, she considers “demon” and “daimon,” from ancient Greek *daimon*.⁷⁵⁵ To this one could add J. Walton’s typology in which “demons” and monsters are grouped together under the term Class-II beings, while gods are Class-I beings and ghosts are Class-III.⁷⁵⁶ Although Walton’s taxonomy of supernatural beings is commendable and helpful, it is perhaps too precise in some places and does not address the fluidity and flexibility inherent in these supernatural figures. For example, the *ilu lemnu* of the *Utukkū Lemnūtu* incantations could be considered both Class-I and II entities.⁷⁵⁷ Additionally, some supernatural beings could transition from one class to another, such as the Sebettu, which start as Walton’s Class-II and become Class-I beings (i.e. gods) in the Neo-Assyrian period or the Urdimmu and Urmahlullu, which began as protective spirits but

⁷⁵⁴ Konstantopoulos, “They are Seven,” 10.

⁷⁵⁵ Konstantopoulos, “They are Seven,” 11.

⁷⁵⁶ John H. Walton, “Demons in Mesopotamia and Israel: Exploring the Category of Non-Divine but Supernatural Entities,” in *Windows to the Ancient World of the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honor of Samuel Greengus*, ed. Bill T. Arnold, Nancy L. Erickson, John H. Walton (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 229-246.

⁷⁵⁷ UL 2 63. See M. J. Geller, *Evil Demons: Canonical Utukkū Lemnūtu Incantations (SAACT 5)* (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2007), 99, 196.

become “deified” at Uruk during the Neo-Babylonian period.⁷⁵⁸ As Wiggermann explains, this fluidity is the result of a less well defined demonology and it is due to the fact that “the ancient scholars did not collect, organize, and explain their demonic material in demon-lists, like they did their theological material in god-lists.”⁷⁵⁹ Furthermore, since Walton’s Class-II contains what we might refer to as monsters and “demons,” the category is more broad than the terms “demon” or daimon and thus less useful. Konstantopoulos opts for the term “demon” since, according to her, both “demon” and daimon come with their own histories and associations.⁷⁶⁰ While her reasoning is sound, this author cannot agree that daimon “distorts the indigenous views of the period as much as the application of the term ‘demon’ would” at least in the minds of modern western audiences.⁷⁶¹ Here, I concur with other scholars such as G. Cunningham and K. Sonik who employ the term daimon to refer to supernatural beings whose roles could be both beneficent and maleficent.⁷⁶² Though this solution is not a perfect one, I believe it is the least problematic option for our purposes.

⁷⁵⁸ Brian B. Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power: Explorations in the Social History of Early Israelite Magic* (FAT 105; Tübingen: Mohr Siebek, 2016), 176-178; Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Pantheon of Uruk during the Neo-Babylonian Period* (CM 23; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 355-368.

⁷⁵⁹ Frans A. M. Wiggermann, “The Mesopotamian Pandemonium: A Provisional Census,” *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* 77 (2011): 307.

⁷⁶⁰ Konstantopoulos, “They are Seven,” 13-14.

⁷⁶¹ Konstantopoulos, “They are Seven,” 12.

⁷⁶² Karen Sonik, “Daimon-Haunted Universe: Conceptions of the Supernatural in Mesopotamia” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2010), 27-28; Graham Cunningham, *‘Deliver Me From Evil’ Mesopotamian Incantations 2500-1500 BC* (StPohl 17; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1996), 39.

Yahweh Dispatches the Sword

Perhaps the easiest to overlook among the sword personification passages are the references to Yahweh's dispatching (*šlh*) the sword, usually with other agents of punishment, against antagonists, whether they are wayward Israel or foreign nations. One reason the formulation *šlh* + *hrb* may go uncommented upon is that *šlh* in the sense "send, dispatch" can be used of both animate (animals or people)⁷⁶³ and inanimate (fire or food)⁷⁶⁴ predicates.⁷⁶⁵ Similarly, the phrase "send pestilence" (*šlh* + *deber*) is the most common way to describe causing a bout of pestilence.⁷⁶⁶ Whether or not *deber* "pestilence" should be considered a supernatural daimonic force or a mundane disease is not clear. Nor is it clear to this author that these distinctions would have been meaningful to the ancient authors, as supernatural beings were often, though not exclusively, seen as responsible for plague and pestilence.⁷⁶⁷ This is especially true for the term *deber*, which

⁷⁶³ For an example with animals, see Lev 16:22. For examples with humans, see Gen 28:6; Exod 7:16; and 1 Sam 20:5.

⁷⁶⁴ For examples with fire, see Ezek 39:6 and Amos 1:4. For an example with food, see Neh 8:12.

⁷⁶⁵ Yahweh can also dispatch (*yšallah*) his burning anger (*hārôn 'appô*) along with a series of other calamities: rage (*'ebrâ*), wrath (*za'am*), and distress (*sārâ*) in Ps 78:49. How these great evils should be categorized (animate or inanimate) is not straightforward, since technically they are all inanimate, being neither human or animal, and yet are also described as "evil messengers/angels" (*mal'ākê rā'im*) in the same verse. For a discussion of this verse in the context of Yahweh's anger and its independent status, see McCarter, "When Gods Lose Their Temper," 87.

⁷⁶⁶ The term *deber* occurs as the object of the verb *šlh* eight times: Lev 26:25; Jer 24:10; 29:17; Ezek 14:19; 14:21; 28:23; Amos 4:10; 2 Chron 7:13.

⁷⁶⁷ One could mention the disease-related covenantal curses found of Lev 26: 16, 25 and Deut 28:20-37; 32:23-24. Additionally, the phrase "the hand of Yahweh" (1 Sam 5:6) refers to plague, associating disease with divine provenance. See J. J. M. Roberts, "The Hand of Yahweh," *VT* 21 (1971): 244-252. The same phenomenon is at work within Mesopotamian traditions, where the "hand of Deity" is the name of several diseases. See JoAnn Scurlock and Burton R. Andersen, *Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian Medicine: Ancient Sources, Translations, and Modern Medical Analyses* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 429-528, esp. 505-509; JoAnn Scurlock, *Sourcebook for Ancient Mesopotamian Medicine* (WAW 36; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014). As we saw in chapter four, plague can be referred to as the *lipit Erra* in omens and royal inscriptions (e.g. Rassam Cylinder A iii 126).

is almost exclusively caused or sent by Yahweh, as noted in chapter five. Counter intuitively, the sword, as I hope to prove, must be considered an animated sign in some sense, even if the referent is not supernatural, since if the sword is meant to evoke war, a hostile army, or armed enemies, each case involves human opponents. By “animated sign,” in this case, I am referring to an inanimate object that is instilled with the characteristics of an animate being. The animation of inanimate objects, of which personification is one subtype,⁷⁶⁸ is a common way for human beings to explain the world around them. H. Belting notes that “animation is an innate (and learnable) ability of our bodies to discover life in inanimate images. And it is we who endow images with life.”⁷⁶⁹ Similarly, W. M. Roth, in discussing how signs are created, notes that in the process of developing new communicative forms individuals “often speak from the point of view of the inanimate entities involved and thereby portray these entities as animate.”⁷⁷⁰ In reference to God sending (*šlh*) forth punishments, J. Milgrom argues that “the language betrays the original notion of personified forces of the divine assembly acting as agent of Yahweh.”⁷⁷¹ This is most evident in Ezekiel’s description of Yahweh’s four terrible judgments:

12. *wayhî dābar-yhwh ’ēlay lā ’mōr*

13. *ben-’ādām ’ereṣ kî teḥṣṣā’-lî lim’āl-ma’al wānāṭīṭī yādī ’ālēhā
wāšābartī lāh maṭṭēh-lāḥem wāhišlaḥṭī-bāh rā’āb wāhikrattī mimmennā
’ādām ūbāhēmā*

⁷⁶⁸ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 33-34.

⁷⁶⁹ Hans Belting, “Body and Image,” in *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*, eds. Jeffery C. Alexander, Dominik Bartmański, and Bernhard Giesen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 188.

⁷⁷⁰ Wolff-Michael Roth, “The Emergence of Signs in Hands-On Science,” in *International Handbook of Semiotics*, ed. Peter Pericles Trifonas (New York: Springer, 2015), 1275.

⁷⁷¹ Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2313.

14. *wəhāyū šəlōšet hā'ānāšīm hā'ēlleh bətokāh nōaḥ dāni'ēl / dānīyē'l wə'iyōb hēmmā bəšidqātām yənaššəlū napšām nə'um 'ādōnāy yhw*
15. *lū-ḥayyā rā'ā 'a'ābīr bā'āreš wəšikkālātā wəhāyətā šəmāmā mibbālī 'ōbēr mippənē haḥayyā*
16. *šəlōšet hā'ānāšīm hā'ēlleh bətokāh ḥay-'ānī nə'um 'ādōnāy yhw 'im-bānīm wə'im-bānōt yaššīlū hēmmā ləbaddām yinnāšēlū wəhā'āreš tihyeh šəmāmā*
17. *'ō ḥereb 'ābī' 'al-hā'āreš hahī' wə'āmartī ḥereb ta'ābōr bā'āreš wəhikrattī mimmennā 'ādām ūbəhēmā*
18. *ūšəlōšet hā'ānāšīm hā'ēlleh bətokāh ḥay-'ānī nə'um 'ādōnāy yhw lō' yaššīlū bānīm ūbānōt kī hēm ləbaddām yinnāšēlū*
19. *'ō deber 'āšallah 'el-hā'āreš hahī' wəšāpaktī ḥāmātī 'ālēhā bədām ləhokrīt mimmennā 'ādām ūbəhēmā*
20. *wənōaḥ dāni'ēl / dānīyē'l wə'iyōb bətokāh ḥay-'ānī nə'um 'ādōnāy yhw 'im-bēn 'im-bat yaššīlū hēmmā bəšidqātām yaššīlū napšām*
21. *kī kōh 'amar 'ādōnāy yhw 'ap kī-'arba'at šəpāṭay hārā'im ḥereb wārā'āb wəḥayyā rā'ā wādeber šillaḥtī 'el-yərūšālāim ləhokrīt mimmennā 'ādām ūbəhēmā*
22. *wəhinnēh nōtārā-bāh pələṭā hammūšā'im bānīm ūbānōt hinnām yōšā'im 'ēlēkem ūrā'item 'et-darkām wə'et-'ālīlōtām wəniḥamtem 'al-hārā'ā 'āšer hēbē'tī 'al-yərūšālāim 'ēt kol-'āšer hēbē'tī 'ālēhā*
23. *wəniḥāmū 'etkem kī-tir'ū 'et-darkām wə'et-'ālīlōtām wīda'tem kī lō' ḥinnām 'āsītī 'ēt kol-'āšer-'āsītī bāh nə'um 'ādōnāy yhw*

12. The word of Yahweh came to me:

13. O, son of man, if a land sins against me by committing infidelity, I will stretch out my hand against it. I will break its staff of bread. I will send famine against it, so that I exterminate man and beast from it.

14. (if) these three men were in its midst, Noah, Daniel, Job they would save their own lives by their righteousness, utterance of the lord Yahweh

15. Or if I cause wild animals to pass through the land and they bereave it, so that it becomes a ruin with no one passing through because of the animals.

16. even if these three men were in its midst, as I live, utterance of Yahweh, they would not save (their) sons nor daughters. They alone would be saved. The land would become a ruin.

17. Or if I were to bring a sword upon that land and said, “May a sword pass through the land, so that I exterminate man and beast from it.”

18. Even if these three men were in its midst, as I live, utterance of lord Yahweh, they would not save sons and daughters. Indeed, they alone would be saved.

19. Or if I release pestilence on that land and pour out my wrath upon it in bloodshed exterminating man and beast from it.

20. Even if Noah, Daniel, or Job were in its midst, as I live, utterance of lord Yahweh, they would not save either son or daughter. They would save their own lives by their righteousness.

21. Indeed, thus says lord Yahweh, "How much less if I released my four terrible judgments: sword, famine, wild animals, and pestilence against Jerusalem to exterminate man and beast from it."

22. But there will be a remnant left over in it. Sons and daughters will be led out, they will come out to you and you will see their way and their actions. You will console yourself over the evil which I have brought upon Israel, namely everything which I brought upon it.

23. They will comfort you when you see their ways and their actions. Then you will know that not without cause did I do everything which I did in it, utterance of the Lord God.
(Ezek 14:12-23).

After describing how luminaries such as Noah, Daniel, and Job would only be able to save their own lives in the face of just one of God's judgments, Yahweh laments Jerusalem's fate in the face of four judgments. Two of the four judgments are clearly animate(d), the sword and wild animals, while the remaining two, famine and pestilence, are less clear, though a case could be made for each. The destructive purpose of these agents is made clear in the latter part of v. 21 since they are to rid Jerusalem of living beings, man and beast. The sword's role as an active agent is highlighted by its direct address by Yahweh in the hypothetical scenario of v. 17. Block argues that this rhetorical flourish signifies "the sword's role as Yahweh's primary agent of death in the book."⁷⁷² Block sees further evidence of God's destructive agents earlier in Ezek 5:17:

17. *wəšillaḥtî 'ālêkem rā 'āb wəḥayyâ rā 'â wəšikkəluk wədeber wādām ya 'ābār-bāk wəḥereb 'ābî' 'ālayik 'ānî yhwḥ dibbartî*

17. I will send against you a famine and wild animal(s), and they will leave-you-childless. Plague and bloodshed will pass through you and I will bring a sword upon you. I, the Lord, have spoken.

⁷⁷² Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1-24*, 442 n. 30.

Although *šlh* is not used of the sword in the previous example (Ezek 14:17), Block signals that the crucial feature in distinguishing mundane catastrophes from divine agents is the use of the verb “*šillah*, with Yahweh as the subject.”⁷⁷³ Block goes on to caution that one should not rush to the conclusion that “Ezekiel recognized the existence of any of these purportedly semi-divine beings.”⁷⁷⁴ Instead he views references to Rešep and *deber* as “poetic allusions.”⁷⁷⁵ It seems to me that this is unnecessary distancing. The existence of other supernatural, especially non-divine, beings under the service of Yahweh is certain in the case of angels, and does not diminish his status as supreme ruler but rather enhances it. If in late biblical thought *deber* could be represented by *mal’ak yhw* “the angel of Yahweh” (1 Chron 21:12), there is no reason why daimonic entities could not exist to do Yahweh’s bidding.

