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Ezekiel's Oracles against the Nations in Light of a Royal Ideology of Warfare

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Over the last few decades a steady stream of scholarship has argued for a mythological background to the oracles against the nations (OANs) in the book of Ezekiel.[1] Very few studies, however, have attempted to make overarching sense of Ezekiel's use of mythological motifs, either in the oracles or as part of the theological and literary project of the book. This essay will argue that Ezekiel's use of mythological motifs of a cosmological type, both in the cycle of OANs and as part of the book as a whole, is derived from the royal military ideology that was current in Jerusalem prior to the exile, and that the oracles constitute a direct attempt to incorporate the experience of exile into this ideology. Ultimately, however, Ezekiel's initial efforts to this end were perceived to have failed, and alternative ideological explanations of warfare were introduced, either by Ezekiel himself or by an editor. I will conclude by addressing the accrual of this additional material.

I. Current Research

There are two principal exceptions to the generally ad hoc studies of mythological motifs in Ezekiel. The first of these is the work of Christoph Auffarth, who addresses the purpose of Ezekiel's mythological allusions as part of a study of the theme of creation in myth and ritual.[2] His analysis of

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[1] Michael C. Astour, "Ezekiel's Prophecy of Gog and the Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin," *JBL* 95 (1976): 567–79; Christoph Auffarth, *Der drohende Untergang: "Schöpfung" in Mythos und Ritual im Alten Orient und in Griechenland am Beispiel der Odyssee und des Ezechielbuches* (Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 39; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991); Lawrence Boadt, *Ezekiel's Oracles against Egypt: A Literary and Philological Study of Ezekiel 29–32* (BibOr 37; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980); Pierre-Maurice Bogaert, "Montagne sainte, jardin d'Éden et sanctuaire (hiérosolymitain) dans un oracle d'Ézéchiel contre le prince de Tyr (Éz 28,11–19)," in *Le Myth, son Langage et son Message: Actes du Colloque de Liège et Louvain-la-Neuve, 1981* (ed. Henri Limet and Julien Ries; Homo Religiosus 9; Louvain-la-Neuve: Centre d'Histoire des Religions, 1983), 131–53; John B. Geyer, "Mythology and Culture in the Oracles against the Nations," *VT* 36 (1986): 129–45; idem, *Mythology and Lament: Studies in the Oracles about the Nations* (SOTSMS; Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); H. J. Van Dijk, *Ezekiel's Prophecy on Tyre (Ez. 26,1–28,19): A New Approach* (BibOr 20; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1968); Anthony J. Williams, "The Mythological Background of Ezekiel 28:12–19?" *BTB* 6 (1976): 49–61; Robert R. Wilson, "The Death of the King of Tyre: The Editorial History of Ezekiel 28," in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope* (ed. Robert M. Good and John H. Marks; Guilford, CT: Four Quarters, 1987), 211–18; K. Yalmon, "The Dirge over the King of Tyre," *ASTI* 3 (1964): 28–57.
[2] Auffarth, *Der drohende Untergang*.

the Tyre oracles in chs. 26–28 argues that the oracles aim to emphasize Yahweh's particular kingship and deploy the mythological motifs to this end.[3] Of eventual importance for his interpretation of Ezekiel's use of these motifs is the question whether the mythology behind the allusions was "Canaanite," that is, native to Tyre, or "Israelite" in origin—a question that is deferred for an examination of the oracles against Egypt on the grounds that the use of Egyptian mythological material in those oracles would indicate that Ezekiel was using foreign nations' own traditions against them, rather than using native Israelite traditions.[4] To this end Auffarth contends that the oracles against Egypt in chs. 29–32 reflect Egyptian mythology about the gods Horus and Seth; he consequently concludes that the motifs used against Tyre are Canaanite rather than Israelite in origin.[5] As a result of these conclusions, Auffarth goes on to argue that Ezekiel's use of these (foreign) mythological motifs is part of a political polemic against the gods and customs of Babylon, with the dating scheme in chs. 40–48 pointing toward a subversive theological reinterpretation of the New Year festivities that were celebrated in Babylon in association with the kingship of Marduk.[6] In summation, Auffarth believes that Ezekiel was presenting an entirely new interpretation of the traditional theology of Heilsgeschichte, focused on a new festival celebrating Yahweh's kingship.[7]

The principal difficulty with Auffarth's interpretation is his contention that the mythological motifs in question are not natively "Israelite"; by extension, his conclusion that Ezekiel's use of these motifs marks a significant and novel departure from the theological tradition is also problematic.

The New Year tradition to which Auffarth believes Ezekiel is objecting was centered on the annual celebration of the kingship of the god Marduk. More specifically, this was a celebration of the kingship that had been won by Marduk through his successful defeat of the goddess Tiamat at the time of creation. Tiamat being a deification of cosmic chaos, Marduk's defeat of her had enabled the creation of an ordered universe. However, this motif—often referred to as the Chaoskampf—was common throughout the ancient Near East and, more importantly, it has already been convincingly established that such a tradition was well known in Israel and Judah.[8] Though deliberately obscured in the Priestly account of creation in Genesis 1, it is clear from other texts that Israel and Judah knew of a cosmological account in which it was Yahweh's victory over the forces of chaos, embodied as

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[3] Ibid., 88–99.

[4] Ibid., 98–99.

[5] Ibid., 99–103.

[6] Ibid., 106–17. Though his study is based solely on the Egypt OANs and is unconnected to the New Year festival, Boadt also suggests that Ezekiel's use of mythological allusions was designed To mock foreign beliefs (*Ezekiel's Oracles*, 170–71).

[7] Auffarth, *Der drohende Untergang*, 114–15.

[8] Most recently, see John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 35; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

watery sea creatures, that enabled the establishment of an ordered world.[9] Furthermore, the strongest evidence for this tradition occurs in Psalms, where the depiction of Yahweh as creator is firmly associated with acclamations of Yahweh's own kingship.[10]

Ezekiel's audience, therefore, would have been perfectly familiar with these mythological themes from their own native tradition. If Ezekiel was making an argument that the events surrounding the New Year festival should constitute a celebration of the kingship of Yahweh rather than that of Marduk, it was far from a theological novelty.[11]

The familiarity of Ezekiel and his audience with these myths in their own theological tradition raises the possibility that Ezekiel's object was not externally oriented polemic against foreign political and religious traditions but an internally oriented theological argument. Though an internal argument is, to an extent, also inherently an argument against various foreign interpretations of these traditions, it is my contention that Ezekiel is concerned not so much with the illegitimacy of the foreign forms of the tradition as with supporting the ongoing legitimacy of the tradition within the native Judahite tradition complex.

