

The Sumerian Mythographic Tradition and Its Implications for Genesis 1-11

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Abstract

This thesis contends that myth served the role of speculative philosophy for ancient Near Eastern peoples and examines some of the implications, particularly hermeneutical implications, of the claim. The Introduction presents a case for using the Sumerian mythographic tradition as a control, an introduction to the field of mythography, and the problem of viewing ancient Near Eastern myth through the lens of Western, particularly Hellenistic, views of myth.

Chapter One is an overview of the influential mythographers of the last two hundred years and their writings. Emphasis is placed on functionalist approaches to myth as functionalism is the aspect of ancient Near Eastern myth being addressed in this thesis. Chapter Two is the heart of the thesis and presents the case for speculative philosophy as a dominant function, but not the only function, of ancient Near Eastern myth. The ways in which rational-instrumental thought contrasts with analogical reasoning are unpacked and the case is made that one does not preclude the other. Divination is presented as a (counter-intuitive) example of rational-instrumental thought and a brief excursus on analogical vs. rational-instrumental thought in Genesis 4 is provided to help make the distinction concrete and to model the hermeneutical implications of the distinction.

Chapters Three and Four present case studies. The first (Chapter Three) is the Sumerian myth Gilgamesh and Huwawa and the second (Chapter Four) is the Babel story of Genesis 11:1-9. Both case studies are presented for two reasons: 1) To demonstrate that I am not an outside theorist but have gained the expertise to handle the materials in the original languages; and 2) To provide concrete examples of the hermeneutical implications of the claims made in Chapter Two.

A note of concern: The order of the chapters of the dissertation could give the impression that I developed a theory and then tried to apply it to the data (in this case, texts). In actuality I developed the theory from immersing myself in the texts.

Special thanks go to my family (my wife, parents, and in-laws) for their unwavering support

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Abbreviations

AfO	Archiv für Orientforschung
Ash.	Museum siglum of the Ashmolean Museum
Ash.	R. Borger, <i>Die Inschriften Asarhaddons</i> (= AfO Beih. 9, 1956)
CBS	Museum siglum of the University Museum in Philadelphia
ETCSL	Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature: http://www-
etcs1.orient.ox.ac.uk	
GHA	Gilgamesh and Huwawa A
GHB	Gilgamesh and Huwawa B
K	Museum siglum of the British Museum in London
LXX	The Septuagint
OB	Old Babylonian
OIP	Oriental Institute Press
R	H. Rawlinson et al., <i>The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia</i> , I-V
(London	1861-1909)
SEM	F. Chiera, <i>Sumerian Epics and Myths</i> (= OIP 15, 1934)

Introduction

This thesis contends that Genesis 1-11 needs to be situated in its larger ancient Near Eastern mythographic background in order to be read well. This does not mean that nothing valuable can be gained from various reader response readings such as psychoanalytic readings, earth story readings, ecological readings, etc., it simply means that if one's concern is to seek the meaning of the text or even the author's original intended meaning, a notion now very much out of favor and not my concern in this dissertation, then the text has to be situated in its original context.

This raises the question: What is the text's original context? For Genesis 1-11, I believe the primary context is the ancient Near Eastern mythographic tradition. I say the 'primary' context because even a cursory reading of Genesis 1-11 reveals divergent genre, primarily an interchange between narrative and genealogy. However, overall the text as it stands can be read as a single story (irrespective of the various theories regarding sources and composition) hanging off genealogical entries.