Another example of the personified sword deployed against the deity’s enemies occurs in Jeremiah 9, in which Yahweh explains why the land was destroyed:

12. wayyō’mer yhw ‘al-’ozbām ’et-tôrātî ’ăšer nātattî lipnêhem wəlō’-šāmā ’û baqôlî wəlō’-hālākû bāh

13. wayyēlakû ’aḥărē šarirût libbām wə’ aḥărē habbā’alîm ’ăšer limmādûm ’ăbôtām

14. lākēn kōh-’āmar yhw šabā’ôt ’ēlohē yisrā’ēl hinnî ma’ăkilām ’et-hā’ām hazzeh la’ānā wəhišqîtîm mē-rō’š

15. wahăpîšôtîm baggôyim ’ăšer lō’ yādā’û hēmmā wa’ăbôtām wəšillaḥtî ’aḥărêhem ’et-haḥereb ’ad kallôtî ’ôtām

12. Yahweh spoke, “Because they abandoned my teaching, which I placed before them, and they did not listen to my voice nor did they walk in it.

⁷⁷³ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1-24*, 212.

⁷⁷⁴ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1-24*, 214.

⁷⁷⁵ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1-24*, 215.

13. They followed after the stubbornness of their heart and after the *ba'alim*, about which their fathers taught them.”

14. Therefore, thus said Yahweh of Hosts, the God of Israel, “Here I will feed them, this people, wormwood and I will make them drink poisonous water.

15. I will scatter them among the nations which they and their fathers did not know.

I will send the sword after them until I have finished them.

(Jer 9:12-15)

In v. 15 the addition of *'aḥrêhem* “after them” to the formula of *šlḥ* + *ḥereb* conjurs up the image of the sword in pursuit of the scattered people.⁷⁷⁶ In a later chapter, the pursuit is made explicit in Yahweh’s message to those in Jerusalem who had not yet gone into exile:

16. *kî-kōh 'āmar yhwḥ 'el-hammelek hayyôšēb 'el-kissē' dāwīd wə'el-kol-hā'ām hayyôšēb bā'ir hazzō't 'āḥēkem 'āšer lō'-yāšə'ū 'ittakem baggôlā*

17. *kōh 'āmar yhwḥ šəbā'ôt hinnî məšallēaḥ bām 'et-haḥereb 'et-hārā'āb wə'et-haddāber wənātattī 'ôtām kattā'ēnīm haššō'ārīm 'āšer lō'-tē'ākálnā mērōa'*

18. *wərādeptī 'aḥrêhem baḥereb bārā'āb ūbaddāber ūnātattīm lizwā'ā/ləza'āwā ləkōl mamləkôt hā'āreš lə'ālā ūlāšammā wəlišrēqā ūlāḥerpā bəkol-haggōyim 'āšer-hiddaḥtīm*

19. *taḥat 'āšer-lō'-šāmə'ū 'el-dəbāray nə'um-yhwḥ 'āšer šālaḥtī 'ālêhem 'et-'ābāday hannəbī'im haškēm wəšālōaḥ wəlō' šəma'tem nə'um-yhwḥ*

16. For thus says Yahweh to the king who sits on the throne of David and to all the people dwelling in this city, “Your brothers, who did not go out with you into exile;”

17. Thus says Yahweh of Hosts, “Here I am sending against them the sword, famine, and pestilence;

I will make them like rotten figs which cannot be eaten because of corruption.

18. I will pursue after them with the sword, famine, and pestilence;

⁷⁷⁶ See, also, Jer 49:34-39 for similar phrasing.

I will make them into a terror for all the kingdoms of the earth, into a curse, into a horror, into a hissing, and into a taunt among all the nations in which I will scatter them.

19. Instead they did not listen to my words,” utterance of Yahweh, which I sent to them; “My servants, the prophets, (which I) sent again and again, but they did not listen,” utterance of Yahweh.

(Jer 29:16-19)

In these verses, Yahweh not only declares that he is sending his agents, sword, famine, and pestilence, but since he cannot wait to enact his retribution, he announces that he will pursue them himself with his three agents (v. 18). We have seen in these examples Yahweh’s sword takes on the role of a subordinate agent of destruction that he deploys against enemies. These descriptions evoke the image of both the divine warrior who possesses powerful weapons ready to wade into battle, and an exalted king who delegates tasks to those in his assembly. The focus of such descriptive imagery is on Yahweh as the ultimate source and the one responsible. The sword is completely under Yahweh’s control and its presence is explicitly connected with the command of Yahweh.⁷⁷⁷ This is evident not only in the language of dispatching agents, but in how Yahweh takes credit for their actions. Though Yahweh sends the punishing sword against his people, it is Yahweh who is said to scatter them or finish them, not the sword (e.g. Jer 9:15; 29:18). This rhetoric is comparatively benign, as the sword is commissioned for a task. Its own personality is absent. This is not to deny the truly terrifying aspect of Yahweh’s sword, which is evident in Jeremiah’s injunction for the people who are about to receive the cup of Yahweh’s wrath to:

16. *wəšātû wəhitgō ‘āšû wəhithōlālû mippānē haḥereb ‘āšer ‘ānōkī šōlēaḥ bēnōtām*

⁷⁷⁷ In contrast, Yahweh’s anger can act independently of the deity. See, McCarter, “When the Gods Lose Their Temper,” 89-91.

16. Let them drink, vomit, and act madly because of the sword, which I am sending among them.
(Jer 25:16).⁷⁷⁸

Though the sword is elsewhere an object of fear (Jer 42:16), its terrifying characteristics are not the main focus in the dispatching passages. For a look at how grotesque the sword could become, we now turn to examine the sword as devourer.

The Devouring Sword

Of all the types of personification involving the sword, the motif of the devouring sword is the most ubiquitous. While the imagery of Yahweh dispatching the sword is primarily confined to the book of Jeremiah, the image of the sword that consumes its victims appears more widely throughout the prophets and even in 2 Samuel.⁷⁷⁹ It is in the historical books that we get a glimpse at the possible origin of this synecdoche in a proverb concerning the endless appetite of sword as a symbolic index for war. In hearing the news of the deaths of some of David's officers in the scheme to eliminate Uriah the Hittite, the king sends assurances concerning the nature of the sword:

25. wayyō 'mer dāwīd 'el-hammal'āk kōh-tō'mar 'el-yō'āb 'al-yēra'
bā'ênêkā 'et-haddābār hazzeh kî-kāzōh wākāzeh tō'kal hehāreb haḥāzēq
milḥamtākā 'el-hā'ir wəhōrsāh wəḥazzāqēhū

25. David said to the messenger, "Thus you will say to Joab, 'Do not worry (be uneasy) about this matter for the sword devours indiscriminately. Strengthen your attack against the city and destroy it!' (Thus) encourage him!"

(2 Sam 11:25)

⁷⁷⁸ See also, Jer 25:27.

⁷⁷⁹ Deut 32:42; 2 Sam 2:26; 11:25; 18:18; Isa 1:20; 31:8; 34:5-8; Jer 2:30; 12:12; 46:10; Hos 11:6; Nah 2:13; 3:15.

In this verse, the inevitability of the casualties in war is highlighted through a reference to the sword's ravenous hunger. This sentiment also appears in the mouth of Abner who laments the deaths due to fighting between David's and Ishbaal's forces by asking *hālāneṣaḥ tō'kal ḥereb* "Will the sword devour forever?" (2 Sam 2:26). As has been noted by many scholars, the motif of the devouring sword was common enough to appear as a decorative motif on the swords themselves with the hilt of the sword depicted as an open lion's mouth out of which the blade extends.⁷⁸⁰ Both the proverb and the iconographic representation of the motif stand behind the more extended treatments. One example that might have influenced later prophets, especially Jeremiah, occurs in the Song of Moses.⁷⁸¹ In the Song, Yahweh promises to unleash his sword of vengeance against those who oppose his people:

39. *rə'û 'attâ kî 'ānî 'ānî hû' wə'ên 'ēlōhîm 'immādî 'ānî 'āmîṭ wa'āḥayyeh māḥaṣṭî wa'ānî 'erpā' wə'ên mīyyādî maṣṣîl*

40. *kî-'eśśā' 'el-šāmayim yādî wə'āmartî ḥay 'ānōkî lə'ōlām*

41. *'im-šannōtî bəraq ḥarbî wəṭō'ḥēz bəmišpāṭ yādî 'āšîb nāqām ləṣārāy wəlimśan 'ay 'āšallēm*

42. *'aškîr ḥiṣṣay middām wəḥarbî tō'kal bāsār middam ḥālāl wəšibyā mērō'š par'ōt 'ōyēb*

43. *harnînu gōyim 'ammô kî dam-'ābādāyw yiqqôm wənāqām yāšîb ləṣārāyw wəkipper 'admātô 'ammô*

39. See now that I, I am he, there are no gods with me;

I myself cause death and bring to life, I strike down and I myself heal, no one can deliver from my hand.

40. For I raise my hand to the sky;

⁷⁸⁰ Jean-Georges Heintz, "Langage métaphorique et représentation symbolique dans le prophétisme biblique et son milieu ambiant," in *Image et signification, Rencontres de l'École du Louvre II* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1983), 55-72, esp. pp. 63-66; Brent A. Strawn, *What Is Stronger than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (OBO 212; Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 186-187.

⁷⁸¹ Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, 856.

I say as I live, forever

41. I will sharpen the lightning of my sword, my hand will grasp judgment;
I will bring vengeance to my enemies, I will repay those who hate me.

42. I will make my arrows drunk on blood, my sword will consume flesh,
blood of the slain and the captive, from the head of enemy leaders.

43. O nations, cause his people to rejoice. For he will avenge the blood of
his servants; he will return vengeance to his enemies; he will make
atonement for his land (and) his people.

(Deut 32:39-43)

Yahweh begins by sharpening his lightning sword (cf. Ezek 21:15)⁷⁸² before the sword is turned loose to devour human flesh. Although the second half of verse 42 is ambiguous—“from the blood of the slain and the captive; from the head of enemy leaders,” could refer to the activity of the arrows or the sword—it makes sense to see the return to the topic of blood as pointing back to the arrows, while the enemy leaders can be yet more flesh for the sword. Nelson considers these graphic images to “symbolize bloody, physical violence.”⁷⁸³ While this is undoubtedly true, such descriptions go beyond representing the grisly nature of violence and begin to take on daimonic associations. The description of entities feasting on the blood (*dām*) and flesh (*bāsār*) of enemies conjures up the image of birds and animals of the fields invited to dine on the fallen forces of Gog (Ezek 39:17-18).⁷⁸⁴ The connection between animals and daimons is an old one in Mesopotamia,

⁷⁸² Not only is Yahweh’s connection with lightning a part of his role as a divine warrior and storm god, it is also a part of his association with fire as an aspect of divine radiance. For more on this, see Theodore J. Lewis, “Divine Fire in Deuteronomy 33:2,” *JBL* 132 (2013): 798; and Michael Simone, S. J., “On Fire: Preternatural and Hypostatic Fire in Ancient Israelite Religion” (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2015), 120-124, 210.

⁷⁸³ Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 378.

⁷⁸⁴ J. Wright briefly draws attention to the connections between animals and demons in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. See John Wright, “Spirit and Wilderness: The Interplay of Two Motifs within the Hebrew Bible as a Background to Mark 1:2-13,” in *Perspectives on Language and Text: Essays and Poems in Honor of Francis I. Andersen’s Sixtieth Birthday July 28, 1985*, eds. Edgar W. Conrad and Edward G. Newing (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 294.

going back to the third millennium and continued into the first millennium.⁷⁸⁵ J. Scurlock notes that not only are certain Mesopotamian daimons portrayed with animal features, “some ordinarily encountered animals also acquired quasidemonic overtones.”⁷⁸⁶ As we saw above, wild animals appear among Ezekiel’s four judgements (Ezek 14:21) and birds of the sky and beasts of the earth are among the four types (literally “families”) of judgment in Jer 15:3. Jeremiah may draw upon the Song of Moses when he explains what has happened to Judah after Jehoiakim’s revolt against Nebuchadnezzar II:⁷⁸⁷

9. *ha‘ayit šabûa‘ nahālātî lî ha‘ayit sâbîb ‘ālêhâ ləkû ‘ispû kol-ḥayyat haśśādeh hētāyû lə‘oklā*

10. *rō‘îm rabbîm šihātû karmî bōsāsû ‘et-ḥelqātî nātēnû ‘et-ḥelqat ḥemdātî ləmidbar šəmāmâ*

11. *šāmāh lišmāmâ ‘ābəlâ ‘ālay šəmēmâ nāšammâ kol-hā‘āreš kî ‘ēn ‘iš šām ‘al-lēb*

12. *‘al-kol-šəpāyim bammidbār bā‘û šōdādîm kî ḥereb layhwh ‘ōkəlā miqšēh-‘ereš wə‘ad-qəšēh hā‘āreš ‘ēn šālôm ləkol-bāsār*

13. *zārə‘û ḥittîm wəqōšîm qāšārû neḥlû lō’ yō‘lû ūbōšû mittəbû‘ōtēkem mēḥārôn ‘ap-yhwh*

9. My possession has become a bird of prey (or) a hyena to me; let birds of prey envelop it! Gather all the beasts of the field, bring them to feed!

10. Many shepherds have ruined my vineyard; they have tread down my field;

They made my field of delight into a desolate steppe

11. He made it into a desolation; it mourns to me desolated;

⁷⁸⁵ Karel van der Toorn, “The Theology of Demons in Mesopotamia and Israel. Popular Belief and Scholarly Speculation,” in *Demons: The Demonology of Israelite-Jewish and Early Christian Literature in Context of their Environment*, eds. Armin Lange, Hermann Lichtenberger, and K. F. Diethard Röhmed (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 65-67.

⁷⁸⁶ JoAnn Scurlock, “Animals in Ancient Mesopotamian Religion,” in *A History of the Animal World in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Billie Jean Collins (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 362.

⁷⁸⁷ Lundbom interprets v.12 as an interpolation of the devastation wrought by the Chaldeans, Syrians, Ammonites, and Moabites as punishment for rebellion in 598 BCE (2 Kgs 24:1-2) from a later date. See, Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 659-660.

The whole land has been made desolate for there is no one who takes (it) to heart.

12. Upon all the bare heights in the steppe, devastators have come
For Yahweh's sword devours from one end of the earth to another
There was no peace for all flesh.

13. They have sown wheat, but thorns they harvested.

They became exhausted (but) they did not benefit.

Be ashamed of your harvests
of the burning anger of Yahweh.