First, however, the second proposal that has been put forth with regard to the overarching purpose of Ezekiel's use of mythological motifs in the OANs must be considered. This has been made by John B. Geyer, initially as a short article concerned with the forms of OANs in the Hebrew Bible and subsequently in greater detail in a monograph.[12] In the former, he argues that the OAN form found in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel (except in Ezekiel 25) comprises the "living prophetic tradition" of the eighth to sixth centuries B.C.E. and is characterized principally by its use of mythological traditions and loose literary form.[13] In the monograph, he revives Sigmund Mowinckel's arguments for the

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[9] The versions of this tradition known from Mesopotamia and Ugarit culminate in the construction of the divine king's temple. In combination with the following arguments as to the nature of the use of this tradition in the OANs, this may contribute to a better understanding of the location and purpose of the temple vision in Ezekiel 40–48. For an externally oriented interpretation of the role of chs. 40–48, see Auffarth, *Der drohende Untergang*, 113–14.

[10] See C. L. Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History* (BZAW 407; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2009).

[11] Similar assumptions undermine the otherwise compelling analysis of Ellen F. Davis, who argues that Ezekiel's intent is to polemicize against the "mythical" discourse of the foreign nations' political and religious ideologies, in favor of his own "metaphorical" discourse ("'And Pharaoh Will Change His Mind . . .' (Ezek. 32:31): Dismantling Mythical Discourse," in *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs* [ed. Christopher Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 224–39). Davis's contention that the OANs "mark the transition out of Israel's own idolatrous past into a possible future" by "[r]endering an accurate judgment on the false perception of reality embedded in foreign mythologies" (p. 228) neglects the extent to which these "foreign mythologies" were known and affirmed also in Judah. Though Ezekiel certainly objects to the nations' renderings of their own roles—in particular the effrontery to Yahweh that their claims to kingship represent—a mythological conception of the world is not at issue.

[12] Geyer, "Mythology and Culture"; idem, *Mythology and Lament*.

[13] Geyer, "Mythology and Culture," 135, 124, 132.

cultic origins of the "Day of Yahweh" tradition and connects the Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel OAN form to this tradition; in particular he locates both within the lament tradition as witnessed by the old Sumerian laments.[14] Still following Mowinckel, Geyer then contends that the entire tradition was centered on the festival of the enthronement of Yahweh and "the chaos-cosmos tradition celebrated in the Jerusalem cult" (although, curiously, his analyses of the Ezekiel OANs revolve primarily around mythological traditions divorced from the Chaoskampf motif, which he identifies as central to the enthronement festival).[15] Geyer's conclusions are more persuasive than that of Auffarth in terms of the perceived convergence of religious and theological traditions, but as far as Ezekiel is concerned the principal weakness of Geyer's study is the fact that he demands a functioning liturgical context for the lament oracles/OANs "in the temple in the time of the monarchy before the Deuteronomic reforms," which is patently not possible in the exilic context of Ezekiel.[16] Though Geyer does refer to the continuation of this lament tradition "even into exilic times in circles beyond the influence of the Deuteronomists," he gives no explanation for why the tradition persisted into the exilic period and beyond, or why what he identifies as the strongest evidence for such a tradition—Ezekiel and Isaiah 14—is from the period of the monarchy's collapse (at best, from Geyer's point of view) or well into the postmonarchic period (at worst). The origin of the mythologically-based OAN tradition in the temple cult would readily explain a priestly Ezekiel's familiarity with it, and a connection with lamentation would certainly account for its appeal in a period of national crisis, but ultimately the sociohistorical background that Geyer envisions for the OANs cannot quite account for the context in which the relevant OAN material is now found. The Ezekiel OANs require an explanation of their use, in a period of a collapsing monarchy, of a mythological tradition that had been based in a fundamentally royal context.[17]

It is, in fact, the royal emphasis of the tradition that provides the solution to the problem: Ezekiel's use of these motifs has to do with the extent to which the Chaoskampf, with its central emphasis on the kingship of Yahweh, had become entwined with the military endeavors of the human Judahite king.

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[14] Geyer, Mythology and Lament, 77–148, referring to Sigmund Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien II: Das Thronbesteigungsfest Jahwes und der Ursprung der Eschatologie* (Christiania: J. Dybwad, 1922).

[15] Ibid., 148. Geyer relates the ship of Ezekiel 27 to an Egyptian myth of Amduat and the cosmic tree tradition in Ezekiel 31 to an unspecified mythological tradition regarding the fall of tyrants, reflected also in Isaiah 14 (*Mythology and Lament*, 39–74).

[16] Geyer, *Mythology and Lament*, 179–80.

[17] Note also that Geyer's basis for associating the Yahwistic Chaoskampf with laments is Claus Westermann's assertion that the theme appears only in the psalms of community lament, which is certainly too limited a sphere for the tradition (Geyer, *Mythology and Lament*, 148, referring to Westermann, *Genesis 1–11* [trans. J. J. Scullion; London: SPCK, 1984], 33). This is certainly too limited a sphere for the tradition (see Crouch, *War and Ethics*, 29–32, 68–74).

As mentioned, the Chaoskampf motif—in the Hebrew tradition, as in the Babylonian, part of the mythology of creation—is strongly associated with the recognition of Yahweh as king of the gods. Much as in the Babylonian celebration of Marduk's kingship, with which many are more familiar, Yahweh's kingship arises from his successful defeat of chaotic forces, typically characterized as water or sea.[18] In addition to the fully mythological association of this victory with creation, however, the royal ideological tradition perceived the defeat of chaos also in the historical military victories of the human king against his enemies on the battlefield. God and king acted in tandem to facilitate the ongoing defeat of chaotic forces, historically personified as the king's military enemies. The human king's successes on the battlefield reflected the involvement of the divine king in the conflict, and the divine king's power and universal authority were confirmed in the human king's success.

Owing to the nature of the sources that have come down to us, the clearest indication of this synergy is evident in Psalms. In Psalm 18, for example, both the king's and Yahweh's battles are conceived in cosmological terms, as is affirmed by the cosmological imagery employed: the psalm speaks of Yahweh's weapons in meteorological terms (hail, thunder, lightning [reading ברק with the LXX and 2 Sam 22:15], coals of fire; 18:11–15). His chariot is the wind; he is clothed in clouds; and his actions culminate with "then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare" (18:16). Yahweh then proceeds in the subsequent verses to convey this knowledge of warfare to the king.[19]

From this concept of the divine and human kings' synergy derived the common ancient Near Eastern belief that the defeat of the human king on the earthly battlefield was tantamount to the defeat of the divine king in the divine sphere. As a consequence, the defeat of Yahweh's human king in Jerusalem and Judah's fall to the Babylonians posed a major theological and ideological challenge to the adherents of the royal military ideology—in other words, the elites who were subsequently deported to Babylon.[20] Ezekiel's use of these cosmological mythological motifs in his OANs is directly related to the theological threat posed by this disaster, namely, the possibility that Yahweh had lost his status as divine king and creator. by using these traditions Ezekiel is reasserting Yahweh's claims to these titles.

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[18] For a more detailed exposition of the following, see Crouch, *War and Ethics*, 29–32.

[19] See further Klaus-Peter Adam, *Der königliche Held: Die Entsprechung von kämpfendem Gott und kämpfendem König in Psalm 18* (WMANT 91; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001); and Crouch, *War and Ethics*, 29–31, 68–74.