In my opinion, which I will seek to demonstrate throughout this thesis, when the text of Genesis 1-11 is viewed through the lens of ancient Near Eastern myth, certain modern concerns such as sources, reader response, theological systems, and evolution are relegated to the background. Obviously, this dissertation is directed at the academy, but the implications for the church at large are intriguing.¹

A word needs to be said about the use of the Sumerian mythographic tradition as a control for assessing the genre expectations of ancient Near Eastern myth. I must begin by admitting that this focus is at least partially the result of personal interest. I am intrigued and fascinated by Sumerian myth (and the Sumerian language in general), and so it is natural for me to write a dissertation concerned with Sumerian myth. However, in my study I have become increasingly convinced that the dominant mythographic influence in the ancient Near East was the Sumerian

1

To be unpacked in my forthcoming *Reading Genesis 1-11*, Wipf & Stock.

mythographic tradition. Perhaps an analogy will suffice. American composers of the 20th century were largely influenced by the western, specifically European, tradition. Even though Mexico is closer geographically (i.e. in *space*), it was the European tradition that held sway. Also, even though mariachi bands were playing songs written in the last twenty years, it was the music of the more distant past that was being claimed as inspiration for composers such as Aaron Copeland (who used Quaker tunes, among others). Thus, even in American classical music we can see that it is not always influences that are the closest in time and space that hold dominant sway. Likewise, for the composers² of Genesis 1-11, it was not the nearer mythographic traditions (such as Ugaritic or even Egypt) that held dominant sway, but the tradition begun in ancient Sumer and carried on in Babylonia and later Assyria via Sumerian's continued use as the language of the literary elite.³ Although Sumerian died out as a spoken language in approximately 2000 BC,⁴ it was the scholarly language of the scribes of Mesopotamia throughout the period under discussion.

In discussing his 'four-pronged assessment process' for the assessment of parallels (language, geography, time, and culture), Younger notes that there can be mitigating factors that raise the relevance of a more distant parallel. "For instance, one mitigating factor along the chronological axis is that of a medium for the transmission of tradition. Thus, in the conservative ancient Near East, if there was a clear medium by which a more ancient tradition could accurately be transmitted to a later time period, then the relevance of that parallel may be increased in the evaluation process. This means, for example, that *a Sumerian parallel may be more relevant along the chronological axis than it first appears.*"⁵

Younger claims that parallels ideally should move along generic lines.⁶ Hallo notes that "genre is especially significant in understanding and appreciating ancient literature, because ancient

² Even those who hold to Mosaic authorship of Genesis 1-11 must acknowledge that Genesis 5:1 seems to indicate the use of sources.

³ Epitomized by the proverb, *dub-sar eme-gir₁₅ nu-mu-un-zu-a a-na-am₃ nam-dub-sar-ra-ni* (A scribe who does not know Sumerian, what kind of scribe is he?) (ETCSL 6.1.02.47).

⁴ There is debate on the exact date. See the representative articles by Woods 2006 and Michalowski 2006.

⁵ Younger 2003 xxxvii, emphasis mine.

⁶ Younger 2003 xxxix.

literature was composed not at the whim of an author but according to fairly strict traditions and rules that differed for each genre and that were generally adhered to even at the expense of individuality.”⁷ The rules for ancient Near Eastern myth were established, at least insofar as the material remains allow us to discern, by the Sumerian mythographic tradition and followed by the later traditions. However, it is perhaps misleading to use the terms 'established' and 'followed.' It is more the fact that the norms of genre exhibited by the Sumerian material are also reflected in the other, later traditions of the ancient Near East. One possible explanation is that the Sumerian materials were known and followed by later scribes of other civilizations. This is not my contention. Rather, the mythic materials from all the known ancient Near Eastern civilizations reflect a common cultural heritage of genre expectations that could then be followed or rejected in favor of the distinctive. Hallo phrases the question as follows:

Can we generalize? How did Sumerian literature influence biblical literature? Was it directly, or via Akkadian intermediaries, or are the similarities coincidental? If they are not coincidental, how or when or where did the knowledge of Sumerian literary precedents reach the biblical authors?

The parallels I have drawn may in many cases owe more to a common Ancient Near Eastern heritage—shared by Israel—than to any direct dependence of one body of literature on the other.