(Jer 12:10-13)

Note, again, birds and beasts are invoked to consume (v. 9). The sword is depicted as a ravenous being that moves all about the land devouring flesh as it goes. According to Lundbom, this interpretation of the disaster of 598 BCE recasts the role of antagonist to Yahweh's weapon. He explains that "it was not simply foreign intruders. This audience is told that the destruction came about because of the 'sword of Yahweh.'"⁷⁸⁸ Multiple devastators (*šōdādīm*) are revealed to be the sword of Yahweh. On the one hand, this conforms to what we have seen in chapter four, in which the Assyrian king is the very weapon of the gods. On the other hand, the descriptions of Yahweh's sword take on a horrific dimension as its hunger ravages the entire earth and puts an end to peace. As in the example from the Song of Moses, here flesh (*bāsār*) is the sword's primary target, but it gorges itself on both flesh and blood elsewhere:

10. *wəhayyôm hahû' la'dōnāy yhwš šəbā'ôt yôm nəqāmā ləhinnāqēm
miššārāy wə'ākəlā ḥereb wəšābā'ā wərāwətā middāmām kī zebaḥ
la'dōnāy yhwš šəbā'ôt bə'ereš šāpôn 'el-nəhar-pərāt*

⁷⁸⁸ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 659.

10. That day belongs to the Lord, Yahweh of Hosts, a day of vengeance to take revenge on his enemies. A sword will devour and eat its fill. It will drink its fill of blood.

For there will be a sacrifice to the Lord, Yahweh of Hosts in the land north of the Euphrates river.

(Jer 46:10)

The prophet sets up the defeat of the Egyptian army presumably at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar II at Carchemish in 605 BCE as a sacrifice in which the sword will consume both flesh and blood.⁷⁸⁹ Thompson sees in the reference to eating flesh and drinking blood “the picture of a wild beast devouring people and drinking his fill of blood.”⁷⁹⁰ A similar picture of a gruesome feast set out for the sword appears in Yahweh’s plans of vengeance on Edom in Isaiah:

1. *qirbû gôyim lišmōa’ ûlâ`ummîm haqšîbû tišma’ hā`āreš ûmālō`āh tēbēl wəkol-še`ēšā`ēhā*

2. *kî qešep layhwh`al-kol-haggôyim wəhēmā`al-kol-šabā`ām heḥērîmām nātānām laṭṭābah*

3. *wəhallēhem yušlākû ûpigrēhem ya`āleh bo`šām wənāmassû hārîm middāmām*

4. *wənāmaqqu`kol-sabā` haššāmayim wənāgöllû kassēper haššāmayim wəkol-šabā`ām yibbōl kinbōl`āleh miggepen ûkənōbelet mittā`ēnā*

5. *kî-riwwatā baššāmayim ḥarbî hinnēh`al-`ēdôm tērēd wə`al-`am ḥermî lamišpāt*

6. *ḥereb layhwh mālā`ā dām huddašnā mēḥēleb middam kārîm wə`attūdîm mēḥēleb kilyôt`ēlîm kî zebaḥ layhwh bəbošrā wəṭebaḥ gādōl bə`ereš`ēdôm*

7. *wārārādû rə`ēmîm`immām ûpārîm`im-`abbîrîm wəriwwatā`aršām middām wa`āpārām mēḥēleb yađuššān*

8. *kî yôm nāqām layhwh šanat šillûmîm lərîb šīyyôn(?)*

1. Draw near, O nations, to hear! Listen, O populace! May the land and its fullness listen, the world and its offspring.

⁷⁸⁹ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37-52*, 202.

⁷⁹⁰ Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 689.

2. For the anger of Yahweh is upon all the nations; rage is upon all their armies. He has put them under the ban. He has given them up to slaughter.
 3. Their slain will be cast out; as for their corpses, their stench will rise. The mountains will melt because of their bloodshed.
 4. All the armies of the heavens will be dissolved; the heavens will be rolled up like a scroll; all their armies will wither like foliage withers on the vine or like withered fruit from the fig tree.
 5. For my sword is drunk in the heavens; Look it will descend upon Edom and upon the people of my ban for judgment.
 6. The sword of Yahweh is filled with blood; it is dripping with fat from the blood of young rams and goats; from the kidney fat of rams; for Yahweh's sacrifice will be in Bozrah; a great slaughter in the land of Edom.
 7. Wild bulls will descend on them; bulls with the powerful ones; their land will be drunk with blood. The dust will become fat from fat.
 8. For the day of vengeance belongs to Yahweh; a year of retaliation belongs to the dispute of Zion.
- (Isa 34:1-8).

This chapter of Isaiah is famous for containing the only biblical reference to Lilith and for this reason has often been a go-to passage in the discussion on whether or not the writers of the Hebrew Bible believed demonic entities to exist (namely, are the various entities listed in v. 14 merely animals or demonic forces?).⁷⁹¹ Our concern, however, is with Yahweh's sword, whose destructive rampage takes on cosmic significance as mountains flow and the very hosts of heaven will rot and wither away as the sword is drunk on blood and fat in the heavens. The imagery here is potent and, as Oswalt notes, "unnerving because of its frankly gory tone."⁷⁹² The inhuman character of the sword is not only highlighted by its macabre delight in feeding on human blood and fat, but also by its location in the

⁷⁹¹ H. W. F. Saggs, "The Divine in Relation to Good and Evil," in *The Encounter with the Divine in Mesopotamia and Israel* (London: Athlone Press, 1978), 212 n. 94; Toorn, "The Theology of Demons in Mesopotamia and Israel," 63; Judit M. Blair, *De-Demonizing the Old Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 63-95; Walton, "Demons in Mesopotamia and Israel," 241.

⁷⁹² Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 611.

heavens. While other celestial bodies wither at the sight and stench of Edomite corpses, the sword drinks it all in and descends for more. The supernatural status of Yahweh's sword is further confirmed in Isaiah's description of its use against Assyria:

8. *wānāpal 'aššûr bəḥereb lō'-'iš wəḥereb lō'-'ādām tō'kālennû wānās lô mippānê-ḥereb ûbahûrāyw lāmas yihyû*

9. *wəsal'ô mimmāgôr ya'ăbôr wəḥattû minnēs sārāyw nə'um-yhwh 'ăšer-ûr lô bəšīyyôn wətannûr lô bîrûšālāim*

8. Assur will fall by a sword **not of man**, an **inhuman** sword will consume him. He will flee before the sword and his young men will become forced labor.

9. His rock will pass away from fright; his leaders will be shattered because of a standard, utterance of Yahweh, whose light is in Zion and his furnace is in Jerusalem.

(Isa 31:8-9)

The otherworldly character of the sword is beyond a doubt in this instance, no human will be able to claim responsibility for Assyria's fall. Oswalt speculates that the sword refers to one of God's angels, while Roberts wonders whether it is meant to refer to a plague or is purposefully ambiguous.⁷⁹³ The association of angel, plague/pestilence, and sword appears in one of the punishments for David's census in 1 Chron 21:12 (more on this below). Although the sword here is supernatural, this interpretation cannot be applied to every reference, since in some passages the sword represents a foreign king or army. Yet in passages that personify the sword, particularly those that revel in the sword's gory appetite, the supernatural is invoked. Regardless of exactly what kind of entity is envisioned (daimon, angel, hypostasis), one of the results of employing this kind of language is a shift in responsibility from the human realm to the divine one. The

⁷⁹³ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 575-576; Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 405.

destruction of Israel (e.g. Isa 1:20; Jer 12:10-13; Hos 11:6) or foreign enemies (Deut 32:39-43; Isa 31:8-9; 34:5-8; Jer 46:10) is not the result of human punishment but the working out of divine justice, in which god commands his subordinates to undertake bloody vengeance. This brings us to the final category of personification, the direct address.

Direct Address

Not only is the sword described as a dutiful agent of Yahweh and its evokes gruesome imagery, the sword is addressed by Yahweh and in one instance by his prophet. Naturally, Yahweh's communication with the sword takes the form of a sovereign-subject relationship with Yahweh giving orders and instructions, which are to be executed. In Amos 9, we find a summary of Yahweh's communication with the sword:

1. *rā`itī`et-`ādōnāy niṣṣāb`al-hammizbēaḥ wayyō`mer hak hakkaptōr wəyir`āšū hassippīm ūbāša`am bārō`š kullām wə`aḥrītām baḥereb`ehērog lō`-yānūs lāhem nās wəlō`-yimmālēt lāhem pālīt*
2. *`im-yaḥtərū biš`ōl miššām yādī tiqqāḥēm wə`im-ya`ālū haššamayim miššām`ōrīdēm*
3. *wə`im-yēḥābə`ū bārō`š hakkarmel miššām`āḥappēs ūlāqaḥtīm wə`im-yissātərū minneged`ēnay baqarqa`hayyām miššām`āṣawweh`et-hannāḥās ūnəšākām*
4. *wə`im-yēlakū baššəbī lipné`ōybēhem(?) miššām`āṣawweh`et-haḥereb wahārāgātam wəsamti`ēnī`ālēhem lərā`ā wəlō`ləṭōbā*

1. I saw my Lord standing upon the altar. He said, strike the capital so that the thresholds quake; sever all of them at the head; I will kill the last of them with the sword. None of them will be able to flee; none of them will escape.

2. If they dig into Sheol, my hand will take them from there. If they ascend to the heavens, I will bring them down from there.

3. If they hide themselves at the top of Carmel, I will track (them) down from there and I will take them. If they conceal themselves from my eyes at the bottom of the sea; I will command the snake from there to bite them.

4. If they go into captivity before their enemies; I will command the sword to kill them from there; I will set my eye upon them for evil and not for good.
(Amos 9:1-4)

In this passage, Yahweh promises that there will be no escape for the northern kingdom of Israel. At the outset, Yahweh issues a short series of commands (“strike,” “sever”) to an unidentified entity. Andersen and Freedman take this to be a command to an “unnamed (angelic) agent” and suggest that it may be the same entity that receives the sword’s command in v.4.⁷⁹⁴ This would make sense as the verb *nkh* can be associated with the sword in the common expressions “striking with the edge of the sword” (*nkh lpy-hrb*)⁷⁹⁵ or “strike with the sword” (*nkh bhrb*).⁷⁹⁶ If any survive the first onslaught, Yahweh himself will kill them with the sword. High or low they will not be able to escape his punishment. Even in the situation of being taken captive, a phase in which one could usually consider the threat of imminent death to be past, Yahweh will command the sword to kill them. Interestingly, since captivity before one’s enemies is contrasted with death by the sword, it seems that human enemies are not the referent behind the sword. Andersen and Freedman take this view when they speculate that *hereb* “sword” itself is “perhaps the name of a heavenly agent who is the sword wielder par excellence or the personified weapon of choice both for gods and men.”⁷⁹⁷ Yahweh both wields the sword himself (v. 1) and gives orders to the sword (v. 4). Although the exact command itself

⁷⁹⁴ Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 24A; New York: Doubleday, 1989), 839.

⁷⁹⁵ See Num 21:24; Deut 13:16; Josh 11:11; 2 Sam 15:14; Jer 21:7; and Job 1:15.

⁷⁹⁶ See 2 Sam 12:9; 2 Kgs 19:37; Jer 20:4; 26:23; 41:2; and Ezek 5:2.

⁷⁹⁷ Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 838.

does not appear in verse 4, Yahweh's instructions do appear briefly in Ezekiel's Song of the Sword:

19. *wə'attā ben-'ādām hinnābē' wəhak kap 'el-kāp wətikkāpēl hereb šəlīšitā hereb ḥālālīm hī' hereb ḥālāl haggādōl haḥōderet lāhem*

20. *ləma 'an lāmūg lēb wəharbēh hammikšōlīm 'al kol-ša 'ārēhem nātattī ibḥat-ḥāreb 'āḥ 'āšūyā ləbārāq mə'uṭṭā ləṭābaḥ*

21. *hit'aḥādī hēmīnī hāsīmī haśmīl 'ānā pānayik mu'ādōt*

22. *wəgam-'ānī 'akkeh kappī 'el-kappī wahānīḥōtī ḥāmātī 'ānī yhwḥ dibbartī*

19. As for you, son of man, prophesy and clap hands, a sword be doubled up to a third (time), it is a sword of (the) slain, the sword of the great slain is surrounding them.

20. In order that heart(s) waver and that stumbling blocks increase, upon all their gates I have set the slaughter of (the) sword. Alas, it was made as lightning, it was withdrawn for slaughter.

21. Be sharp! Go right! Get set! Go left! Wherever your face is appointed!

22. Even I myself will clap my hands and I will satisfy my wrath. I the Lord have spoken.

(Ezek 21:19-22)

In the Song of the Sword, Yahweh begins by preparing the sword for its destructive purpose. The sword is repeatedly sharpened and polished (v. 14, 15, 16) before being set into the hand of a killer (v. 16).⁷⁹⁸ The prophet is enjoined to clap his hands followed by Yahweh's orders to the sword. The sword is given license to completely unrestricted movement (to the right and to the left) according to the designation of Yahweh (*mu'ādōt*). Here the sword has some agency of movement though it is under the complete control of the deity. The clapping of the prophet and deity's hands has been explained in a variety of ways.⁷⁹⁹ Maarsingh argues that the multiplication of the sword or sword

⁷⁹⁸ For the treatment of Ezek 21:14-16, see chapter three, pages 143-146.

⁷⁹⁹ For a summary of the various ways the clapping of Ezek 21:19-22 has been interpreted, see Friebe, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 301-303.

strikes is tied to the clapping of the prophet's hands, which serves as a kind of magical act.⁸⁰⁰ Ezek 21:19-22 nowhere makes this association explicit. Ezekiel is instructed to clap his hands once, but the sword is not only doubled but doubled multiple times. Additionally, Yahweh's clapping of his own hands is not followed by further descriptions of the sword's activity. While the prophet, the sword, and Yahweh take part in the exchange, the prophet does not interact with the sword directly. In contrast, the prophet Jeremiah does engage in a rhetorical exchange with the sword as it threatens Ashkelon:

1. *'āšer hāyâ dābar-yhwh 'el-yirməyāhû hannābî' 'el-pəlištīm bəterem yakkeh par'ōh 'et-'azzā*
2. *kōh 'amar yhwh hinnēh-mayim 'ōlīm miššāpōn wəhāyû lənaḥal šōtēp wəyišṭəpū 'ereš ūməlō'āh 'ir wəyōšəbē bāh wəzā'āqū hā'ādām wəhélīl kōl yōšēb hā'āreš*
3. *miqqōl ša'ātat parsōt 'abbîrāyw mēra'aš lərikbō hāmōn galgillāyw lō'-hipnū 'ābōt 'el-bānīm mēripyōn yādāyim*
4. *'al-hayyōm habbā' lišdōd 'et-kol-pəlištīm ləhəkrīt ləšōr ūləšīdōn kōl šārīd 'ōzēr kī-šōdēd yhwh 'et-pəlištīm šə'ērīt 'i kaptōr*
5. *bā'ā qorḥā 'el-'azzā nidmətā 'ašqəlōn šə'ērīt 'imqām 'ad-mātay titgōdādī*
6. *hōy ḥereb layhwh 'ad-'ānā lō' tišqōfī hē'āsəpī 'al-ta'rək hērāgə 'i wādōmmī(?)*
7. *'ək tišqōfī wayhwh šiwwā-lāh 'el-'ašqəlōn wə'el-ḥōp hayyām šām yə'ādāh*

1. That which was the word of Yahweh to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the Philistines before Pharaoh struck Gaza.
2. Thus Yahweh has said, "Look, waters are rising from the north and they will become an overflowing wadi and they will flood the land and all that is in it, both city and its inhabitants. Men will cry out and every inhabitant of the land will howl.