[20] Military defeat was of course not unknown prior to the Babylonian exile. Attempts to deal with the theological implications of defeat occur in 2 Samuel 7 and the related Psalm 89, with defeat accommodated as a means of divine punishment. Both, however, are ultimately concerned with short-term defeat; the unconditionality of the Davidic covenant, which both reflect, has no room for the complete destruction of the dynasty as effected by the Babylonian conquest and with which Ezekiel is obliged to deal. On Ezekiel as "reestablishing a conceptual system" in the face of a traumatic event, see Nancy R. Bowen, *Ezekiel* (Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon, 2010), xv–xix.

Ezekiel's particular concern with the vindication of Yahweh's name is of course well known and frequently noted.[21] The debasement of the nations in the OANs has already been connected to this intended vindication by commentators such as Paul Joyce and Ralph W. Klein.[22] Along similar lines, hubris on the part of the nation under judgment is commonly cited by interpreters as their primary offense.[23] Hubris, or pride, insofar as it describes confidence in one's own or other human power over and against the authority of Yahweh, is a general term for the issue under discussion in Ezekiel's OANs. The specific theological content of that hubris, however, is articulated more specifically in Ezekiel's oracles in relation to the cosmological framework in which Yahweh's own claims to power are understood. My goal in this study is to buttress the link between the debasement of the nations and the vindication of Yahweh by demonstrating that Ezekiel's diatribes against the nations are not generalized or imprecise expressions of judgment against traditional enemies for the purpose of exalting Yahweh by contrast, but deploy the mythological traditions of Judah specifically and deliberately to affirm Yahweh's claims to kingship.

II. Cosmological Mythology in the Oracles against the Nations

The OANs of Ezekiel 25–32 open with a series of brief oracles directed against Judah's immediate neighbors: Ammon, Moab, Philistia, and Edom. As Geyer noted, these possess a form distinct from the oracles in the subsequent seven chapters and are wholly lacking in mythological allusions.[24] Their

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[21] E.g., Auffarth, *Der drohende Untergang*, 89-90; Paul M. Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 482; New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 18, 27–28; idem, *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel* (JSOTSup 51; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 127; Ralph W. Klein, *Ezekiel: The Prophet and His Message* (Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament; Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 130; Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (trans. Ronald E. Clements; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 37–38, 61. With this in mind, Henning Graf Reventlow argued that the nations in Ezekiel form a sort of witness to Yahweh's authority, although his contention that this reflects a universalizing tendency in the book is probably special pleading ("Die Völker als Jahwes Zeugen bei Ezechiel," *ZAW* 30 [1959]: 33–43; for further critique, see Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 170).

[22] Joyce, *Divine Initiative*, 127; Klein, *Ezekiel*, 129–30.

[23] E.g., Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48* (WBC 29; Dallas: Word, 1990), xlii; Bernhard Lang, *Ezechiel: Der Prophet und Das Buch* (EdF 153; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981), 108; Davis, "'And Pharaoh Will Change His Mind . . .'," 229–30, 239; Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, "The Book of Ezekiel: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *Introduction to Prophetic Literature; Isaiah; Jeremiah; Baruch; Letter of Jeremiah; Lamentations; Ezekiel* (vol. 6 of *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al.; Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 1073–1607; Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 22A; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 540–41, etc.; Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 86–89, etc.; Geyer, "Mythology and Culture," 141; Walter Vogels, "Restauration de l'Égypte et universalisme en Ez 29,13-16," *Bib* 53 (1972): 479; Wilson, "Death of the King of Tyre," 211. Historical events at the turn of the century, particularly Judah's efforts to forge political alliances with its neighbors, were undoubtedly a major contributor to this perception of hubris.

[24] Geyer, "Mythology and Culture," 129–30.

Similarities to the oracles in Amos 1–2 (also noted by Geyer), however, suggest a reason for their inclusion in these chapters, which will be addressed in further detail below.

We turn first to the oracles against Tyre and Egypt, which together dominate the OANs. The prevalence of water language in the cosmological traditions and the geographical location of Tyre on an island make the determination of the significance of the terminology in the Tyre oracles difficult, so the Egypt oracles will be addressed first.

Egypt

The most thorough catalogue of the cosmological allusions in the oracles against Egypt was undertaken by Lawrence Boadt in 1980.[25] The oracles begin in Ezekiel 29, where use of the cosmological tradition is clear.[26] With regard to this oracle, Boadt noted the appellation of Egypt as התנים הגדול (v. 3, "great dragon" [NRSV]), arguing against its prosaic identification as a mere earthly crocodile.[27] The description of Egypt as a sea monster—classically and unequivocally identified as a תנים (a variant on the more common תנין)—is most naturally taken as a use of the cosmological Chaoskampf tradition to describe Yahweh's enemy, and its habitation of the Nile should be taken as a reiteration of this imagery.[28] Boadt already connected the description of the sea monster's destruction—being dragged from the water—with Baal's battle against Yam.[29]

Egypt is called התנים הגדול, the great sea monster, and is described as sprawling in the midst of its watery abode, the Nile.[30] The offense of which it is accused is having declared, "My Nile is mine, and I made it/me" (29:3).[31] The first-person emphasis is made in the Hebrew by the use of the grammatically unnecessary אני, which serves to contrast the claims of Egypt to the repeated assertions that אני יהוה), "I am Yahweh." Egypt's claim to have created the Nile constitutes a direct challenge to

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[25] Boadt, *Ezekiel's Oracles*.

[26] Despite this, Auffarth includes it as part of his argument for the Horus-Seth motif in the Egypt OANs as a group (*Der drohende Untergang*, 100).

[27] Boadt, *Ezekiel's Oracles*, 35. The crocodile interpretation nonetheless persists, although usually in conjunction with an insistence that any mythological imagery in Ezekiel is deliberately demythologizing (e.g., Darr, "Book of Ezekiel," 1400–1401; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 601–2; Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 137; cf. Auffarth, *Der drohende Untergang*, 100).

[28] This is especially the case in light of the explicit imagery of the Egyptian תנים dwelling in the נהרות in 32:2 (see below).

[29] Boadt, *Ezekiel's Oracles*, 28.

[30] It has been suggested that the verb used for the תנים's actions in the Nile, רבץ, may be connected to the mythological traditions of the chaos monster, though the extant examples are not strong enough to make this certain (Boadt, *Ezekiel's Oracles*, 28). Elsewhere Boadt remarks on the exemplary quality of the Nile as watery chaos (ibid., 106).

[31] The MT has the first person singular suffix; the masculine singular direct object is unexpressed (Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 206; Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 137–38). See Greenberg also for the syntactical analogy between this claim and statements about Yahweh's creative works (p. 602).

Yahweh's role as creator and, by implication, to his associated characterizations as warrior and king. There is room for only one אני, and Egypt's pretentions to the role must be denied.