What can be said at this stage of our knowledge is that this common heritage included not only particular turns of speech, themes, and diverse literary devices, but also whole genres. The evolution of these genres can be traced over millennia, and their spread can be followed across the map of the biblical world. Sometimes, as in the case of casuistic law, the biblical authors adopted these genres with little change; at other times, as in the case of individual prayer and congregational laments, they adapted them to Israelite needs; occasionally, as with divination and incantation, they rejected them altogether in favor of new genres of their own devising (in this case, prophecy). But whether by comparison or by contrast, the rediscovery of Sumerian literature permits a profounder appreciation of the common, as well as of the distinctive, achievements of biblical literature.⁸

This is why I chose the Sumerian mythographic tradition and part of why I refer to Genesis 11:1-9 as myth, for when one speaks of the 'stories' of the ANE there is little hesitation to refer to those stories as myth despite the balking of some at the notion of biblical materials being referred to as myth. As will be unpacked later, myth is a genre label, not a statement of fiction or non-fiction.

⁷ Hallo 1988 663.

⁸ Hallo 1988 674-75.

What I'm calling 'common cultural heritage' Walton calls 'cognitive environment.' He notes that other terms could be used, such as 'conceptual world view,' 'philosophical *Sitz im Leben*,' or '*Zeitgeist*.' Hallo calls it 'common Ancient Near Eastern heritage.' My contextual study seeks to “lessen the subjective element in literary criticism by exposing what is traditional, conventional, or generic in a story. In other words, a contextual approach may produce the genre 'expectations' necessary to read the biblical text competently.”⁹

A note here in regards to alleged borrowing is in order. By claiming the influence of the Sumerian mythographic tradition I am not claiming borrowing or first hand knowledge of the Sumerian on the part of the biblical authors. Rather, I use the background material as a means of assessing the dominant shared cultural heritage of the time. The case for borrowing is at best tenuous, as exemplified by the excesses of the *Babel und Bibel* movement but still very much alive in the works of scholars such as David Wright.¹⁰ However, common cultural heritage is demonstrable.

What is myth?

Myth has been characterized by some moderns as nothing more than a “primitive, fumbling effort to explain the world of nature” (Frazer), a product of poetic fantasy from prehistoric times that is subsequently misunderstood and misinterpreted by moderns (Müller), “a repository of allegorical instruction, to shape the individual to his group” (Durkheim), and as a “group dream” that is nothing more than the symptom of “archetypal urges within the depths of the human psyche” (Jung). Joseph Campbell, perhaps the most influential American student of myth in the 20th century, claimed that myth was all of these.

The question for our purposes is how we characterize the myth of the ancient Near East. Jung's idea of group dreams flowing from the depths of the human psyche has of course fallen out

⁹ Younger 2003 xxxvii.

¹⁰ *Inventing God's Law: How the Covenant Code of the Bible Used and Revised the Laws of Hammurabi*, OUP 2009.

of favor, but his notion of archetypes in myth certainly remains. Thus, how can we arrive at a description that is unique to ANE myth? Also, Campbell's observation that myth is "all of these" may be true, but I will contend that it is not true of ANE myth. The mythographer's job is necessarily one of looking for regularities and consistencies, often at the expense of the unique. The role of this dissertation is in some ways counter the role of the mythographer, in that I am explicitly seeking that which sets ANE myth apart. For when we approach Genesis 1-11, although the observations garnered by mythographers over the years about the many flood stories and creation stories and genealogies (just to name a few of the elements of Genesis 1-11) gathered from around the world are useful and interesting from a mythographic perspective, they do not give us the hermeneutical tools needed for an emic reading of the text. A truly emic reading of Genesis 1-11, in my opinion, must first come from situating the text in its broader context of ANE myth.