⁸⁰⁰ B. Maarsingh, "Das Schwertlied in Ez 21,13-22 und das Erra-Gedicht," in *Ezekiel and His Book. Textual and Literary Criticism and their Interrelation*, ed. J. Lust, (BETL 74; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986), 351.

3. At the sound of the stamping of his mighty hooves; at the roar of his chariots, the tumult of his wheels; fathers will not turn to sons because of the weakness of (their) hands.
 4. On the day which comes to devastate all the Philistines, to exterminate for Tyre and Sidon, every survivor, helper; for Yahweh is devastating the Philistines, the remnant of the isle of Kaphtor.
 5. Baldness has come to Gaza. Ashkelon was silent, the remnant of their valley. How long will you cut yourself?
 6. Alas, sword of Yahweh, how long will you not be silent? Be gathered into your sheath! Be quiet and still!
 7. How can you be silent? Yahweh has ordered it to Ashkelon and to the shore of the sea. He summoned it there.
- (Jer 47:1-7)

Surprisingly in verse 6, at face value the prophet seeks to intervene in the fated destruction of Ashkelon by asking the sword to return to its sheath and cease all activity. Although the genre of Oracles Against the Nations is an unusual place to find concern for foreign nations, the question is rhetorical. The answer to the prophet's question, which he himself gives on behalf of the sword, rejects any opportunity for mercy. The sword cannot do otherwise than what Yahweh commands. Just as the sword could go wherever it was designated (*mu'ādôt* from *yā'ad*) so too in Jeremiah, Yahweh summons (*yə'ādāh* from *yā'ad*) the sword to Ashkelon. Although the sword is addressed by God and prophet, we never hear the sword's response. The closest we come to this is in verse 7 when the prophet seems to speak on behalf of the sword. Lundbom considers the recipient of Yahweh's order and summons in the second part of verse 7 to refer to the oncoming destruction, though he notes that many consider the sword to still be in view.⁸⁰¹ One of the issues that leads him to this interpretation is the sudden shift in person from a second person address "How can you be silent" to a third person one "Yahweh

⁸⁰¹ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, 240.

commanded it.” Of course, there is no grammatical reason why the sword could not continue to be the object of the verbs. Adopting Lundbom’s solution still presents an abrupt shift as the prophet moves from addressing the sword directly to referring to the actions of Yahweh in the third person. Even if Yahweh has ordered destruction to come to Ashkelon, this destruction takes the form of or is being carried out by the sword. Furthermore, given the examples in which Yahweh commands (*šwh*) the sword (Amos 9:4) or summons it (Ezek 21:21), it is best to see the sword as the recipient of Yahweh’s orders.

Finally, a much later text continues the motif of personifying Yahweh’s sword. In this case, there is a growing identification of the sword with the angel wielding it. Beginning with Second-Zechariah in the early Persian period (510-445 BCE), Yahweh addresses the sword in order to take his shepherd to task.⁸⁰²

7. *ḥereb ’ūrī ’al-rō’ī wə’al-geber ’āmītī nə’um yhwḥ šəbā’ōt hak ’et-hārō’eh ūtəpūšēnā haššō’n wahāšibōtī yādī ’al-haššō’ārīm*

8. *wəhāyā bəkol-hā’āreš nə’um-yhwḥ pī-šənayim bāh yikkāratū yigwā’ū wəhaššālīšit yiwwāter bāh*

9. *wəhēbē’tī ’et-haššālīšit bā’ēš ūšərapṭīm kišrōp ’et-hakkesep ūbəḥantīm kibḥōn ’et-hazzāhāb hū’ yiqrā’ bišmī wa’ānī ’e’ēneh ’ōtō ’āmartī ’ammī hū’ wəhū’ yō’mar yhwḥ ’ēlōhāy*

7. Awaken, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man of my community, utterance of Yahweh of Hosts. Strike the one who pastures. May the flock scatter. I will turn my hand against the small ones.

8. It will be in all the land, utterance of Yahweh. Two thirds among it will be exterminated (and) perish; One third among it will be left over.

9. I will bring one third through fire and I will smelt them as one smelts silver. I will test them as one tests gold. He who calls on my name, I will

⁸⁰² There is some debate over the exact dating of Second-Zechariah (Zech 9-14) and even chapters 12-14 more specifically. See Boda’s excellent summary in Mark J. Boda, *The Book of Zechariah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 31-37. Interesting for our purposes is Boda’s connection of Zech 13:7-9 with 11:4-17.

answer him. I will say "he is my people" and he will say, "Yahweh is my God."

(Zech 13:7-9)

The destruction via the sword in terms of thirds recalls Ezek 5:1-12, in which two thirds will die of famine, pestilence, and the sword while one third will be scattered and have the unsheathed sword after them. Likewise, two thirds are destined to perish but the remaining one third is to be tested with smelting instead of being scattered and pursued by the sword. This switch in grammatical gender among Yahweh's commands recalls the ambiguously addressed commands in Amos 9:1, which Andersen and Freedman also thought referred to an "unnamed (angelic) agent" that might be the same as the sword carrying agent in Amos 9:4.⁸⁰³ Here in Zech 13:7, Yahweh commands the sword directly, ordering it to awaken against his shepherd, presumably either Zerubbabel or his son-in-law, Elnathan. This imperative is followed by another order, "stike" (*hak*), but the gender of the command has changed to masculine. Meyers considers this to be a continued reference to the sword of Yahweh, since no new actor has been introduced.⁸⁰⁴ Boda suggests the shift in gender could refer to the one wielding the sword, proposing that it could be directed at Yahweh himself or his arm.⁸⁰⁵ Beginning with the latter, understanding the command to be addressing Yahweh's arm would present the same difficulty, since the common terms for arm (*yad* or *zərôa'*) are both feminine, as is common for most body parts in biblical Hebrew. As for Yahweh ordering himself, it

⁸⁰³ Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 839.

⁸⁰⁴ Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9-14: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 25C; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 384.

⁸⁰⁵ Boda, *The Book of Zechariah*, 739.

seems unlikely for God to need to address himself in the third person. More likely, is that the switch in gender reflects the daimonic entity wielding the awakened sword. Although it is not certain, the most likely candidate for the wielder of the sword would be one of Yahweh's angels. This becomes very clear in a yet later text (early 4th century BCE), the 1 Chronicles version of David's ill-advised census and subsequent punishment. After David realizes his error (1 Chron 21:8), God presents three punishment options via the prophet Gad:

9. *waydabbēr yhwh 'el-gād ḥōzēh dāwīd lē'mōr*
 10. *lēk wəḏibbartā 'el-dāwīd lē'mōr kōh 'āmar yhwh šālōš 'ānī nōṭeh 'ālēkā bəḥar-lākā 'aḥat mēhēnnā wə'e 'ēšeh-lāk*
 11. *wayyābō' gād 'el-dāwīd wayyō'mer lō kōh-'āmar yhwh qabbel-lāk*
 12. *'im-šālōš šānīm rā 'āb wə'im-šālōšā hodāšīm nispeh mippānē-šārēkā wəḥereb 'ōyābekā ləmaššeget wə'im-šālōšet yāmīm ḥereb yhwh wədeber bā'āreš ūmal'ak yhwh mašḥīt bəkol-gəbūl yiśrā'el wə'attā rə'eh mā-'āšīb 'et-šōlḥī dābār*
 13. *wayyō'mer dāwīd 'el-gād šar-lī mə'ōd 'eppələ-nā' bəyad-yhwh kī-rabbīm raḥāmāyw mə'ōd ūbəyad-'ādām 'al-'eppōl*
 14. *wayyittēn yhwh deber bəyiśrā'el wayyipōl mīyiśrā'el šib'im 'elep 'iš*
 15. *wayyišlah hā'elōhīm mal'āk līrūšālaīm ləhašḥītāh ūkəhašḥīt rā'ā yhwh wayyinnāḥem 'al-hārā'ā wayyō'mer lammal'āk hammašḥīt rab'attā herep yādekā ūmal'ak yhwh 'ōmēd 'im-gōren 'ornān haybūšī*
 16. *wayyiššā' dāwīd 'et-'ēnāyw wayyar' 'et-mal'ak yhwh 'ōmēd bēn hā'āreš ūbēn haššāmayim wəḥarbō šəlūpā bəyādō nətūyā 'al-yərūšālaīm wayyipōl dāwīd wəhazzəqēnīm məkussīm baššaqqīm 'al-pānēhem*
 ...
 27. *wayyō'mer yhwh lammal'āk wayyāšeb ḥarbō 'el-nəḏānāh*
 28. *bā'ēt hahī'bir'ōt dāwīd kī-'ānāhū yhwh bəgōren 'ornān haybūšī wayyizbah šām*
 29. *ūmiškan yhwh 'āšer-'āšā mōšeh bammidbār ūmizbah hā'ōlā bā'ēt hahī' babbāmā bəgib'ōn*
 30. *wəlō'-yākōl dāwīd lāleket ləpānāyw lidrōš 'elōhīm kī nib'at mippānē ḥereb mal'ak yhwh*

9. Yahweh spoke to Gad the seer of David:

10. "Go, speak to David, "Thus says Yahweh, I am laying out three (punishments) for you. Choose one of them and I will do it.

11. Gad came to David and said to him, "Thus Yahweh says, "Pick for yourself"

12. "A three-year famine, or three months of being carried away by your enemies; the sword of your enemy overtaking, or three days of the sword of Yahweh, namely pestilence in the land, the angel of Yahweh destroying throughout the border of Israel. Now, see. What shall I return to the one who sent me?"

13. David said to Gad, "I am greatly distressed. Let me fall into the hand of Yahweh for his compassion is very great. Let me not fall into the hand of man."

14. Yahweh placed pestilence in Israel. Seventy thousand men from Israel fell.

15. God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it and as he was destroying, Yahweh saw and relented the disaster. He said to the angel who was destroying, "Enough now! Cease your hand. The angel of Yahweh stopped at the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite."

16. David looked up and saw the angel of Yahweh standing between the earth and heavens, his sword drawn in his hand, stretched out against Jerusalem. David and the elders, covered with sackcloth, fell upon their faces.

...

27. Yahweh spoke to the angel and he returned his sword to its sheath.

28. When David saw that Yahweh had answered him at the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, he sacrificed there.

29. The tabernacle of Yahweh, which Moses made in the steppe and the altar of burnt offering were at that time in the high place in Gibeon.

30. But David was unable to go seek Yahweh in his presence for he was frightened because of the sword of Yahweh's angel.

(1 Chron 21:9-16, 27-30)

Among the punishments, the last two punishments are characterized by a contrast of swords. This focus on the sword as emblematic of punishment, even punishments not associated with warfare and violence, in addition to its association with an angel is a more recent development of the story of David's census. The sword, whether among the punishments or in the hand of the angel, is completely absent from 2 Sam 24:12-25. It is, perhaps, under the influence of the sword's expanding role in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, in which the sword could serve as a symbol for the entire SFP triad (see chapter five), that it came to play a role in 1 Chron 21:9-30.

Of the final two punishments, the three months of defeat at the hands of enemies is further described as “the sword of your enemy overtaking” (v. 12). This highlights the contrast with the third punishment, three days of pestilence, which is called both the sword of Yahweh and the angel of Yahweh who will devastate (*mašhîṭ*). In this verse, the identity of the sword of Yahweh as the angel of Yahweh is made explicit. This is further confirmed when, after David selects to fall into the hand of Yahweh instead of man, ostensibly choosing pestilence, God sends (*šlh*) the angel to Jerusalem (v. 15), where David sees him with the drawn sword in hand stretched out toward Jerusalem (v. 16). After David builds the altar to Yahweh in Ornan’s threshing floor, Yahweh commands the angel to sheath his sword (v. 27). Interestingly, David’s choice to sacrifice at Ornan’s threshing floor instead of the tabernacle at Gibeon was due to fear of the sword of the angel of Yahweh (v. 30). While it should not be overstated, it is worth noting that David’s fear was of the sword itself and not necessarily the angel or Yahweh whose power stands behind it. This recalls the injunction to get drunk and vomit because of the sword (Jer 25:16, 27) or the description of the fear of the sword that the survivors of Jerusalem’s siege had (Jer 42:16).

As we have seen, the personification of the sword can be manifested in several ways; it can be dispatched as one of Yahweh’s agents of punishment, the sword’s monstrous hunger can be highlighted through gory imagery, and the sword can be addressed directly by God and prophet. The status of the sword as an entity is difficult to settle. In cases of dispatching of the sword or the receiving of commands, one could easily take it elliptically for an angel who either carries the sword of Yahweh or is the sword of Yahweh. On the other hand, the descriptions of a bloodthirsty sword conjure up

a more malevolent forced constrained (or not) by the power of Yahweh into obedience. Yet there is not a hint of independence among the activities of the sword. Thus, unlike Yahweh's anger, the sword cannot be a completely independent hypostasis.⁸⁰⁶ The gruesome nature of the sword, when invoked, serves to emphasize the severity of the punishment awaiting Yahweh's enemies. To shed further light on the phenomenon, we will briefly pause our discussion of the nature of Yahweh's sword, to explore the personification of weapons in Mesopotamian sources to see if they offer any insight to the biblical tradition.