In the absence of a full Hebrew account of Yahweh's battle against chaos, it can sometimes be difficult to identify allusions to it, especially in such a brief passage. However, it is likely that the assault on התנים הגדול via its mouth ("I will put hooks in your jaws"; 29:4) is one such allusion, given the rhetorical questions posed by Yahweh in Job 40:25–32. This form of attack correlates also to the Babylonian version of Marduk's defeat of Tiamat (Enuma Elish IV 95–102).[32] Similarly, the drying up of the waters into dry land, indicating the containment of the chaotic waters above and below the firmaments, is a recurring motif in biblical passages referring to the Chaoskampf, and this is a theme throughout these chapters (Ezek 29:10; 30:12; 32; cf. Isa 50:2; Jer 51:36; Nah 1:4).

Ezekiel 30 is dominated by a series of relatively prosaic descriptions of Egypt's coming judgment, though its opening salvo referring to the "day of Yahweh" may be a subtle allusion to the cosmological tradition, as perhaps is the reference to the המון of Egypt, which Yahweh aims to destroy: the term is typically translated "wealth," but is associated in the mythological traditions with the disorder of chaos and is notably frequent in Ezekiel's oracles against Egypt.[33] The description of 30:16—"I will set fire to Egypt, Sin will writhe in anguish and No will be split apart"—also includes a collocation of אש ("fire") and בקע ("to split"), which in this specific combination is known from the battle of Anat against Mot, a version of the Chaoskampf current alongside the traditional rendering of Baal against Yam at Ugarit.[34] The concept of dividing the conquered enemy is also more generally characteristic of the Chaoskampf: it is present in Baal's defeat of Yam also at Ugarit and in Marduk's defeat of Tiamat in Enuma Elish—vestiges of it survive even in Genesis 1. The term also appears in a clear reference to Yahweh's battle against chaos in Ps 74:13–15.

The cosmological scene is clearly set in ch. 29 and gently maintained through ch. 30. Following this, in ch. 31, Egypt's threat to Yahweh's authority is described according to an extended arboreal metaphor.[35] According to Auffarth, one of the reasons to contend that Ezekiel is in these chapters

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[32] Citations of Enuma Elish refer to the standard edition of Philippe Talon (T*he Standard Babylonian Creation Myth: Enūma Eliš. Introduction, Cuneiform Text, Transliteration, and Sign List with a Translation and Glossary in French* [SAA Cuneiform Texts 4; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2005).

[33] Margaret S. Odell catalogues the appearances of המון and notes that it is frequent particularly in oracles against the nations and in Ezekiel is associated with the follies of political alliances and with Egypt in particular (*Ezekiel* [Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005], 326). On the day of Yahweh, see Geyer, *Mythology and Lament*, 77–148. Boadt also connects 30:8, regarding the defeat of Egypt's followers, with Job 9:13 regarding the defeat of Rahab's followers, but the terminology is probably not specific enough to base too much on the connection (*Ezekiel's Oracles*, 68). On scholarly skepticism regarding the chapter's origins, see Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 154–55, 172–73).

[34] Boadt, *Ezekiel's Oracles*, 74.

[35] This is presuming that "Assyria" in 31:3 is either an errant reference or an object lesson for Egypt, and that the metaphor is aimed at Egypt, as 31:2, 18 suggest.

using Egyptian mythology rather than Israelite is a supposed absence of this "cosmic tree" in the Israelite tradition.[36] How he relates this assertion to the tradition in Genesis 2–3 is not clear, particularly in view of the convergence of the tree, a "garden of God" (which is clearly identified as the Garden of Eden), the theme of illegitimate usurpation of divine prerogative, and the punitive consignment of the offender to death. Admittedly, there are a number of differences between Ezekiel 31 and Genesis 2–3, most obviously the absence in Ezekiel 31 of individual human offenders, but the similarities are clearly sufficient to suppose some common mythological tradition, albeit one divergent in details.[37]

Given the apparent background of this series of concepts in a tradition that appears elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in the context of creation, what becomes especially striking about this passage from the perspective of the present study is the extent of the cosmological references it contains. Though Boadt does not include the passage among those relating to the Chaoskampf, he notes several of the cosmological images. First there is the persistent and repeated use of language of the primeval waters, especially (מים רבים, תהום, and נהרות) (31:4, 5, 15). More crucially, these terms occur in pairs that are overwhelmingly associated with the creation traditions of the Chaoskampf. מים parallels תהום in 31:4, as it does in Gen 1:2; Job 28:14; 38:16; Pss 33:7; 104:6; 135:6; and Prov 8:28–29—almost all in the explicit context of Yahweh's creative activities. The association is affirmed by the reference to נהרות, which in its plural form is associated "aux eaux souterraines et cosmiques, aux eaux primordiales, au Grand Océan qui est identique au chaos."[38] The reference to מים רבים in 31:5, 15, especially in combination with נהרות, reiterates the imagery.[39] Though it is not overt, in this passage there is thus a strong undercurrent of typical imagery of the cosmological waters of chaos, especially in the opening and concluding sections; these frame the passage and reiterate the importance of the image.

Enclosed by these references to the cosmological waters is the clear imagery of the primeval Garden of Eden, known more familiarly in its Genesis 2–3 form (see above). While detailed speculation is exceedingly difficult, given the nature of the biblical sources on the creation traditions, Ezekiel seems to reflect a composite tradition: the theme of watery chaos is combined with a secondary but

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[36] Auffarth, *Der drohende Untergang*, 101.

[37] For a discussion of the Eden tradition in Ezekiel 31, see Terje Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden: Genesis 2–3 and Symbolism of the Eden Garden in Biblical Hebrew Literature* (Biblical Exegesis and Theology 25; Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 391–93.

[38] Carl-A. Keller and René Vuilleumier, *Michée, Nahoum, Habacuc, Sophonie* (CAT 116; Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1971), 124; cf. Boadt, *Ezekiel's Oracles*, 106. See also Ps 93:3–4; Nah 2:7, 9; Hab 3:9–10. Darr insists that here תהום is "devoid of associations with chaos" ("Book of Ezekiel," 1425), but the evidence to the contrary is too compelling to dismiss.

[39] On the cosmological associations of מים רבים, see Herbert G. May, "Some Cosmic Connotations of Mayim Rabbîm, 'Many Waters,'" *JBL* 74 (1955): 9–21. Likewise Boadt, *Ezekiel's Oracles*, 109. For a clear cosmological combination of the phrase with נהרות, see Ps 93:3–4.

associated threat to Yahweh's royal authority in the guise of an arrogant usurper.[40] That the usurper is portrayed as gaining its strength from the primordial waters appears more than coincidental; the waters seem barely restrained in their support for the tree in the opening passages of the verse, while the concluding passage of judgment declares explicitly that Yahweh's punishment of the tree was accompanied by a holding back of the streams of the deep and a checking of the great waters (31:15).[41]

The imagery is that of the upper and lower firmaments, the divided body of the defeated chaotic power, below and above which are corralled the waters themselves (see, e.g., Enuma Elish IV 137–38). The waters of chaos, through their agent the tree (i.e., Egypt), had been attempting to assert a royal prerogative in the created order; their defeat constitutes an affirmation of Yahweh's power and of his exclusive claims to royal authority.