By *emic* I mean analyzing and relating features with respect to their role as structural units *within* a system, in this case the 'system' is ANE myth. This is in contrast to an *etic* reading which analyzes the raw data without respect to the system in which the data is found. This is typified by studies like Lang's look at flood stories from around the world¹¹ or Lammel's interesting look at how the biblical flood narrative was reworked when it came into contact with Incan flood stories via Spanish explorers.¹² There are also studies that seek to read the text through a particular etic lens. Gardner reads through the lens of ecojustice,¹³ Gnuse through process theology,¹⁴ and Vandermeersch through psychoanalysis.¹⁵ It is not that these studies are not valuable, it is that they

¹¹ Bernhard Lang, "Non-Semitic Deluge Stories and the Book of Genesis: A Bibliographical and Critical Survey." *Anthropos* 80 (1985): 605-616.

¹² Annamária Lammel, "Historical Changes as Reflected in South American Indian Myths." *Acta Ethnographica* 30 (1981): 143-158.

¹³ Anne E. Gardner, "Ecojustice: A Study of Genesis 6:11-13." In *Earth Story in Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 117-129.

¹⁴ Robert Gnuse, "A Process Theological Interpretation of the Primeval History in Genesis 2-11." *Horizons* 29 (2002): 23-41.

¹⁵ Patrick Vandermeersch, "Where Will the Water Stick: Considerations of a Psychoanalyst about the Stories of the Flood." In *Interpretations of the Flood* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 167-193. For earlier psychoanalytic readings of the flood, see Geza Roheim "The Flood Myth as Vesical Dream" in his *The Gates of the Dream* (New York: International Universities Press, 1952, pp. 439, 448-460, 465) and Otto Rank, "Die Symbolschichtung im Wecktraum und ihre Wiederkehr im mythischen Denken" in *Jahrbuch für psychoanalytische und psychopathologische Forschungen* 4 (1912): 51-115.

are not as hermeneutically useful to the community of faith as emic studies.¹⁶

It is not only myth studies that are often concerned with the etic. This can also (and perhaps most vividly) be seen in evangelical treatments of Genesis 1-11. For example, the entire preoccupation with creation science amongst some wings of conservative biblicists, or the quest to find remains of the ark, is an introduction of themes foreign to the text that are driven by modern concerns to demonstrate the historical validity of the text. Much conservative debate on the flood centers around whether it was 'local' or 'universal.' The text is not specific on this point because it is not an issue emic to the text. Rather, it is an imposition of modern reading techniques that do not properly account for the genre of Genesis 6-9, nor does it take seriously the need to speak where the text speaks and remain silent where the text is silent.

If we take a closer look at creation science, we see that one of its primary concerns is to validate scientifically a young earth. The thought is that if one takes the ages listed in the genealogies at face value one will come up with an earth that is approximately six thousand years old. Supposing for a moment that the genealogies are to be read in this way (although I do not believe they are), there is still the problem of the assumption that if the earth is in fact six thousand years old then it should *appear* six thousand years old. This is, in my opinion, an invalid assumption that is too often overlooked by those concerned with scientifically validating the text of Genesis. No creation scientist of whom I am aware believes that if they could somehow examine Adam the day after he was created he would appear one day old. Rather, they believe he would appear as a man, perhaps 15-22 years old. If Adam was created with age, why is it not possible that the earth would be created with age? If this is the case, then the entire goal of demonstrating a young earth is off base on exegetical grounds and those interested in demonstrating the scientific validity of the text of Genesis ought rather to be looking for evidence of an earth with age.

Granted, the earth did not have to be created with age exegetically. The point is not that

¹⁶ It should be noted that hermeneutical validity was never a goal, as far as I am aware, of the above mentioned studies.

sound exegesis must lead us to posit an old earth. The earth may very well be young, from an exegetical point of view. The problem is with the presupposition of a young earth implicit in the exegesis of creation scientists. Frankly, they are doing their cause more harm than good by their quest to prove the earth is young.

Take also the quest to find the ark. Supposing for a moment that the Hebrew word for Ararat means a single mountain,¹⁷ and supposing for a moment that this mountain could be positively identified, it is stunningly unlikely that something made out of wood will survive a wet climate intact for thousands of years. It is perhaps spurious to think that the ark survived and can be found, yet nearly every year some new report comes out from someone claiming to have found it. This is such a prevalent problem that the American Schools of Oriental Research has begun an entire session devoted to what it calls, “junk archeology.”