Mesopotamian Parallels

Over the millennia of Mesopotamian history, divine weapons have played many roles, but, for the topic of weapon personification, perhaps the most significant is their position as gods. There are several examples of a god's weapon functioning as a god in its own right, such as the two divine maces of Ninurta: Šarur and Šargaz.⁸⁰⁷ To this we could add the Sebettu, which began their life as daimons only to achieve the status of gods and were given to Erra as his weapons.⁸⁰⁸ Erra's advisor, Išum, was envisioned in the Erra Epic as a sword.⁸⁰⁹ This may have been on analogy with Nergal's advisor Ugur,

⁸⁰⁶ There is, however, some connection between Yahweh's anger and the sword. In Isa 34:1-8, Yahweh's anger is invoked (v. 2) before the graphic description of the sword's work (vv. 5-6). This is also the case for instances when Yahweh's anger is acting contrary to Yahweh, such as with Balaam in Num 22:20-22, 31-35 and 2 Sam 24:1-2, 10, 15 || 1 Chron 21, both mentioned by McCarter. In both the Numbers and 2 Samuel || 1 Chronicles examples, the anger of Yahweh is accompanied by the *mal'ak yhw* with drawn sword (Num 22:23, 31; 1 Chron 21:12, 16, 30).

⁸⁰⁷ Esar 8 ii' 11'-13'; Lugale 109-115, 160-161, 191. See below for exemplars.

⁸⁰⁸ Erra i 7-8, 17-18, 30-38, 45, 89-91. See below for exemplars.

⁸⁰⁹ Erra i 12 *at-ta nam-ša-ru-um-ma ta-bi-[hu]* "You are the sword and slaughterer."

who was also depicted as a sword.⁸¹⁰ At some level the concept of weapon-gods may inform many of the examples of weapon personification in Mesopotamian traditions. That said, not every example features known weapon-gods and thus I have organized the Mesopotamian examples thematically into categories similar to the Hebrew Bible examples: Weapons marching at the king's side, Devouring Weapons, and Direct Address.

Marching at the King's Side

Kings, especially in the Neo-Babylonian period, often claim that the gods dispatched their terrifying weapons to the king's side. Much like the examples of divine weapon bestowal, this claim serves both to empower the king in his campaigns against enemies and to provide an example of divine approval of the king's action. For example, in Sargon II's famous Letter to Aššur, in the king's prayer to Aššur, he extols Aššur's greatness and equates the deployment of divine weapons to the king's side with god-given victory:

122. *ul-mi-šu še-e-ru-ti i-du-uš-šu u₂-šal-lak UGU a-a-bi u₃ za-ma-ne₂-e uš-za-a-su i-na NI₃.E₃*

122. He [Aššur] caused his devastating axes to go at his [Sargon's] side, over enemies and adversaries he caused him to triumph. (TCL 3 122)⁸¹¹

⁸¹⁰ Since Nergal and Erra were syncretized together as early as the Old Babylonian period, it is not surprising to find the advisor of Erra taking on characteristics of Nergal's advisor, in spite of Išum's connection with fire. See F. A. M. Wiggermann, "Nergal A," *RLA* 9:217.

⁸¹¹ Mayer, *Assyrien und Urartu*, 1:108. Mayer has UGU *a-a-bi za-ma-ne₂-e*, but *TCL* 3 shows an *u₃* between *a-a-bi* and *za-ma-ne₂-e*.

Not unlike Yahweh, who dispatches his sword, Aššur causes his axes to travel at the king's side described with the C-stem of the verb *alāku* “go, walk.” This is the most common verb used to portray divine weapons coming to the king's side. This motif is repeated after Sargon II's prayer is answered and Aššur sends his furious weapons to the king's aid:

126. ^{giš}TUKUL.MEŠ-*šu*₂ *ez-zu-ti ša i-na a-ši-šu-nu iš-tu ši-it* ^dUTU-*ši a-di e-reb* ^dUTU-*ši la ma-gi-ri i-meš*₃-*šu i-du-u* ³-*a u₂-ma-er-ma*

126. He dispatched to my side his furious weapons which when they go out from east to west crush the insubmissive.
(TCL 3 126)

In this line, Aššur's action is described with the verb *âru* “go, advance,” which when in the D-stem, as it is here, often is used to refer to sending persons such as messengers.⁸¹² This implies a certain amount of agency in the weapons, which is confirmed by their further description as “going out from east to west” and “despising the insubmissive.” Additionally, it should be noted that the weapons are qualified as *ezzu* “terrible,” which is a common adjective for divine weapons, daimons (Lamaštu, Ūmu), gods (Ištar, Erra, Sîn), powerful natural forces (wind, flood, fire), and divine radiance.⁸¹³ The common element to these various entities is the threat they can pose to humanity, which is fitting for divine weapons whose purpose is to defeat the king's enemies. This motif continued to be employed by Sargon II's grandson, Esarhaddon, who not only had Aššur's arrow in his possession, but was accompanied by the weapon-gods Šarur and Šargaz:

11'. *a-bu-ba-niš a-lak* ^{giš}*šil-ta-ḫi* AN.ŠAR₂ *la [pa-du-u]*
12'. *ez-zi-iš šam-riš it-ta-ši* [...]
13'. ^d*šar₂-ur₄ dšar₂-gaz il-la-ka ina* ^ṛ*i*^ṛ-*[di-ia]*

⁸¹² CAD A2, s.v. *âru*, 320.

⁸¹³ CAD E, s.v. *ezzu*, 432-434.

Like the flood I was rushing (lit: going/marching); the merciless arrow of Aššur furiously and savagely was moving out. Šarur and Šargaz were going at my side.
(Esar 8 ii' 11'-13')⁸¹⁴

Although this prism is fragmentary, the second column, from which the above lines are taken, most likely refers to Esarhaddon's Egyptian campaign.⁸¹⁵ This passage seems modelled in part upon Sennacherib's Battle of Halulê text, since both involve a prayer to the gods (ii' 1'-6'), followed by a description of the king equipping himself for battle (ii' 6'-10'), which included the strong bow that Aššur had given him. Unlike Sennacherib who fights with Aššur's weapons, shooting arrows (Senn 22 v 78-82), the divine weapons take a more active role in Esarhaddon's case. The arrow of Aššur seems to take off furiously (from *ezzu*) on its own volition with no mention of anyone firing it. In addition to Aššur's arrow, Ninurta's divine maces, Šarur and Šargaz go marching at Esarhaddon's side, like Sargon II's reference to Aššur's axes and furious weapons. This depiction casts the king in the role of Ninurta who fought the terrible Anzu with his bow and arrows, surrounded by his iconic maces. As we saw in chapter four, this fits into the pattern of Neo-Assyrian kings adopting the traits and attributes of the warrior-god, Ninurta.⁸¹⁶ The motif continued into the Neo-Babylonian period and was especially popular in the prayers of Nebuchadnezzar II.⁸¹⁷ These prayers, which often occurred at the end of

⁸¹⁴ RINAP 4, 53-54.

⁸¹⁵ Leichty, RINAP 4, 52.

⁸¹⁶ Annus, *The God Ninurta*, 204.

⁸¹⁷ VAB 4 84 ii 26-29; VAB 4 190 ii 12-15; YOS 1 44 ii 23-29; CT 37 6 i 18-22; and PBS ½ 106: 32-34.

building inscriptions, were addressed to a variety of gods: Marduk,⁸¹⁸ Šamaš,⁸¹⁹ Lugal-Marada,⁸²⁰ Nabû,⁸²¹ and Ea.⁸²² For example, Nebuchadnezzar II praises Nabû as the one who sent his weapons to the king's side:

i 18. *u₃ ^dna-bi-um pa-qi₂-id ki-iš-ša-ti₃ ša-me₂-e u₃ er-še-ti₃*
i 19. *IBILA-šu re-eš-ta-am li-ib-bi-ša*
i 20. *ra- 'im šar-ru-u₂-ti-ia mu-ki-nim pa-le-e-a*
i 21. *gišTUKUL.gišTUKUL da-nu₄-ti₃ ša la im-ma-aḥ-ḥa-ru a-na šu-um-qu₃-tu a-a-bi-a*
i 22. *u₃ ka-ša-dam za- 'i-ri-ia u₂-ša-li-ka i-da-a-a*

and Nabû, caretaker of the totality of the heavens and the earth, his (Marduk's) firstborn heir, her [Sarpanit's] beloved, lover of my kingship, establisher of my reign, he caused strong weapons, which cannot be faced, to go at my side in order to make my enemies fall and conquer my foes. (CT 37 6 i 18-22)⁸²³

As we saw in the Assyrian examples, the weapons sent to the king's side seemed to have a life of their own. While the vividness of the weapon's agency is lacking in Nebuchadnezzar II's prayer, there is some indication that the divine weapons are supernaturally controlled. The purpose of Nabu's strong weapons is made clear: to fell the king's enemies and conquer his foes. The effectiveness of such divine weapons is never in doubt. Yet, whether the king was meant to wield them or they were to "wield

⁸¹⁸ VAB 4 84 ii 26-29 and PBS ½ 106: 32-34.

⁸¹⁹ VAB 4 190 ii 12-15 and PBS ½ 106: 32-34.

⁸²⁰ YOS 1 44 ii 23-29.

⁸²¹ CT 37 6 i 18-22.

⁸²² PBS ½ 106: 32-34.

⁸²³ As Zyl III, 6 in Paul-Richard Berger, *Die neubabylonischen Königsinschriften: Königsinschriften des ausgehenden babylonischen Reiches (626-539 a. Chr.)* (AOAT 4/1; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1973), 44-45, and 291; 782 in M. Sigrist, R. Zadok, and C. B. F. Walker, *Catalogue of the Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum. Volume III* (London: British Museum Press, 2006), 276; and as NebkC36 in Rocio da Riva, *The Neo-Babylonian Royal Inscriptions: An Introduction* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2008), 121.

themselves”⁸²⁴ is not made clear in these lines. In a prayer to Lugal-Marada, after restoring the god’s Eigikalamma temple in Marad, Nebuchadnezzar II asks for a long life, a stable throne, a long reign, and divine weapons:

- ii. 23. *ba-la-aṭ u₄-um da-ri₂-u₂-ti₃*
- ii. 24. *še-be₂-e li-it-tu-u₂-ti*
- ii. 25. *ku-un* ^{giš}GU.ZA *u₃ la-ba-ri pa-le-e*
- ii. 26. *a-na ši-ri-ik-ti šu-ur₂-kam*
- ii. 27. ^{giš}TUKUL.^{giš}TUKUL-*ka da-nu₄-ti₃ li-il-li-ku i-da-a-a*
- ii. 28. *ši-gi-iš ku-ul-la-at la ma-gi-ri*
- ii. 29.⁸²⁵ *ḫu-ul-li-iq na-ap-ḫa-ar-šu-un*

- ii. 23. a life of everlasting day(s),
 - ii. 24. the satisfaction of old age,
 - ii. 25. stability of throne, an enduring reign
 - ii. 26. Grant to me as a gift!
 - ii. 27. May your strong weapons go at my side!
 - ii. 28. Slay all the insubmissive!
 - ii. 29. Kill all of them!
- (YOS 1 44 ii 27-29)

In these lines the request for Lugal-Marada’s strong weapons to go at the king’s side is accompanied by a series of imperative verbs: “slay” (*šigiš*) and “kill” (*ḫulliq*). These commands are directed at a masculine singular subject and therefore cannot be directed at the weapons themselves, which are plural (*kakkīka dannūti*). Given that the previous requests were addressed to Lugal-Marada, it is best to see these commands in the same way. This is reminiscent of the address change in Zech 13:7-9. Presumably, when Nebuchadnezzar II asks Lugal-Marada to slay and kill his enemies, the implication is that the god will either use or command the aforementioned weapons to achieve this effect.

⁸²⁴ This seemed to be the case with the arrow of Aššur and Aššur’s weapons that set forth and despise rebels.

⁸²⁵ A. Clay gives the transliteration for this line as “*ḫu-ul-li-iq na-ap-ḫa-ar-šu₂-un*.” See Albert T. Clay, *Miscellaneous Inscriptions in the Yale Babylonian Collection* (YOS 1; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1915), 64. The line drawing on pl. 32 shows *šu* instead of *šu₂*, which is supported by the *CAD* reading of the line, see *CAD* N1, p. 295.

While the divine weapons are now in the presence of the Babylonian king, Lugal-Marada's weapons are still at the god's command and thus Lugal-Marada is still responsible for vanquishing the king's enemies. Finally, this same motif of dispatching weapons to one's side is depicted at the divine level when Anu gives the Sebettu to Erra as his weapons in the Epic of Erra:

i 39. *ul-tu ši-mat* ^d7-*bi nap-ḥar-šu₂-nu i-ši-mu* ^da-*num*
i 40. *id-din-šu-nu-ti-ma ana* ^dir₃-*ra qar-rad* DINGIR.MEŠ *lil-li-ku i-da-ka*
...
i 44. *lu-u₂* ^{giš}TUKUL.MEŠ-*ka ez-zu-ti šu-nu-ma lil-li-ku i-da-a-ka*

i 39. After Anu decree the fates for all the Sebettu,
i 40. he gave them to Erra warrior of the gods (saying) “May they go at your side!”

...
i 44. May they be your furious weapons; may they go at your side!
(Erra i 39-40, 44)⁸²⁶

After a description of Anu's creation of the Sebettu and his instructions to them, he puts them in Erra's charge, just as the gods do for the human king. With the Sebettu serving as Erra's weapons, the independence of the divine weapons, themselves gods, is highlighted. Not only are they commissioned by their father, Anu (i 30-38), the Sebettu are confusingly both the weapons of Erra and armed with their own weapons (i 45), which they complain are suffering from a lack of use (i 89-91). The image of divine weapons going at someone's side (king or god) seems to be a version of divine martial support similar to when the gods go at the king's side, front, or back. These divine weapons travel in the presence of the king on the order of their divine owner (or father in

⁸²⁶ For a discussion of the wordplay in the Epic of Erra and geminate parallels between *kakkū* and *lillikū*, see Scott B. Noegel, “‘Wordplay’ in the Song of Erra,” in *Strings and Threads: A Celebration of the Work of Anne Draffkorn Kilmer*, eds. Wolfgang Heimpel and Gabriella Frantz-Szabó (Winona Lake, IN.: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 182.

the case of the Sebettu). They act either on their own or by command of the god who sent them.