Having thus developed the imagery of Egypt as a historical manifestation of Yahweh's primeval chaotic opponent and again reiterated the royal authority of Yahweh over such manifestations of chaos, Ezekiel brings the image to its climax in ch. 32. The imagery of Egypt as the תנים, recognizable already from ch. 29, reappears and is developed further, with its domain this time identified overtly as the נהרות rather than circuitously as the Nile (32:2). Egypt is also said to have compared itself to a כפיר ("lion"), tantamount to a claim to kingship: the royal associations of leonine imagery in the ancient Near East and beyond are well known.[42] Specifically in relation to the Chaoskampf, Boadt observes that "in sharp contrast to the dignities of royalty connected with the lion, Ezekiel plays on the theme of the mythological defeat of the royal aspirations of Yam (Sea) and Mot (Death) for rule over creation."[43] Boadt did not take into account the possibility that the play was on a native Israelite and Judahite tradition, but the principle is the same with an internal referent. The centrality of the deity's acquisition of kingship status in these traditions is evident in Enuma Elish as well as in the biblical texts. In any event, the passage makes clear the extent to which the challenge of Egypt is to Yahweh's kingship.[44] With a decisiveness corresponding to the importance of the issue, Egypt's claims to kingship are quashed, and Egypt's identity with the chaos monster defeated by Yahweh is declared.

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[40] That the threat is to Yahweh's kingship in particular is suggested by the appellation of the Egyptian pharaoh as "king of Egypt." On the royal identity of the tree, see also Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 393. On the centrality of kingship claims throughout in the OANs, see Madhavi Nevader, "Yhwh versus the Kings of Middle Earth: Royal Polemic in Ezekiel's Oracles against the Nations" (paper presented at the annual meeting of OTSEM II, Göttingen, October 20, 2009).

[41] Preceding these two descriptions of how Yahweh will constrain the chaos waters is the phrase "I will make the deep mourn," which strikes many as odd and which some prefer to see as analogous to the two subsequent verbs. See Greenberg (*Ezekiel 21–37*, 641–42) and Block (*Ezekiel 25–48*, 194–95) for further discussion.

[42] See Darr, "Book of Ezekiel," 1432, 1434; Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 200–201 n. 18.

[43] Boadt, *Ezekiel's Oracles*, 131.

[44] See also Nevader, "Yhwh versus the Kings of Middle Earth"; Odell, *Ezekiel*, 404.

That the defeat is achieved first and foremost through the use of Yahweh's net reiterates the cosmological theme: though no Hebrew version of the Chaoskampf remains extant, the net is one of the most prominent weapons in Marduk's defeat of Tiamat and Baal's defeat of Yam, and it is one of the most deliberate allusions used in royal inscriptions to align the activities of the human king with those of the god (Enuma Elish IV 95).[45] That similar imagery was associated with the motif of Yahweh's battle against the sea in Hebrew literary tradition is indicated by Job 26:13. It is a characteristically royal weapon and an important cipher for the battle of the king against chaos.

The subsequent depiction of Egypt's fate repeats much of the imagery of Ezekiel 29, and the chapter culminates in a description of Egypt's descent into Sheol. Though confusing and repetitive, the section seems most probably to be an elaboration on the conclusion to ch. 31, in which the challenger to Yahweh's authority is corralled with the waters of chaos in the realm of the underworld.

Tyre

Having established the centrality of the cosmological mythology in Ezekiel's portrayal of Egypt's offenses and downfall, we may now return to the oracles against Tyre in Ezekiel 26–28. As already noted, the imagery is complicated by the geographical location of the city on an island off the Levantine coast: its standard description in, for example, the Assyrian royal inscriptions was "Tyre who dwelt in the middle of the sea," and at times it is difficult to distinguish the extent to which the water language used of the city constitutes a deliberate cosmological allusion and the extent to which it is merely a consequence of geographical reality.[46] It is perhaps because of the multivalent nature of the language that scholars are divided as to whether Ezekiel's oracles against Tyre are in fact using mythological motifs and, if so, for what purpose. Both Moshe Greenberg and Daniel I. Block, for example, argue that any mythological imagery in these chapters is employed by Ezekiel for the purpose of "demythologizing" the traditions. This interpretation is opposed by, among others, H. J. Van Dijk and Margaret S. Odell, who argue strongly in favor of the continued mythological character of Ezekiel's allusions.[47]

Especially in light of the language used of Egypt the collective force of the language with regard to Tyre is enough to suggest that in these oracles Ezekiel is making much the same cosmological

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[45] See Crouch, *War and Ethics*, 23–24, 37–38, 48–49. The use of the net in the battle of the god against the sea is noted also by Darr ("Book of Ezekiel," 1434–35), though the mythological implications of this are otherwise played down in the interpretation.

[46] *ṣur-ru ša qabal tam-tim* or *ṣur-ru a-šib qabal tam-tim*; see Van Dijk, *Ezekiel's Prophecy*, 12. Geyer also argues that while the language may be the natural means of speaking of the city, it is also indicative of Tyre's identification with chaos (*Mythology and Lament*, 39).

[47] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 538; Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 47; Van Dijk, *Ezekiel's Prophecy*, 11; Odell, *Ezekiel*, 340.

argument as in those directed against Egypt: Yahweh's power over the forces of chaos persists, even in the face of the defeat of his earthly royal counterpart in Jerusalem.

The sequence against Tyre opens with Ezekiel 26. After an indictment suspiciously similar to that against Ammon in 25:3, the announcement of the city's destruction is expressed in a mixed combination of historical and mythological language. On the one hand, the dominant referent is the armies of the nations, who will destroy the city (26:3a), but this initially straightforward historical statement is given cosmic significance almost immediately, with the first mention of the nations followed sharply by an analogy to the waves of the sea (26:3b). As Odell observes, Ezekiel "begin[s] with appearances and delve[s] more deeply into the powers that propel and undergird reality. As the oracle proceeds, the waves of the sea become fully revealed as the powers of chaos and even named as such."[48] In contrast to Greenberg, who transliterates תהום as "Tehom" yet considers it merely a geographical term, and Block, who contends that "the notion of chaotic primordial waters has been thoroughly demythologized," Auffarth also identified these sea waves as flood language.[49] This flood is initially credited with the destruction of the city, culminating in the remains of the city described as a "naked rock . . . a place for the stretching of nets," with the imagery reiterated through the repetition of the same phrases in the culmination of the passage (26:4-5, 14). Unwittingly, Greenberg's rendering of מחי קבלו in 26:9 as "the storm of his battle" ("a guess based on Akkadian *meḫu* 'storm' and *qablu* 'battle'") buttresses this imagery.[50] Collectively, these images evoke the Chaoskampf. Like the net, the flood is one of Marduk's characteristic weapons, and Assyrian royal inscriptions frequently refer to the effects of kings' conquest using the net in terms alluding to this, employing phrases such as "laid waste as though ruined by the flood" (*kīma til abubi*), phraseology reminiscent of the description of Tyre as a naked rock.[51] The description of Tyre as a place for the spreading out or drying of nets may also be a way of describing the aftermath of Chaoskampf, when the weapons of war are cleaned and preserved, ready for the next occasion on which they are needed.[52] An alternative or concurrent interpretation of the waves is that they are the great waves brought up by storms—in which case a direct connection to Yahweh's own known weaponry is made possible (cf., e.g., Ps

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[48] Odell, *Ezekiel*, 340.