This is a concern for me because as an evangelical I have a comparatively high view of scripture. However, I do not believe that evangelical Christians have historically read the text of Genesis 1-11 well, particularly since the Enlightenment and its preoccupation with certain forms of rationalistic thought.¹⁸ Genesis 1-11 is a literary product of the ancient Near East, and as such its literary form does not automatically conform to what Enlightenment readers expect of good literature. For example, it has many repetitions, and rather than this being a sign of poor composition, a forgetful mind, or sources mindlessly spliced together, these repetitions are part and parcel of ANE literature. In fact, the repetition in Sumerian myth is often so pervasive as to make the text dull and silly to the ears of modern readers.¹⁹

Yet the repetition in Genesis 1-11 is one of the primary criteria for the division of the text

¹⁷ 'Ararat' refers to the mountain chain, not a single mountain.

¹⁸ This is typified by the preponderance of 'inductive' studies available on the Bible, the assumption often being that inductive logic is the only proper way to approach the text. It is not that inductive logic is invalid, but too often 'inductive study' means turning a blind eye to all presuppositions and assuming that a modern person uninitiated in ancient Near Eastern customs will automatically derive the 'true meaning' of the text.

¹⁹ I have actually tried this out on my seven year old son. I will take the classics of Sumerian myth and read them to him (in translation, of course) and ask him what he thinks. It has gotten to the point that he knows when I'm launching into one of these stories and he leaves the room. He blames, among other things, the repetitive nature of the stories, calling them 'boring.'

into sources. Is this valid, given the repetitive nature of ANE myth? The problem is that source critical theory rests on Enlightenment assumptions, and even though these assumptions no longer hold sway in the academy, having given way to postmodern thought and beyond (such as generative grammar), the results of Enlightenment thinking continue to hold sway despite the collapse of the foundation. This is why one finds consistent reference to sources in the secondary literature of Genesis 1-11. It is unfashionable to challenge the dominant theory, even though the system that led to that theory has crumbled.

What I propose is a new system of analyzing the literary concerns, such as sources, of Genesis 1-11. This new system is an emic one, the difficulty of which is the extraordinary amount of work and energy it takes to develop.

How does one arrive at an emic understanding of the text? Admittedly, this is in the end an impossible goal. A modern reader will never be able to enter into the minds of the ancients. We will never be able to fully understand their worldview or their experiences of the world, given the enormous separation of time and space. However, this is too often used as an excuse to not even try to understand the historical-cultural context. Rather, we resort to reading the text through our own lenses, in light of our own presuppositions. As I said earlier, this can make for some very interesting and engaging readings of the text. The problem is not with the readings, it is with the assumption it is not worth the effort to read emically, the assumption that says if a task cannot be pulled off perfectly it is not worth engaging in at all. I disagree with this assumption. I think it is incumbent upon us as faithful readers of literary texts to try to approach the text on its own terms and situate it in its own world and read it in light of its own rules and expectations. If we really are going to read the text through some sort of lens, I believe we should try to read it through a lens consistent with its origin.

The issue of repetition is a hot one in Genesis studies. The assumption that identifying repetition is a valid means of identifying sources is crumbling, and it bears mentioning that

repetition, especially with variation, is a valid and long-standing artistic (not just literary) technique. For example, the hallmark of semitic (not just Hebrew) poetry is parallelism. In my opinion, the large scale repetition in Genesis is a working out of the small scale parallelism one sees in poetry. Also, in Sumerian myth repetition is a normal means of providing structure to the literature. Inanna's Descent is a cycle of repetitions with variation as Inanna goes through the gates of the underworld. Also, the repetition in Gilgameš and H̄uwawa is redundant to modern ears but a natural part of Sumerian story telling.