Weapons Consume

As we saw above, the image of the consuming sword appears frequently in the Hebrew Bible. This motif of the consuming weapon is far less represented among the texts of Mesopotamia, appearing primarily in Sumerian mythological texts (Old Babylonian period) concerning Ninurta and Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty.⁸²⁷

Beginning with Lugale, Ninurta is informed of the dread Asag daimon and in setting off for battle, he equips himself with various weapons:

- ii 79. *miṭ-ṭu a-na KUR-i pi-i-šu₂ pi-i-ti*
- ii 80. *[ka]k-ku a-na KUR a-a-bi mi-it-ḥa-riš i-tak-ka-lu*

- ii 79. The mace opens its mouth toward the mountain.
- ii 80. The weapon devours completely in the enemy land.
(LKA 9 ii 12-17; Lugale ii 78-80)⁸²⁸

Here the destructive power of Ninurta's weapons are emphasized in preparation for his travel through foreign lands to engage the Asag in battle. The mace opens its mouth toward the mountain in preparation for the devouring what is to come in the fight (cf. Tiamat's opening her mouth to swallow the evil wind in EE iv 97). The weapon consumes enemies in a foreign land. Likewise, in Angim, Ninurta lists his numerous impressive armaments in a speech to Ninlil concerning his suitability to be king. Among these weapons, which include the divine Šarur and Šargaz, we find his weapon:

- 133. *kak-ku ša₂ ki-ma u₂-šum-gal-li ša₂-lam-ta ik-ka-lu* MIN

⁸²⁷ In Sumerian literature, the motif appears in Angim iii 28 and Lugale ii 36.

⁸²⁸ Dijk, *LUGAL UD ME-LÁM-bi NIR-ĜÁL*, 1:62, 2:51-52; Seminara, *La versione accadica del Lugale*, 71.

133. I bear the weapon, which consumes corpses like the lion-dragon.
(Angim 133; MVAG 815, pl. v 28)⁸²⁹

In this line, the ravenous hunger for human flesh of Ninurta’s weapon is compared to the lion-dragon (*ušumgallu*).⁸³⁰ The *ušumgallu* also appears among Tiamat’s menagerie of Monsters, in which they are characterized as *nadrūti* “fearful” and clothed by Tiamat in *pulhāti* “dread” (EE i 137; ii 23; iii 27, 85). Lambert notes that *ušumgallu* “lion-dragon” along with *mušmahḫi* and *ūmi dabrūti* serve as generic terms for all Tiamat’s eleven monsters.⁸³¹ The otherworldly and horrific nature of this weapon is established through its description. The weapon is not credited with making corpses but with their consumption, in contrast with Šarur and Šargaz whose names mean, respectively, “massacre a myriad” and “slays a myriad.”⁸³² From a practical point of view this may seem unnecessary for an instrument of war, since corpses pose no serious threat. The elicitation of fear in one’s enemies, however, is very useful and thus a gruesome weapon serves the purpose of creating order by restraining enemies. This becomes yet more clear when we examine the devouring weapons in EST. In chapter five, we discussed the fate of anyone who rebelled against Esarhaddon:

632. *šum-ma at-tu-nu* ^m*aš-šur*-PAB-AŠ MAN ^{kur}*aš-šur*
 633. *u*₃ ^m*aš-šur*-DU₃-A DUMU MAN GAL-*u* *ša*₂ E₂ UŠ-*te*
 633a. *u* ŠEŠ.MEŠ-*šu* [DUMU AMA]-*šu*₂ *ša*₂ ^m*aš-šur*-DU₃-A
 633b. DUMU MAN GAL *ša*₂ E₂-UŠ-*ti ri-ih-ti* DUMU.MEŠ
 633c. *ši-it* ŠA₃-*bi* *ša*₂ ^m*aš-šur*-PAB-AŠ MAN ^{kur}*aš-šur*
 634. *tu-ram-ma-a-ni a-na* ZAG *u* KAB *tal-lak-a-ni*

⁸²⁹ Cooper, *Return of Ninurta to Nippur*, 78.

⁸³⁰ In the Sumerian, Ninurta’s weapon is specified as his *aga-silig* “mighty ax.”

⁸³¹ Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 225. The *ušumgallu* is also the mythological creature on which Nabû stands (KAR 104 29; SAA 13 134) and is the symbol/weapon (*kakku*) of Nabû (IV R2 no. 31).

⁸³² M. Krebernik, “Šar-ur und Šar-gaz,” *RLA* 12:85.

635. *ša₂ a-na ZAG il-lak-u-ni GIR₂.MEŠ le-kul-a-šu₂*

636. *ša₂ a-na KAB il-lak-u-ni GIR₂.MEŠ-ma le-kul-a-šu₂*

If you forsake Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, and Aššurbanipal, great son of the king, crown prince, and his brothers, [son(s) of] Aššurbanipal's [mother], great son of the king, crown prince, (and) the remainder of the sons, the offspring of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria (and) you go to the right or the left. May swords consume the one who goes to the right! May swords consume the one who goes to the left!
(EST 635-636).⁸³³

The image of the consuming swords, which follow their targets no matter where they go would be at home among the exilic prophets (cf. Jer 42:15-17). This reference to the consuming swords of EST appear in a letter concerning the *adê*-agreement (SAA 16 126 19-23). One difference is that the consuming swords in EST are plural compared to the singular sword of the Hebrew prophets. The plurality of these devouring swords may be explained as a reference to the army of Assyria, which would be expected to be part of the threat standing behind the agreement.⁸³⁴ The main authority behind the *adê* curses lies with the gods (EST 472-475, 511-512) and while the curses do include references to enemies,⁸³⁵ they nowhere mention the Assyrian forces who might be presumed to engage them.⁸³⁶ The way these swords are presented as ravenous blades has more in common with the quasi-daimonic weaponry of Ninurta than the rank and file troops of the

⁸³³ SAA 2 6 632-636, §96, 57 and JCS 64, 110 viii 26-32.

⁸³⁴ Parpola and Watanabe seem to support this view, noting the “sword of Aššur” could refer to the army. See SAA 2, xxiv.

⁸³⁵ See EST 428-430; 453-454; 534-536; 573-575; 588-590; 612-615; 616-617; 626-631.

⁸³⁶ Likewise, it would be easy to see the reference to the destruction of the land and taking people captive (*šalālu*) in EST 292-295 as a description of the work of the Assyrian army. Indeed, it would have been the army that carried out such retribution. The presentation of the *adê* curses and punishments, however, puts the ultimate responsibility of punishment upon the gods, even for forced migration. This is clear in Esarhaddon's *adê* with Baal of Tyre, in which Melqarth and Eshmun are invoked to give the people over to captivity (SAA 2 5 14^r-15^r).

Assyrian king. On one level, a reason for this association is that divine wrath was surely thought to be a stronger form of deterrence than human retaliation, hence the many lines devoted to curses carried out by the gods. One might be able to escape from a human army, but there would be no escape from the watchful eyes of the gods. On another level, employing such rhetoric legitimizes the Assyrian position by aligning the Assyrian king with the will of the gods, while anyone who breaks the *adê*-agreement become de facto enemies of the gods. Additionally, connecting the punishment with the gods is intended to spur the gods into action on behalf of the Assyrian king. For example, in the Etana myth the eagle and snake swear an oath before Šamaš invoking the roving weapon (*kakku murtappidu*) and the trap (*gišparru*) of Šamaš.⁸³⁷ After the eagle breaks his oath, the snake reminds Šamaš of the oath and invokes the trap (*gišparru*) and net (*šētu*) of Šamaš. In spite of the rhetoric concerning Šamaš' weapons, it is the snake itself that enacts his revenge by ambushing the eagle in the carcass of an ox at the instruction of Šamaš.⁸³⁸ Even though Šamaš is not depicted as employing his trap, weapon, or net against the eagle, the symbolic value of such signs was a vital part of the process of oath taking and retribution.

Direct Address of Weapon

Finally, since divine weapons in Mesopotamia were themselves gods in some cases, we find many examples of such weapons being addressed (usually by other gods) or themselves speaking. Because of this, I will limit myself to only a few representative

⁸³⁷ Etana SB ii 14-22.

⁸³⁸ Etana SB ii 67-71, 74-87.

examples and one unique but provocative passage. Since Šarur functioned as Ninurta’s weapon and messenger, there are unsurprisingly examples of him speaking with the gods.⁸³⁹ For example, in the SB Anzu myth Šarur’s role as messenger delivering Ea’s tactical advice to Ninurta is at the forefront of the narrative, while his nature as a weapon does not come into play.⁸⁴⁰ In contrast, Šarur’s role as weapon features prominently in Lugale. After being informed of the Asag by Šarur, Ninurta sets off through the rebel lands, presumably looking for the Asag. As the divine warrior rains destruction upon the rebel lands, he sees his weapon, Šarur, in action:

In his heart he beamed at his lion-headed weapon, as it flew up like a bird, trampling the Mountains for him. It raised itself on its wings to take away prisoner the disobedient, it spun around the horizon of heaven to find out what was happening. Someone from afar came to meet it, brought news for the tireless one, the one who never rests, whose wings bear the deluge, the Šar-ur. What did it gather there . . . for Lord Ninurta? (Lugale 109-115).⁸⁴¹

Like Ninurta’s other weapons (Lugale 79-80; 256-259), Šarur’s destructive power is vividly described. He tramples down mountains and flies down to snatch the insubmissive. In Gudea’s Ningirsu temple inscriptions (Gudea Cyl A and B), Šarur receives the epithet of one “who subdues the mountain land in battle” (kur šu-še₃ ġar-

⁸³⁹ In the Anzu myth, Šarur is summoned by Ninurta (ii 70-71) and later by Ea (ii 102) and subsequently obeys their commands (ii 86, 124). Šarur speaks to Ninurta many times in Lugale (23-69; 119-150; 225-243; 264-280; 309).

⁸⁴⁰ Annus, *The God Ninurta*, 99.

⁸⁴¹ 109) ġiš-tukul saġ piriġ₃-ġa₂-ni-a šaġ₄ mu-un-na-ab-zalag-ge 110) mušen-gin₇ i₃-dal-e kur mu-na-ab-zukum-e 111) nu-še-ga tum₃-de₃ a₂ dub₂ i₃-ak-e 112) a-na ak-e zu-zu-de₃ an-ur₂ im-niġin₂-niġin₂ 113) ul du gaba mu-un-ru-gu₂ inim-bi mu-un-na-ab-tum₃ 114) nu-kuš₂-u₃ la-ba-tuš₃-u₃ a₂-bi mar-uru₅ de₆ 115) šar₂-ur₃-re en ^dnin-urta-ra a gu₃ a-na bi₂-ib-dab₅ Composite text according to van Dijk, *LUGAL UD ME-LÁM-bi NIR-ĜÁL*, 1:65-66, updated according to *ETCSL* 1.6.2 109-115. Translation according to Jeremy Black et al., “Ninurta’s Exploits,” in *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, ed. Jeremy Black et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 166-167.

ḡar).⁸⁴² A further example appears later in the narrative when Ninurta gets ready for battle with the Asag. This includes a scene in which the divine warrior equips himself for battle: “He gave orders to his lance, and attached it . . . by its cord; the Lord commanded his mace, and it went to its belt” (Lugale 160-161).⁸⁴³ Ninurta’s command brings his weapon to his belt. The precise identity of this weapon is left ambiguous. It may be that Šarur is the weapon in view here since Šarur is often paralleled with ḡiš-tukul in Lugale⁸⁴⁴ and is even called ḡiš-tukul en-ra ki aḡ₂ lugal-bi-ir ḡiš tuku “the weapon who loves its lord and obeys its king” (Lugale 191). However, not every occurrence of ḡiš-tukul in Lugale refers to Šarur, so the weapon’s exact identity remains uncertain. What is certain is that Ninurta addresses this weapon directly and it proceeded to carry out his desire. Not unlike Yahweh’s sword in Amos 9:4, Ninurta’s weapons obey his command and go wherever they are instructed.

A final representative example of the direct address of a weapon occurs in the Erra epic. As mentioned above, the Sebettu serves as Erra’s weaponry, in addition to Išum, in the narrative. When Erra’s heart encourages him to battle, he orders his weapons:

7. *i-ta-mi a-na* ^{giš}TUKUL.MEŠ-š_u₂ *lit-pa-ta i-mat mu-u-ti*
8. *ana* ^dSebettu (IMIN.BI) *qar-rad la ša₂-na-an na-an-di-qa kak-^ḡke^ḡ-ku-un*

⁸⁴² E3/1.1.7.CylA ix 24 (RIME 3.1 75) and E3/1.1.7.CylB vii 19 where the epithet is slightly expanded as me₃-a kur šu-še₃ ḡar-ḡar “who in battle subdues the mountain land in battle” (RIME 3.1 92). See, also, *ETCSL* 2.1.7 245 and 978 respectively.

⁸⁴³ 160. ḡiš-gid₂-da-ni a₂ im-ma-an-aḡ₂ IM gu-bi-še₃ im-la₂ 161. en-e ḡiš-tukul-a-ni gu₃ ba-an-de₂ zu₂ keše₂-bi-še₃ ba-ḡen Composite text according to van Dijk, *LUGAL UD ME-LÁM-bi NIR-ḠÁL*, 1:72, updated according to *ETCSL* 1.6.2 160-161. Translation according to Black et al., “Ninurta’s Exploits,” 168.

⁸⁴⁴ See Lugale 22-23; 120-121; 191-192; and 225-226.

He speaks to his weapons, “Smear yourselves with deadly poison!”; to Sebettu, heroes without rival, “Don your weapons!” (Erra i 7-8).⁸⁴⁵

Many scholars have compared this passage in which Erra orders about his weaponry to Yahweh’s commanding the sword to kill and destroy in Ezek 21:21.⁸⁴⁶ In the case of Erra’s weapons, they are commanded to prepare themselves for action, while the order in Ezek 21:21 directs the action of the sword and describes its attack on all sides, not unlike the devouring swords of EST. On the other hand, when Erra desires rest he commands his weapons back to their place:

17. *i-ta-a-ma a-na kak-ke-šu₂ um-me-da tub-qa-a-ti*
18. *ana^d Sebettu (IMIN.BI) qar-rad la ša₂-na-an a-na šub-te-ku-nu^r tu^r-ra-ma*

He speaks to his weapons, “Stand in the corners!”; to the Sebettu, heroes without rival, “Return to your dwellings!” (Erra i 17-18).⁸⁴⁷

Likewise, Erra’s injunction to inaction is comparable to Ezek 21:35 in which Yahweh commands the sword back to its sheath (cf. Jer 47:6). In spite of their terrible powers, the Sebettu are completely obedient to Erra. Though they may offer their own bloodthirsty counsel, they never disobey their master’s command. In this way, they are like the sword of Yahweh, which receives and carries out Yahweh’s instructions without question.

While the commands to divine weapons are similar among Mesopotamian sources and the Hebrew prophets, the agency and autonomy of Yahweh’s sword is much more

⁸⁴⁵ Text according to Cagni’s composite text in Luigi Cagni, *L’Epopèa di Erra* (StSem 34; Rome: Istituto di Studi del Vicino Oriente, 1969), 58. For a discussion of the assonance at play in this line, see Noegel, “‘Wordplay’ in the Song of Erra,” 164.