[49] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 563–64; Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 47; Auffarth, *Der drohende Untergang*, 90.

[50] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 533.

[51] Hayim Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III, King of Assyria: Critical Edition, with Introductions, Translations and Commentary* (Publications of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1994), Summ. 1:9; Summ. 7:25 (*kīma tíl a-bu-bi ú-ab-bit*). Interestingly, Greenberg catches the similarity between Ezekiel's description of Tyre's destruction and the description of Sidon's destruction by Esarhaddon (*Ezekiel 21–37*, 535), though he understandably assumes that the language is particular to the overthrow of port cities, rather than reflecting the role of water in the mythological tradition of battle.

[52] Thanks are due to Casey A. Strine for this particular insight.

18:11–15). The passage culminates with language already familiar from 31:15, referring to the ruination of the city as when the תהום is brought over it and the מים רבים cover it.[53]

This brings us to Ezekiel 27, which mainly comprises a seemingly endless description of the ship of Tyre, culminating in the destruction of the ship in the midst of the sea. The passage is not at first glance especially cosmological in content, but Van Dijk proposes that the ultimate destination of the Tyrian ship in the depths of the sea is "more or less the primordial sea and figure of the Pit," which would render the passage a variation on the preceding chapter and suggest a reliance on the same idea of corralling the chaos waters that is seen in Ezekiel 31. The verbs רעם ("be disconcerted") and שער ("shudder") (27:35) are also associated with the divine battle against the sea and may, albeit obliquely, confirm this.[54] A more concrete association of the passage with the cosmological tradition is the data marshaled by Auffarth with regard to the use of similar boats in processions of the New Year festival in Babylon.[55] If Auffarth is correct, Ezekiel would be using the description of Tyre as such a ship to reiterate that its claims are to the kingship celebrated by the annual festival, and the destruction of Tyre's pretentions to such a role would cohere with the overall depiction of Tyre and Egypt as usurpers of Yahweh's power that must accordingly be destroyed.[56] Odell's suggestion that the description of Tyre as enthroned upon the sea (27:3; cf. 28:2) constitutes an assertion of dominion over the powers of chaos it represents contributes to this same argument: power over the sea is reserved for Yahweh as triumphant king, and Tyre's claims to that role must be denied.[57]

This theme continues into the final chapter on Tyre, Ezekiel 28. The chapter is fraught with textual issues, which have frequently contributed to the variety of interpretations for the mythological imagery that its twofold structure employs.[58] Van Dijk contends that 28:2, with Tyre's self-depiction as a god dwelling in the midst of the sea, contains no allusion to Canaanite mythology, yet he makes the intriguing proposal that the baffling phrase תָּכְנִית חוֹתֵם in 28:12 MT should be read as "serpent of perfection" (תַכְנִית חֻתַּם, with the final מ enclitic), in keeping with the Edenic imagery of the

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[53] On these parallels, see above and again May, "Some Cosmic Connotations of Mayim Rabbîm, 'Many Waters,'" 9–21. Van Dijk specifically emphasizes that these images are not aimed at "demythologizing" the tradition (*Ezekiel's Prophecy*, 11); similarly, Odell contends that "[i]f anything, the oracle is not an example of demythologization, but remythologization" (*Ezekiel*, 340).

[54] See Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 563–64.

[55] Auffarth, *Der drohende Untergang*, 93–94.

[56] That the language is reminiscent of the Babylonian festival in particular may reflect a simple lack of extant information on the native Judahite equivalent or may affirm that Ezekiel's argument is multifaceted, aimed at addressing an internal theological issue as well as rebutting various foreign interpretations of the same tradition.

[57] Odell, *Ezekiel*, 434.

[58] For various attempts to account for the variety of material in the chapter, see, e.g., Bogaert, "Montagne sainte," 131–53; Wilson, "Death of the King of Tyre," 211–18; Yalmon, "Dirge over the King of Tyre," 28–57; Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 87–120.

subsequent verses.[59] More persuasive, however, are the arguments put forth for the latter half of the chapter (28:11–19) having as its referents the Jerusalem temple and its high priest. To this end, P.-M. Bogaert argues that the passage was originally a thinly veiled oracle against the high priest in Jerusalem that was subsequently mistaken as actually referring to the king of Tyre and appended to the oracles against Tyre.[60] Given the similar combination of an Edenic tradition with a more overtly cosmological one in Ezekiel 31, the confusion is explicable.[61] This leaves us with the oracle in 28:1–10, in which the association of Tyre with the chaotic waters is evident—if without illuminating detail—and which in its depiction of Tyre's fate reiterates that described of Tyre in Ezekiel 27 and parallels that decreed for Egypt in Ezekiel 31 and 32. Of note among commentators is Odell's suggestion that the declaration in 28:2 that the king of Tyre is an אדם ("man") constitutes not only a denial of his claims to divinity but also a demotion from kingship, insofar as אדם is the lowest tier in the hierarchy of gods, kings, and humans.[62] Madhavi Nevader has also argued that this passage, like several of the other Ezekiel OANs, is directed specifically against Tyre's claims to kingship, reiterating the issue underlying Ezekiel's use of the cosmological motif.[63]

Across the Tyre and Egypt OANs, then, there is a consistent use of mythological imagery identifying the nation in question with the forces of chaos defeated by Yahweh at creation. The equally consistent insistence that Yahweh will defeat these forces in their present manifestations affirms the ongoing authority of Yahweh as the divine king and as creator, despite the necessity of his dissociation from his traditional historical agent, the king of Judah.[64] This proposal dovetails with Marco Nobile's argument that Ezekiel exhibits a tripartite structure designed to mirror the ancient Near Eastern epic form which, after the god's defeat of chaos, culminates in the construction of the house of the god.[65]

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[59] Van Dijk, *Ezekiel's Prophecy*, 113–16. Carol A. Newsom also sees Edenic imagery here, arguing that the king of Tyre is represented as an Adamic figure in order to emphasize Yahweh's role as creator ("A Maker of Metaphors—Ezekiel's Oracles against Tyre," *Int* 38 [1984]: 151–64).

[60] Bogaert, "Montagne sainte," 142–43; also Bernard Gosse, "Le recueil d'oracles contre les nations d'Ézéchiel xxv–xxxii dans la redaction du livre d'Ézéchiel," *RB* 93 (1986): 535–62; and Wilson, "Death of the King of Tyre," 217.

[61] The accrual of the passage here may well also be another instance of the phenomenon suggested below, in which an oracle initially directed against Judah is turned against its enemy. In the absence of both versions of the oracle, certainty is impossible.

[62] Odell, *Ezekiel*, 367.

[63] Nevader, "Yhwh versus the Kings of Middle Earth."