A more recent, non-literary example is Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* (The Rite of Spring). One of the masterpieces of 20th century music, it uses varied repetition as one of its primary compositional techniques. It gives the ear something to latch onto in the absence of more traditional thematic markers such as recapitulation or theme and variation. It also creates a brilliant atmosphere of movement while standing still. The artistic value of varied repetition is that it simultaneously allows familiarity (repetition) and breaking new ground (the variation). It does it in such a subtle way that the movement is often unrecognizable.

Mythography

As mentioned earlier, one of the goals of this dissertation is to examine the particular characteristics of ancient Near Eastern myth. This is not necessarily a study of myth theory or mythology in general, but of mythography. There is of course some overlap in the studies, but whereas the study of myth seeks to examine the myths themselves, mythography is concerned with the study of myth writing. This is similar to the difference between the study of history and historiography, i.e., history writing.

Although voluminous work has been done on myth and mythography, there has not been a tremendous amount of work done on ancient Near Eastern mythography. Even Doty, in his influential *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals*, upon which much of this introduction is

based, says, “My focus is not upon materials from antiquity, except in giving a cursory overview of some of the exciting mythographic studies of Greek culture in the last couple of decades” (xii). Note that for Doty (and many others), myth from antiquity is equated with the Greeks and Romans. Yet most of the myth we are concerned with in ancient Near Eastern studies has antecedents that predate Greek myth by more than a millennium. To assume that what is true for Greek (western) myth is automatically true for ANE myth is simply naïve.

There are competing theories of myth, but as Cohen rightly observes, “they are not necessarily rival theories: the reason for this is that different theories often explain different statements about myth.”²⁰ The appearance of contradictions in competing theories of myth is often the result of explaining different facets of myth. Although most theories of myth look at myth in general, Cohen contends that “theorists should make clear which aspects of myth their own theory is designed to clarify.”²¹ In this vein, I attempt to show myth as ‘speculative philosophy’ not to the exclusion of other theories but in conversation with them. In other words, the aspect of myth my own theory is designed to clarify is its role in ancient Near Eastern societies as philosophical speculation on ‘ultimate’ questions such as the gods, humanity, suffering, cosmology, etc. Note that I limit my discussion to ancient Near Eastern myth. I am not trying to write a general theory of myth but am rather trying to assess the role of ancient Near Eastern myth in ancient Near Eastern societies. Thus, my theory may or may not be viable for theorists of other periods or places.

Much of Christian apologetics is, in my opinion, a reaction to an outmoded and unacceptable theory of myth. “[T]oo much of our mythographic history has been marked by the assumption that *only a single approach* will predominate, so that myths or rituals are considered to have only *one function*.... For instance, the mythological is considered in such approaches to be but a preliminary stage that optimally can lead to scientific thinking.”²² The opposite extreme is to

²⁰ Percy Cohen, “Theories of Myth.” *Man* 4/3 (1969): 338.

²¹ *Ibid.* See also William G. Doty, *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals*. 2nd ed. London: University of Alabama Press, 2000, p. xv; 30.

²² Doty xv, emphasis his.

assume that every myth is polyfunctional. Since Genesis 1-11 contains mythic themes, it is automatically placed in the category of pre-scientific and therefore false. The apologist then feels the need to show that far from being false the text squares with the discoveries of modern science. The apologist has unwittingly bought into the false assumption that if a text is not scientifically precise it is mythological and therefore fiction.

While some consider myth “a preliminary stage that optimally can lead to scientific thinking,” others take myth as nothing more than a reflection of the psyche, a way of passing on values that are no longer viable for modern man. Thus the apologist ends up fighting for the continuing viability of the text, demonstrating ways in which the text speaks to values that can still be of worth today.