⁸⁴⁶ Maarsingh, “Das Schwertlied,” 351-352; Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra*, 254-255; Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1-24*, 680 n. 134.

⁸⁴⁷ Text according to Cagni’s composite text in Cagni, *L’Epopèa di Erra*, 58-60.

limited. This should come as no surprise, since divine weapons in Mesopotamia can be gods themselves and though they are obedient to their divine rulers (e.g. Ninurta and Erra), they can speak and have their own opinions. As gods, they take part in processions⁸⁴⁸ and they can receive cultic worship through sacrifice.⁸⁴⁹ Of course, not every weapon used by a deity in Mesopotamia was necessarily considered a god. Some, like the *abūbu* “deluge,” were both natural phenomenon and daimonic force in addition to being a weapon.⁸⁵⁰

The final example represents a unique description of a divine weapon, at least among our extant texts. In Esarhaddon’s Letter to Aššur, the king’s 673 BCE campaign against Šubria is described. According to the Assyrian source, the Šubrian king had written to Esarhaddon admitting his great sin against the god Aššur. This sin involved not returning Assyrian runaways to their owners. The Šubrian king then begged for Esarhaddon’s mercy (RINAP 4 33 i 16-24). Esarhaddon’s response is a firm rejection, explaining that:

32. MURUB₄ u ME₃ *tu-ša₂-ra-an-ni-ma* ^{giš}TUKUL.MEŠ AN.ŠAR₂ *ez-zu-ti ta-ad-ka-a ina šub-ti-šu₂-un*

You started war and combat against me and you have woken the furious weapons of Aššur from their dwelling.
(RINAP 4 33 i 32)

⁸⁴⁸ George, “Four Temple Rituals from Babylon,” 289-299.

⁸⁴⁹ For the Sebettu, see Konstantopoulos, “They are Seven,” 130-131. For other non-anthropomorphic deities (such as a divine chariot, quiver, and staff), see Beaulieu, *The Pantheon of Uruk*, 295, 351-353.

⁸⁵⁰ Anne Draffkorn Kilmer, “Fugal Features of Atrahasis: The Birth Theme,” in *Mesopotamian Poetic Language: Sumerian and Akkadian*, ed. M. E. Vogelzang and H. L. J. Vanstiphout (CM 6; Groningen: Styx, 1996), 127-139; Anne Draffkorn Kilmer, “Visualizing Text: Schematic Patterns in Akkadian Poetry,” in *If a Man Builds a Joyful House: Assyriological Studies in Honor of Erle Verdun Leichty*, ed. Ann K. Guinan et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 211.

Esarhaddon puts the blame on the Šubrian king for starting the conflict, explaining that his actions had awoken Aššur’s weapons. Interestingly, the language employed here plays with the dual identity of the ^{giš}TUKUL of Aššur as divine weapons and as a reference to the Assyrian army. The verb used of the Šubrian king’s action concerning the weapons comes from the root *dekû*, whose basic meaning is to “move (something).” The verb also has the connotation “awaken (from sleep)” or “summon troops.”⁸⁵¹ The verb is used to describe Ištar’s summoning an evil wind against Teumman of Elam⁸⁵² as well as the calling up of troops.⁸⁵³ The image here is one of horrific entities that, now awake, will not go back to sleep so easily. Additionally, the dwelling of Aššur’s weapons, *šubtu*, could refer to the socle or pedestal for a deity’s statue⁸⁵⁴ as well as a military outpost.⁸⁵⁵ The home for the Sebetu, as Erra’s weapons, is also referred to as a *šubtu* (Erra i 18).

While the polysemous references to divine weapons and the king’s troops demonstrate scribal erudition, by describing the threatening object as “the weapons of Aššur” the scene transitions to a supernatural level. The actions of the Šubrian king do not just incite a conflict between two kings on earth; they now have a supernatural dimension.⁸⁵⁶ Having roused Aššur’s weaponry from sleep, he will have to suffer the

⁸⁵¹ *CAD* D, s.v. *dekû*, 123-128.

⁸⁵² Streck, *Assurbanipal*, 114 v 45.

⁸⁵³ *ABL* 1241 r.8.

⁸⁵⁴ *CAD* Š3, s.v. *šubtu*, 174.

⁸⁵⁵ *CAD* Š3, s.v. *šubtu*, 184.

⁸⁵⁶ The text goes on to describe how, after Šubria’s defeat, Esarhaddon added its soldiers to the “numerous forces of Aššur (*eli emūqī^d Aššur gapšāte*) and the royal contingent (RINAP 4 33 iii 14’-20’).

consequences of divine wrath and not merely a human army. The summoning or awakening of weapons is similar to several biblical passages that we have explored, such as Yahweh's command for the sword to "awaken" (*'ûrî*) in Zech 13:7 and the summoning (*qr'*) of the sword by Yahweh in Jer 25:29 and Ezek 38:21.

Purpose of Rhetoric

The sword of Yahweh was personified in several ways: it received and carried out orders from its master; it sated its cruel hunger by devouring its targets; and it could be addressed directly by God or prophet. Regardless of whether the prophets thought Yahweh's sword was an independent, quasi-daimonic entity or whether such descriptions were no more than prophetic rhetoric, such imagery served several purposes. The personification of Yahweh's sword functioned to distance Yahweh from the events; to sell this version of the trauma-drama; and to emphasize the inescapability of the punishment.

Distancing

The personification of Yahweh's sword allows for some distance, however slight, between Yahweh and the horrific events of invasion and exile. This is not to absolve Yahweh's ultimate responsibility, which is made clear repeatedly throughout the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In this way, the relationship between Yahweh and his sword would function similarly to Yahweh and his *mašhîr* "destroyer" in the Exodus plague narrative. The responsibility for the deaths of the firstborn can be attributed directly to Yahweh "I will strike" (Exod 12:12) or to the *mašhîr* "he will not let the destroyer enter your homes to strike" (Exod 12:23). W. Propp characterizes the *mašhîr* as Yahweh's "semi-

autonomous dark side” and suggests that the purpose of the manifestation and separation of this aspect from Yahweh proper was to allow Yahweh “the glory of striking Egypt, while the ‘dirty job’ of threatening Israel is delegated to his semi-autonomous dark side.”⁸⁵⁷ Again, the distance that this distinction provides is meager but important, since it affords an outlet for negative emotion. Additionally, the sword can be decommissioned and punished (Ezek 21:35-37), whereas such notions were inconceivable for Yahweh himself. This distancing not only allows God to avoid being directly involved in the “dirty job” of Israel’s bloody destruction, this distance permits more gruesome and horrific descriptions to be employed without the need to paint Yahweh himself as a bloodthirsty monster.⁸⁵⁸ This dramatic element is an important aspect of any successful trauma narrative.

Selling the Trauma-Drama

Regardless of whether one views the messages of the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel as occurring on the eve of invasion, destruction, and captivity or a generation or two later, there is always a struggle over the interpretation of traumatic events both for those existing contemporaneously to the events, but also for future generations.⁸⁵⁹ Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel contended against other interpretations of the coming events,

⁸⁵⁷ Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 409. Certainly, one could understand the difference in direct responsibility, Yahweh vs. Destroyer, to be a matter of different source traditions. In this case, Exod 12:12 usually falls under the P-source, while 12:23 is attributed to the E-source. Yet looking at Ezekiel, we see that at times Yahweh’s involvement seems more direct (Ezek 5:12; 21:8) and other times he sends the sword (5:17; 38:21) or delegates the task to men, each with his weapon of destruction *kālī mašḥētō* in hand (9:1).

⁸⁵⁸ Cf. the distancing that takes place between entity that provokes David into taking the census, Yahweh’s anger (*’ap-yhwh*) in 2 Sam 24:1 and Satan (*śātān*) in 1 Chron 21:1.

⁸⁵⁹ Alexander and Gao, “Mass Murder and Trauma,” 125.

usually from other prophets (e.g. Hananiah son of Azzur in Jer 28:1-4).⁸⁶⁰ The narrative against which Ezekiel and Jeremiah struggled was one of peace and security in the face of what Judah's tumultuous relationship with the Babylonian empire. Of course, much of the "false" prophets' message is not preserved and one would not expect them to receive an unbiased portrayal in the works of their opponents. That said, one might expect their message to be similar to the one of assurance delivered to Hezekiah by Isaiah as Sennacherib marched against Judah (2 Kgs 19:32-34). In this competitive atmosphere, Alexander notes that performative power is one part of a successful trauma narrative.⁸⁶¹ Just as the Chinese Communist Party employed "gruesome and emotional language" to portray the April 12th Massacre, so Jeremiah and Ezekiel drew upon traditions of Yahweh's cruel and ravenous sword to depict and "sell" the trauma of 598 – 586 BCE.⁸⁶² This evocative language could serve both the generation of the disaster along with future generations, providing them with brutal descriptions of a weapon that reflects the brutality of the events. For example, the much later Damascus Document summarizes the events of the Babylonian invasion and exile as "when he [Yahweh] gave them over to the sword" (CD i 3-4).⁸⁶³ Additionally, the macabre descriptions of Yahweh's sword serve a narratological purpose to portray a punishment so destructive and vile as to shake a hard-

⁸⁶⁰ See, also, Ezekiel 13; 22:28; Jer 14:13-18; 23:9-37; 27:9-16; 28:15; 29: 15; 37:19.

⁸⁶¹ Alexander and Breese, "Introduction," xii. Though performative power is important, Alexander and Breese stress that alone it is not enough and needs to be accompanied by power/influence of carrier groups, resources, and the right audience.

⁸⁶² Alexander and Gao, "Mass Murder and Trauma," 126.

⁸⁶³ M. Abegg and E. Cook, "Damascus Document, Cairo Geniza," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader, Volume 1: Texts Concerned with Religious Law, Exegetical Texts and Parabiblical Texts*, eds. Donald W. Parry and Emanuel Tov (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1:80-81.

hearted and stubborn people of out their misconstrued, from the prophetic perspective, safety (e.g. Jer 5:3; 31:32; 32:21; Ezek 2:4; 3:7).

Inescapability

Finally, the personification of Yahweh's weapon serves to emphasize the divine provenance of the punishment and thus rule out any escape. The description of Yahweh's sword as a quasi-daimonic entity casts Judah's punishment as an entirely supernatural affair. Poser makes this point about Yahweh's role explaining that "[a]ssigning the role of perpetrator to God removes the terrible events from the sphere of human volition and earthly contingency."⁸⁶⁴ While this is true, the depiction of Judah's punishment by Yahweh's sword goes further by continually reinforcing this notion, while denying agency and humanity to Judah's oppressors, the forces of Babylonia. A human enemy can be fought, escaped, or defeated. In contrast, when one's antagonist is the sword of Yahweh itself, there is no hope for escape. The borders of another land will not provide protection, not even captivity will provide safety (Amos 9:4). This has the consequence of preserving a kind of "national honor." The disaster is not just a war that happened and their loss is not due to a lack of military prowess, but their sins against Yahweh. Additionally, Yahweh is not weaker than the gods of Babylonia and has not abandoned them, but it is he who is responsible for punishing them. As Poser argues, "[a]bove all, however, it preserves the idea of YHWH as a deity of immense power."⁸⁶⁵

Earlier in Jeremiah's career, the harshness of the message (Jer 42:16) may have been intended to provoke repentance in hopes of averting catastrophe. Later with the

⁸⁶⁴ Poser, "No Words," 37.

⁸⁶⁵ Poser, "No Words," 37.

Babylonian army surrounding the city, for Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the terror of the sword was intended to prevent further death. It functioned to encourage surrender to God's punishment, which was not ultimately the work of mortals but his supernatural agents. At a certain point their fate was unavoidable and the only way to get past it was to go through the punishment and suffering. Attempts to avoid Yahweh's designs would only extend suffering. To later generations, it would signify that although the misdeeds that led to exile and captivity could have been avoided in the long term, after their ancestors had crossed a certain threshold disaster was unavoidable, even for some of the most distinguished individuals such as Moses, Noah, and Daniel (Ezekiel 14) whose righteousness would have only save their own lives.

Conclusion

Having examined examples of weapon personification in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Mesopotamian sources, I have demonstrated how examples from both traditions fall into three similar categories: sending divine weapons, consuming weapons, and the direct address of the weapon. In Mesopotamian examples, the personification of weapons serves to empower and authorize the king (when weapons are sent to his side) and to intimidate enemies through horrific imagery. By adopting this motif in their trauma narratives, the authors of Jeremiah and Ezekiel provide distance, greater persuasiveness, and emphasize the inescapability of punishment. By linking the most graphic imagery to Yahweh's sword, as a ravenous daimonic force, the prophets establish some slight distance between Yahweh and the most terrifying aspects of the invasion, conquest, and exile. Though the distance is meager, given Yahweh's explicit responsibility, it is rhetorically important because it provides some separation between Yahweh and his

instrument of punishment. This allows for the restoration of Yahweh's relation with his people, since his weapon, as the one carrying out the violent task, can be punished and destroyed in a way unthinkable for the deity. This demonstrates Yahweh's continued love and commitment to his people, enabling a progressive trauma narrative. The graphic imagery used also adds to the persuasive force of the trauma narratives by captivating the audience's imagination and framing their conceptualization of punishment. The success of a narrative depends, in part, on its ability to create an emotional connection with the audience. Finally, by rendering Yahweh's sword as a bloodthirsty daimonic entity, the prophetic authors stress the inescapability of the coming punishment. The sword is not like a man or even a god whom one can reason with or persuade. Instead, much like a wild animal, it is beyond communication, pursuing its own bloodlust. Additionally, in as much as the Babylonian king is associated with Yahweh's sword, as demonstrated in chapter four, the king is dehumanized in the role of a daimon out for blood. This allows Yahweh to be responsible and in control of the disaster, while ensuring there is a distinct villain as an object for anger and retribution.