[64] The explicit language of Yahweh's kingship in Ezek 20:33 and the more subtle references to Yahweh's cosmological role that occur elsewhere in the book merit further examination in light of this proposal. Casey A. Strine's recent dissertation has made a start on this ("The Divine Oath and the Book of Ezekiel: An Analysis for the Meaning and Function of the 'As I Live' and 'Lifted Hand' Formulae" [D.Phil. diss., University of Oxford, 2010]). He and I will be addressing Ezekiel's use of the concept in the book as a whole in a forthcoming collaborative work.

[65] Marco Nobile, "Beziehung zwischen Ez 32,17–32 und der Gog-Perikope (Ez 38–39) im Lichte der Endredaktion," in *Ezekiel and His Book: Textual and Literary Criticism and Their Interrelation* (ed. Johan Lust; BETL 74; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986), 255–59. Auffarth's observation that a number of the dates

III. Redaction of the Oracles against the Nations

This identification of cosmological motifs in the Tyre and Egypt OANs has left a few passages unaccounted for.

Ezekiel 25

The first and foremost of these is Ezekiel 25, in which are found oracles against Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia. These possess a distinct form when compared to the subsequent oracles against Tyre and Egypt and are wholly lacking in cosmological—or indeed any mythological—elements.[66] The chapter is often described therefore as an addition to the text, either by Ezekiel himself or by an editor, and usually for the purpose of obtaining a symbolic seven nations in the OAN cycle.[67]

This may well have been part of the purpose of their addition, but their distinct style suggests also another. As the oracles progress, from Ammon to Moab to Edom to Philistia, they begin to develop stronger correlations between the offense of which the nation in question is accused and the punishment that is to be exacted upon it.

The clearest case is the final oracle against Philistia. In the indictment the Philistines are accused of acting "vengefully," an accusation emphasized by the threefold repetition of the root נקם ("to take vengeance," 25:15). In direct correlation to this, the judgment to be exacted against the Philistines is to be Yahweh's "great vengeance," with words from נקם used twice (25:17).[68] I have discussed elsewhere the theologically problematic nature of Yahweh's involvement in punishments that comprise the same acts for which the condemned are accused, and suggested that the principle underlying such instances is one of poetic justice or *lex talionis*, in which the punishment mirrors the offense but, unlike the offense, is not itself a crime.[69] This appears to be the logic in view here against the Philistines.

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in Ezekiel 40–48 are the first of the year probably also ties into this schema (*Der drohende Untergang*, 113–14), though again the primary referent should be an internal Judahite framework of Yahweh's kingship rather than polemic against a Babylonian political theology.

[66] So also Geyer, "Mythology and Culture," 129–45.

[67] So, e.g., Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 61; Geyer, "Mythology and Culture," 141; Boadt, *Ezekiel's Oracles*, 9; Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (trans. Cosslett Quin; OTL; London: SCM, 1970), 351–64. The fact that the chapter is lacking the Ezekielian date formula has not generally been interpreted in favor of the passage's authenticity. Regarding the seven-nation scheme, the addition of four nations in Ezekiel 25 leaves the cycle still one short of the requisite seven until the oracle against Sidon in 28:20–26 is accounted for, which may rather indicate that the Sidon oracle is the one added to make the symbolic seven, and that Ezekiel 25 was added for a different reason (so, e.g., Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 72; Darr, "Book of Ezekiel," 1396).

[68] Both Bowen (*Ezekiel*, 156) and Greenberg (*Ezekiel 21–37*, 526) note the motif of "*nqm* for *nqm*" in these two oracles.

[69] See Crouch, *War and Ethics*, 110–15. This is a more precise correlation between crime and punishment than that represented by the poetic justice seen frequently in the prophetic books by Patrick D. Miller, Jr. (*Sin and Judgment in the Prophets: A Stylistic and Theological Analysis* [SBLMS 27; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982])

The same principle is at work in the preceding oracle against Edom. There the indictment again involves a threefold use of נקם, and the announcement of judgment shows a twofold use of the same root (25:12, 14).[70]

The connection between act and consequence is less clear in the first two oracles and is not helped by the uncertainty as to whether the references to Edom (Seir) in 25:8 and Ammon in 25:10 are deliberate or accidental accretions.[71]

Nonetheless, the second oracle (principally against Moab, with appearances also by Seir and Ammon) seems to have a motif of "the nations," who appear in the content of the offense and play a role in the punishment (25:8, 10). There may also be a recurring motif of exile in these oracles, again as part of the offense (25:3) and part of the punishment (25:4, 7, 10). Unfortunately, however, the intended connections in this first half of the chapter remain vague.

The clarity of the principle in the latter two oracles, however, is provocative, particularly in light of the absence of mythological language. A *lex talionis* approach to warfare is an approach quite distinct from the cosmological framework adopted among royal circles, and it is intriguing to find it here in Ezekiel 25, set next to yet remaining independent of the cosmological approach taken in chs. 26–32.[72] The coexistence of *lex talionis* with a variant of the cosmological traditions is conceivable and is in fact witnessed in Isaiah 40–55.[73] Exilic Isaiah balances the two, however, by severing the military aspects of Yahweh's activity from the cosmological tradition. Yahweh's engagement against Babylon is not part of the cosmic battle against chaos—the concept still present in Ezekiel's oracles against Egypt and Tyre—but is conceived separately, as part of a divinely secured system of *lex talionis*. That

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and in Ezekiel in particular by Ka Leung Wong (*The Idea of Retribution in the Book of Ezekiel* [VTSup 87; Leiden: Brill, 2001]).

[70] In light of the fact that it appears to be the absence of an Israelite or Judahite king through whom Yahweh may act that provokes the abandonment of the cosmological military schema in exilic Isaiah, it is interesting that in the Edom oracle it remains Yahweh's traditional agent (Israel) who exacts the punishment. As Israel is not identified as the agent against Philistia, however, it would seem that this peculiarity most likely derives from the special relationship between Israel/Judah and Edom. On the nature and origins of this relationship, see John R. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites* (JSOTSup 77; JSOT/PEF Monograph Series 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989); idem, "Edom and the Fall of Jerusalem, 587 B.C.," *PEQ* 114 (1982): 13–24; and Bert Dicou, *Edom, Israel's Brother and Antagonist: The Role of Edom in Biblical Prophecy and Story* (JSOTSup 169; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994); on the relationship in Ezekiel in particular, see Marten H. Woudstra, "Edom and Israel in Ezekiel," *CTJ* 3 (1968): 21–35.

[71] See, e.g., Gosse, "Le recueil d'oracles," 535–62; Bernhard Lang, "A Neglected Method in Ezekiel Research: Editorial Criticism," *VT* 29 (1979): 39–44; John W. Wevers, *Ezekiel* (NCB; London: Thomas Nelson, 1969), 197; Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 172.

[72] On the differing backgrounds of the cosmological framework and the lex talionis approach, see Crouch, *War and Ethics*, 114–15.