Both of these approaches to apologetics (i.e. demonstrating scientific accuracy or psychological viability) have the potential to do more harm than good. I am not terribly interested in engaging in apologetics, but if I were I would ignore scientific or psychological viability and go straight for the theory of myth that leads one to dismiss the text as premodern fantasy good only for bedtime stories and the ignorantly religious. I do not treat Genesis 1-11 as a science textbook nor do I treat it as a book of virtues. It is speculative philosophy that has interesting things to say about the world as the ancients knew it. For example, Genesis 3 is not primarily about a talking snake. It is a story that acknowledges that the world is a mess and speculates on how we got into that mess. I am frankly not very interested in whether or not there was ever a talking snake. What is much more interesting to me, and I think closer to the point of the text, is whether rejection of God’s rule can lead to the presence of pain and evil in the world.

Put another way, there was a tradition in mythographic studies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to dismiss the voices of the “primitive.” The answer of the apologist has been to attempt to show how the Bible, being God’s word, is not primitive despite being written long ago. I think a much better answer is to acknowledge, along with the last twenty years or so of

mythographic scholarship, that “traditional scholarship has squelched the voices of peoples presumed to be ‘primitive.’”²³ I am not interested in trying to prove that the ancient authors of the Bible were moderns in primitive clothing. As I will show below, I think the biblical authors used “primitive” models to describe the world as they knew it, *and* what they had to say about life is still instructive and relevant to our “modern” (or postmodern) world.

By now it is obvious that at the heart of this dissertation is the issue of the hermeneutics of Genesis 1-11. Genesis 1-11 is not designed to give us facts, although facts are present, but to shape worldview. The problem is that while hermeneutics shape worldview, worldview also shapes hermeneutics. This has become a tremendous problem for Genesis 1-11 because of our western tendency to read the text through the lens of western philosophical systems, systems that are entirely foreign to ancient Israelites who are neither western nor modern. It is not that they were illogical or prelogical, but that they engaged in philosophical speculation differently than Plato and all the western philosophy that followed. My goal is to shape a hermeneutic of Genesis 1-11 that is not created by my own western worldview. Rather, I wish to develop a hermeneutic of Genesis 1-11 that is consistent with the worldviews of the ancients. This is, of course, an impossible goal, but that is no excuse to simply abandon the hard work of trying to understand context.

The Problem of Western (Greek) Views of Myth

Myth in today’s American and European culture is often equated with fiction, a story that is often the product of deceivers with a political agenda. If not the product of intentional deception, it is at least the belief of the deceived or ignorant. Thus a recent search on amazon.com brought up the following (among hundreds others): *Tear Down This Myth: How the Reagan Legacy Has Distorted Our Politics and Haunts Our Future*; *The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity Is Hurting Young Women*; *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against*

²³ Doty xvi.

Women; *The Top Ten Myths of American Health Care*; and *The Myth of a Christian Nation*. Notice how in all of these titles it is assumed that myth means destructive fiction. It is not my goal to argue against this use of ‘myth,’ only to show that it is foreign to ancient Near Eastern myth.

How did we come to such a view of myth?

With the earliest Greek philosophers, *μυθος* (*mythos*) was a term used to designate the organization of words into story form. Thus, for Homer and the other early poets, it signifies the ornamental or surface level of the text, and how the words were arranged into literary, and usually fictional, form to create beauty or emotional effect. Plato used *mythos* to designate the art of language to be used alongside or within poetry. He would switch to the mythic and to extended metaphors at times when his rational discourse needed to be amplified emotionally or aesthetically.²⁴ Aristotle restricted *mythos* to the rational ordering of words and actions of the drama into a sequence of narrative components, what we call *plot*.²⁵

Alongside *mythos* Greek philosophers used a similar word—*λογος*. The words could be combined into *mythologia* (where we get the English “mythology”), but over time “*logos* gained the sense of referring to words comprising doctrine or theory, as opposed to *mythos* for words having an ornamental or fictional, narrative function.”²⁶ Doty goes on to explain,