Excursus: The Commands of Ezek 21:19-22

The commands Yahweh issues to the sword in Ezek 21:19-22, particularly in verse 19, are admittedly difficult. The first significant issue is *šəliššā*, which as vocalized but ignoring the stress can mean "its third" or, as Greenberg suggests, the final unstressed *āh* can be rhythmic (GKC § 90g; Joüon § 93i), in which case it would mean "a third (time)" or even as an accusative of time meaning "up to a third time."⁸⁶⁶ The ancient

⁸⁶⁶ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 424.

versions do not present an easy solution. The LXX's *hē tritē rhomphaia* understands *šlšyth* as a third sword. The Vulgate, in contrast, understands the word as a verb "triple," which has led many scholars to suggest emending the text to the *pual* stem *šulləšā* "let it be tripled!"⁸⁶⁷ While this certainly fits the passage, it seems that the basic meaning of the verse can be maintained without having to emend the text. One can understand *šlšyth* as an accusative of time with the unstressed *āh* serving as the locative marker or a poetic ending. This results in a meaningful expression, "Let the sword be doubled, up to a third time." The imagery of a reduplicating sword comes to a head in the verbal action of the sword that surrounds the people and which God stations at all their gates (v. 20). Whether this refers to actual multiplication or rapid movement that creates the illusion of multiple swords, as in Block's view, is not clear and ultimately makes little difference as the inhabitants of Jerusalem are to feel completely surrounded regardless.

The second issue involves the adjective *haggādōl* in v. 19, which, because it is masculine, cannot describe the sword as it stands (contra the LXX's *rhomphaia trathmatiōn hē megalē*), but since it does not agree in definiteness with *hll*, it is problematic. This has led some scholars to re-divide the text, taking the letter *he* from the beginning of the participle *hōderet* and adding it to the end of the adjective so that it agrees in gender with *hereb*.⁸⁶⁸ This seems unnecessary as there are examples of an attribute with the definite article modifying a noun without the article by apposition (Joüon § 138c). Though this is more common of later Hebrew, it appears in Ezek 9:2

⁸⁶⁷ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 674; Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48*, 20.

⁸⁶⁸ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 429; Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48*, 20.

ša'ar hā'elyôn and 40:28a with *ša'ar haddārôm* (cf. *hašša'ar haddārôm* in 40:28b). This is how Greenberg and Block understand the phrase.⁸⁶⁹

Moving to verse 21, we are presented with two more difficulties. The first involves the verb *hit'aḥādī*, which would seem to be a hithpa'el of a root *'hd*. Outside of this reference, this is not an attested biblical Hebrew verbal root. As a noun, the root comprises the very common numeral “one.” This has brought Smend and Greenberg to translate the verb as “focus, concentrate.”⁸⁷⁰ The LXX and Targum, however, translate the verb as “be sharpened” presumably related to the root *ḥdd* “sharp.” Block, following Driver, takes *ht'ḥdy* as an “aramaized by-form or variant for *ḥdd*.”⁸⁷¹ Given the focus on sharpening the sword (Ezek 21:14-16) earlier in the Song, this seems preferable, especially since it does not require one to invent a new verbal root and it fits the context.

Finally, the verb *hśymy* from *śym* is often deleted as a partial dittography for the *hśmyly* that follows.⁸⁷² This is based on two issues: first, the word is completely missing from the LXX and Vulgate; secondly, as the *hiphil* of the root *śym* is rare and contested.⁸⁷³ In contrast, Greenberg argues that the deletion of *hśymy* “disrupts the balance of the clauses” and its absence in the LXX may be due to haplography.⁸⁷⁴

⁸⁶⁹ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 674 n. 97; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 424.

⁸⁷⁰ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 425.

⁸⁷¹ G. R. Driver, “Linguistic and Textual Problems: Ezekiel,” *Bib* 19 (1938): 68; Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 675 n. 104.

⁸⁷² Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 430; Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48*, 20.

⁸⁷³ Ezek 14:8; 21:21; and Job 4:20.

⁸⁷⁴ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 426.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The sword of Yahweh functions as a meaning-dense, powerful, multivalent sign. As we have seen, Yahweh's weapon cannot be reduced to just one thing. In Peircean terminology, the sword can be symbol, index, and icon. In fact, it is often more than one in any given passage. In the ancient world, divine weapons could signify a host of different meanings: divine presence, authority, the right to violence, battle power, the king, an army, war, death, punishment, prestige, and piety. As I have demonstrated through Mesopotamian examples, the tropes involving divine weapons were primarily employed within imperial rhetoric in order to justify the dominance of the king and his monopoly on divinely authorized violence. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel tap into these meaning-dense imperial motifs, along with their own curse traditions to craft their trauma narratives concerning the Babylonian exile.

With the growing interest in trauma studies, the tumultuous period of the Babylonian exile and its reflection in biblical literature has been a common starting point for biblical scholars to engage with trauma in the ancient world. These investigations, often working from the classic trauma model, itself based on a psychological framework, have yielded many important insights. Yet, as I demonstrated in chapter two, there are limitations and problems with the classic trauma model when applied to group trauma preserved only in written narratives. Alexander's cultural sociological approach to trauma provides a new way of examining the biblical texts that avoids the shortcomings inherent in the classic model. As Alexander has shown, cultural trauma is a social construct. It involves cultural work undertaken by carrier groups in the form of narratives that make sense of certain events by explaining what happened, identifying both victims and

perpetrators, and how this trauma connects to the wider group. As Alexander and Eyerman explain, trauma narratives are often contentious and polarizing struggles over meaning.⁸⁷⁵ In this contest of meaning, carrier groups must make use of all available assets, including rich, cultural symbolic resources, to craft a persuasive and meaningful trauma narrative.

The imperial rhetoric of conquest would have a powerful emotional element to Judeans only relatively recently freed from Assyrian rule, only to be caught between the machinations of Egypt and Babylonia. The emotional impact of invoking Yahweh's sword was vital in framing the events leading up to 586 BCE as Yahweh's punishment. In this, Jeremiah and Ezekiel positioned themselves against other prophets predicting peace and victory for Judah. The adoption and transformation of imperial motifs is more than just rhetorical presentation. The ways in which the prophets conceptualize the "face" of Judah's punishment shapes the very conceptual system that explains their reality. Furthermore, in working on this dissertation during 2016-2017 in the United States, current events have impressed upon me again and again the vital importance of symbols, symbolic gestures, and symbolic rhetoric on a visceral and emotionally charged level. Issues such as kneeling during the national anthem and the existence of confederate monuments served as loci for debates (at best) and violence (at worst) concerning issues larger and more wide-reaching than the symbols themselves.

In order to understand how the prophets use and rework these motifs and the repercussions of these motifs on the trauma narratives, I singled out four common divine weapon tropes: the bestowal of the divine weapon, the king as divine weapon, divine

⁸⁷⁵ Eyerman, "Cultural Trauma," 570 and Alexander, "Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 12.

weapons in curse traditions, and the personification of the divine weapon. For each motif, I compared the prophetic uses of the motif with that of their powerful neighbors (usually Assyrian and Babylonian).

In chapter three, I explored the longstanding and widespread weapon bestowal motif among several ancient Near Eastern traditions. In this trope, divine and human kings receive weapons from gods, usually high ranking members of the pantheon, in order to empower the king for victory. The bestowal of divine weapons also signifies divine legitimation for violence and conquest. That Ezekiel would employ this motif to portray Judah's conquest by Nebuchadnezzar II may seem counter-intuitive (why "buy into" the rhetoric of the invading foreign power?). Yet, Ezekiel transforms the motif in subtle ways that hijack the force of such propaganda to make the case of Judah's punishment, while at the same time denying the king agency and shifting the dynamic of allegiance and power from the usual god-to-king to people-to-god. Both the notion of Judah's punishment and the promise of its post-punishment relationship with Yahweh were important elements of Ezekiel's trauma narrative.

Chapter four addressed the trope of the king as weapon. In Mesopotamian sources this trope had a long history and was connected with the god Ninurta and the very conception of kingship. By taking on the role of the weapon of the gods, the king modeled himself upon Ninurta as the ideal warrior-king. Becoming the weapon of the gods is a prestigious position, a job only fit for a king that aligns the king and his actions with divine justice and inevitable victory. In contrast, when used by the Judean prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, the role of Yahweh's instrument of punishment was no longer glorious or a sign of the king's privileged relationship with the gods. Instead, the

king is selected for his role because of convenience and not due to his special status. This shifts the normal power dynamic associated with the motif. Now it is the very object of punishment, Yahweh's people, that has the significant relationship with the divine in spite of their punishment. Additionally, the king is dehumanized and transformed into a tool in Yahweh's hands, a tool with no meaningful agency. He is no longer an active warrior-king like Ninurta, but an object to be used and discarded. The future of the king, and not the people to be punished, is what is in flux. The divine punisher will become the one punished in the end. This reversal serves to highlight Yahweh's concern for his people and the fact that the envisioned discipline will be temporary.

Chapter five took up the topic of divine weapons in the curse traditions of Israel, especially as it comes to be represented in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel by the triad of punishments: sword, famine, and pestilence. In Mesopotamian traditions, curse language involving divine weapons reflects the practice of swearing oaths upon or in the presence of divine weapons. These weapons not only represent the presence of the deity associated with them, they were icons of the retribution the oath breaker could expect. Though there is no evidence for a similar oath taking practice in ancient Israel, the influence of this tradition upon treaty curses, especially in Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty, would have reached the kingdom of Judah. While the imagery of the SFP triad draws upon the curse language of Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26, the triad is a creation of the exilic prophets, especially Jeremiah. Though the SFP triad is often conceived of as a representation of siege warfare, the group of punishments come to refer to all the curses in the covenant with Yahweh. Drawing upon traditional curse language enables the prophets to cast the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem as

entirely predictable. These events were promised long ago and thus should come as no surprise. Such language also associates events, especially before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, with powerful negative emotions, since the people are now cursed to be the enemy of their God. Finally, the use of curse language places ultimate responsibility for what is happening with the divine world rather than with human actors.

In chapter six, I examined the personification of divine weapons. In many passages, Yahweh's sword is depicted as a quasi-daimonic entity sent to violently punish those on the wrong side of divine justice. The Hebrew examples can be divided into three different groups: Yahweh dispatches the sword, the sword consumes, and the direct address of the sword. Of these, the category of the consuming sword contains the most graphic imagery. Though the exact nature of the sword (daimonic force or mythopoetic language) cannot be resolved definitively, the effect of the language is the same. The Mesopotamian material, although more diverse, displays similar patterns for representing personified divine weapons. Portraying the sword of Yahweh as a quasi-independent entity provides some distance between Yahweh and the most terrible bloodshed associated with the invasion, siege, and defeat of Judah. This works in a similar way to the role of the *mašhūt* in Exod 12:12, 23. Though Yahweh is ultimately responsible, the gruesome and terrifying aspects of the exile can be attributed to his sword. The sword's role as a daimonic figure also serves to signify the inescapability of the coming punishment since the final decision has been made in the divine realm. Additionally, the evocative imagery of the sword helps to make the trauma narrative more resonant and impactful to the prophets' audience.

Looking at the significance of these four weapon motifs, two common elements present themselves. First and most obvious is the location of ultimate authority and responsibility for the events of 598-586 BCE with Yahweh. This takes multiple forms in Jeremiah and Ezekiel's trauma narratives. Not only does Yahweh claim direct responsibility, but by portraying the invading forces as his sword, especially with language that casts them as either an instrument or a quasi-daimonic force reaffirms that what is happening is due to Yahweh's decision. Though this may seem like hardly a surprising choice for a Judean prophet, the obviousness of the view depends on hindsight. Not every Yahwistic Judean saw the first forced migration and subsequent invasion as Yahweh's punishment. Not every Judean saw Yahweh as the offended party (e.g. the Queen of Heaven could be the referent). Furthermore, there might have been some temptation, especially for those in exile in Babylonia, to view Nebuchadnezzar II and gods like Nabû, Marduk, and Erra as the real reason for Judah's defeat. Yahweh's control over the events is a crucial element to the continued relevancy of Yahwistic belief and Judean identity formation.

The second and related element among the motifs is the reduction of the king of Babylon's status. Just as Yahweh rises in responsibility, so the king must sink. The king is denied a glorious role in conquest; he is denied a unique relationship with the gods; he is denied agency. The king is variously superfluous, an instrument in divine hands, and a bloodthirsty daimon. There has been much discussion over Ezekiel's relationship with Babylonian culture. Much of the debate has centered on the use of vocabulary and imagery drawn from Akkadian sources and the lack of an oracle against Babylon in the book of Ezekiel. The role that the king plays, while rarely overly negative, still serves to

deny the king the prestigious roles he claimed for himself in royal rhetoric. The king's position in the typical hierarchy of punishment is overturned in favor of the relationship between Yahweh and his people. In the prophetic view, the Babylonian king's role is both incidental and temporary. This is an important component for a progressive trauma narrative because it allows for the possibility of a future restoration. The punishment will not last forever and the people of Judah will eventually be able to return to their land.

I have endeavored to demonstrate how the authors of the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel drew upon divine weapon motifs from both foreign imperial rhetoric and their own curse traditions in order to fashion narratives addressing the trauma of the Babylonian exile. Understanding the prophetic works through this lens reveals that the violent, gruesome, and difficult imagery in these texts can be understood as a way to craft a resonant message and convince their audience of the rightness of their trauma narratives. This functions as a key element in the trauma story's persuasiveness. Moreover, the role of the foreign king is much diminished, addressing the relation between exiles and those who forced them into exile and prevented their return home.

The language concerning Yahweh's sword derives, in part, from the depiction of Yahweh as divine warrior. The notion of God as a divine warrior has been ever present – from the Bible's stories of holy war to Aquinas' Just War theory. For better or worse the Bible plays a role in fomenting war rhetoric and giving a voice to peacemakers. This study seeks to change the narrative by demonstrating that in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel Yahweh's sword is not a justification for war or a battle cry to inspire troops. Instead, it is the embodiment and attempt to conceptualize the traumatic experience that the exiles suffered at the hands of those wielding unchecked power. As the Syrian

refugee crisis has proved, it is vitally important to give a voice to those marginalized and disenfranchised by war. If that voice is not correctly understood as part of a process of creating a trauma narrative, however, then the message is in danger of being used to support the same horrific experiences that the exiles endured.

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Curriculum Vitae For William Reed

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Magic Weapons, Propaganda, and Trauma in the Bible (forthcoming Summer 2018)

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Introduction to the Ancient Near East (Spring 2008, Fall 2009, Spring 2010)

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Research Interests:**Hebrew Bible/Ancient Near East**

- Divine and royal weapons in text and archaeology
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Presentations:

- “In the Hand of God: Imperial Rhetoric and Counternarrative.” National Society of Biblical Literature Meeting, Boston Massachusetts (Forthcoming).
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- “Reading in Rings: An Examination of a Ring Structure in the Saul Narrative.” Regional Society of Biblical Literature Meeting, 26 April 2009, Pacific Lutheran University.

Professional Affiliations:

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Languages:

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- Ugaritic
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- Sumerian
- Classical Greek
- Middle Egyptian
- Coptic
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