[73] See C. L. Crouch, "Adapting the Cosmological Tradition in Isaiah 40–45," *SJOT* 25 (2011) forthcoming; eadem, "Sit Down upon the Dust—A Talionic Approach to Warfare in Deutero-Isaiah" (paper presented at the summer meeting of the Society for Old Testament Study, Sheffield, July 20, 2010).

Ezekiel subscribed to a principle of poetic justice for offenses against the deity is plausible enough.[74] That he understood it as the means by which Yahweh now and in the future would engage in human military activities is also conceivable. That he subscribed to it as a doctrine for Yahweh's involvement in the fate of foreign nations at the same time as attempting to salvage the cosmological tradition—the military component intact—is much more problematic. In Ezekiel 26–32, the prophet affirms Yahweh's status as divine king and reasserts the legitimacy of the cosmological framework for understanding the deity's military activities. The means by which Yahweh acts militarily is accordingly already established. There is no need for a further explanation, and, in their attempt to provide one, the oracles in Ezekiel 25 sit oddly with what follows. Given that a *lex talionis* approach to Yahweh's military activities was known by the late exilic period, ch. 25 would seem to be an attempt—albeit what appears to be an incomplete or tentative one—to update or replace the cosmological arguments in chs. 26–32.[75]

Egypt

That such an intention is at the heart of Ezekiel 25 is supported by the fact that a number of other authorially suspicious passages seem to reflect a similar mind-set. Already mentioned is the apparent transformation in 28:11–19 of an oracle originally targeting Judah into an oracle directed against Tyre. Among other such texts is the announcement of Egypt's restoration in Ezekiel 29. This

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[74] Whether an idea of *lex talionis* is itself sufficiently coherent with the rest of Ezekiel's thought for ch. 25 to have originated with him as opposed to an editor is also debatable. Both Wong (*Retribution*, esp. 196–243) and Miller (*Sin and Judgment*, 97–110) have discussed what they term poetic or retributive justice in the book, and, while the relationships they observe are at times worthy of note, the connections between offenses and punishments tend to be very loose. Unsurprisingly, Michael A. Fishbane's analysis concludes that "there is no focused attempt in the Book of Ezekiel to correlate specific sins with specific judgments . . . where a more precise relationship can be found, as in Ezekiel 16 and 23, the reason usually has more to do with metaphorical consistency than anything else" ("Sin and Judgment in the Prophecies of Ezekiel," *Int* 38 [1984]: 148, 149). Nevertheless, the general correlations these authors note may have been the germ of the more clearly articulated policy of Ezekiel 25, developed either by Ezekiel himself or by an editor as a means of extending his arguments about Yahweh's control of human military activities or as a means of superseding the earlier arguments altogether.

[75] As to the possible date of the addition, the analysis of the oracles' logic according to *lex talionis* indicates that it is incomplete and somewhat erratic; a comparison with the much clearer logic in Isaiah 47 perhaps indicates a date still prior to the late exilic period. Whether the level of correlative sophistication may be related to chronological development depends on the conclusions reached with regard to the date of the oracles against the nations in Amos 1–2, where a much more articulate application of the principle is expounded in a purportedly eighth-century text. On the basis of form-critical similarities between Amos 1–2 and Ezekiel 25, as well as the appearance of the אמר יהוה formula elsewhere only in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, Geyer argued that both texts derive from a postexilic setting ("Mythology and Culture,"138–41), though his conclusion as to which is primary is unclear. On the date of the concept of lex talionis, see also Hans-Winfried Jüngling, "'Auge für Auge, Zahn für Zahn': Bemerkung zu Sinn und Geltung der alttestamentlichen Talionsformeln," *TP* 59 (1984): 1–38. By contrast, Greenberg supposes that the demolition of Moab and Ammon around 582 constitutes a *terminus ante quem* for these oracles (*Ezekiel 21–37*, 527). The question deserves more sustained attention than may be allowed here; it will have to suffice to note that the existence of a similar phenomenon in Isaiah 47 at least confirms the possibility of the idea appearing in Ezekiel around the same time.

announcement is remarkable in many ways. Certainly the relatively positive tenor of the passage causes it to jar with Ezekiel's negative portrayal of the fates of foreign nations elsewhere, and this has led to numerous suggestions that it must be secondary.[76] If this is the case, then there remains to be established the purpose of the addition. A clue may be found in the similarities between the language used to describe the nature ("I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations," 29:12) and duration ("forty years," 29:12, 13) of Egypt's punishment and the language that is typically used by Ezekiel to describe the fate of Judah in terms of an exile followed after forty years by a second exodus (4:6; 11:16; 12:15; 20:23, 35-36; 23:15; 36:19).

These similarities, combined with the express statement of Egypt's role in Israel's recent political misadventures (29:16) and the strong tradition of the first exodus being from Egypt and resulting in forty years in the wilderness, suggest that the decree of forty years in exile as Egypt's punishment is most persuasively viewed as a case of *lex talionis*: what Egypt did to Israel—not once but twice—will now be turned against Egypt. In a great historical *inclusio*, Yahweh will bring the fate of a generation in exile upon the inhabitants of Egypt.

Ammon

In addition to the fate of Egypt, an instance outside the OANs also suggests that there may have been a revision of Ezekiel with a principle of *lex talionis* against the nations involved in Judah's downfall in mind.[77] This is the brief oracle against Ammon, which appears in Ezek 21:33-37. Both Bernhard Lang and Bernard Gosse argue that this oracle was originally directed against Jerusalem itself.[78] If they are correct in this assessment, the shift from Jerusalem to Ammon may have arisen out of the perceived responsibility of Ammon for Judah's fate, in accordance with the preceding narrative episode. Without both forms of the oracle extant it is difficult to say, but a similar phenomenon has certainly occurred elsewhere: Jer 50:41–43 repeats almost verbatim an oracle against Judah from 6:22–24, directing it instead against Babylon, and Isaiah 47 does something similar with Isa 3:16–4:1.

IV. Conclusions

We have argued that Ezekiel's use of cosmological mythological motifs in his oracles against the nations was directly related to the theological threat to Yahweh's status that was posed by the military defeat of Judah. The cosmological imagery, identifying Egypt and Tyre as chaotic forces and describing their defeat by Yahweh, was deployed by Ezekiel as a means of affirming the power of

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[76] Against such arguments Vogels has contended that the parallels between Israel's eventual restoration and that promised to Egypt are a reflection of Ezekiel's universalistic tendencies ("Restauration de l'Égypte," 473–94).

[77] Boadt briefly suggests that the use of certain phrases both in the Egypt oracles and in oracles against Judah was intentional (*Ezekiel's Oracles*, 176). Davis has made a similar proposal with regard to the Tyre oracles ("'And Pharaoh Will Change His Mind . . .'," 224–39). These smaller-scale correspondences may further support an editorial effort to achieve this effect across the book.

[78] Gosse, "Le recueil d'oracles," 549–51; Lang, "A Neglected Method in Ezekiel Research," 40–42.

Yahweh as divine king and creator. Ultimately Ezekiel's efforts to this end were perceived to have failed, and passages describing the defeat of the nations in terms of a policy of *lex talionis* were introduced.