When Greek philosophical and scientific discourse began to claim that its rationality (its *logos*) had supplanted mythological thinking (identified as *mythos*, although that same discourse was still heavily indebted to mythological thinking), the mythological came to be contrasted with logic (the *logos*-ical) and later with “history” in the sense of an overview or chronicle of events (*epos* or *historia*, not necessarily chronologically distant from the present).²⁷

It is this view of history as an outgrowth of the logical that has led many modern commentators to

²⁴ Marcel Detienne. *L'invention de la mythologie*. Bibliothèque des Sciences Humaines. Paris: Gallimard, 1981, particularly chs. 4-5. See also chapter 9 of Paul Friedländer *Plato: An Introduction*, trans. Hans Myerhoff, Bollingen ser., 59, New York: Harper and Row, 1958, long considered the classic introduction to Plato.

²⁵ Doty, 6.

²⁶ Doty 6.

²⁷ Doty 6-7.

contrast myth and history (assuming that the mythological cannot be historical).²⁸

Thus, mythology as the fictive product of the imagination, or at the least an imaginatively embellished story, was the end product of this course of linguistic development. *Mythos* made its way into Latin as *fabula*, which in turn came into English as ‘fable,’ part of the reason for the modern assumption that anything which contains myth must be fable. The emphasis becomes the poetic and imaginatively inventive aspects of mythological discourse, and it is this fictional aspect that has become the focus of the modern scholarly discourse on myth and, in my opinion, in the scholarly literature on Genesis 1-11. This is especially true in a climate that conceives of science (whether rightly or wrongly) as being based in the concrete and empirical, that which is capable of being tested via experiment and the ‘scientific method.’ In such an environment, scientific thought is considered not merely different than mythological thought, but its opposite. Myth is the realm of the fictive, of fantasy, and of products of the imagination. Thus, myth is *technically*, not just popularly, treated as nonscientific and, therefore, inferior.²⁹ Graf rightly contends that this mental construct (the science/myth dichotomy) is a product of Enlightenment thought, and that “it is entirely possible that in speaking of ‘myths’ in non-European societies we are projecting our own conceptions, which go back to fifth-century Athens, onto those societies.”³⁰ In my opinion, studies of Genesis 1-11, a decidedly non-western, pre-fifth century Athens product,³¹ are too often marred by this projecting of our own conceptions.

Doty comments that one of the underlying intentions of his book is to raise doubts about the myth/science distinction as the terms are generally conceived today. He contends that “our myths are *fictional*, to be sure, but that fictional need not mean unreal and certainly not non-empirical.”³²

At first blush it seems rather odd to say something can be fictional without being unreal, but if I

²⁸ See, for example, Kenton Sparks, “The Problem of Myth in Ancient Historiography,” 269-280 in *Rethinking the Foundations*, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000. Assuming that myth is a “problem” in ancient Near Eastern history writing is, in my opinion, ethnocentric.

²⁹ Again, see Sparks, who (unwittingly?) treats the ‘mythological’ as inferior to the strictly ‘historical.’

³⁰ Graf 1993: 55-56.

³¹ Even in attempts to place the final form of Genesis 1-11 in the Hellenistic period, it is still accepted that the stories have antecedents in pre-Greek and pre-Persian societies.

³² Doty, 7.

understand him properly what he is saying is that even though certain of the events in a myth *may* not be referentially true, i.e., they did not actually happen in time and space (in ‘history’), the underlying principles, what I will refer to as the “truth claims” of the text, are indeed real and empirical.

For example, in the Sumerian myth Gilgamesh and Huwawa A, there is a scene in which Gilgamesh bribes the mountain dwelling Huwawa by giving him his older sister Enmebaragesi:

en-me-barag₂-ge₄-e-si nin₉ gal-ĝu₁₀ nam-dam-še₃ kur-ra ħu-mu-ra-ni-kur₉-ra
“I am bringing you Enmebaragesi my older sister as a wife in the mountains.”

The point here is not that the Sumerians believed there was a historical Gilgamesh who met the beast-man Huwawa and bribed him with his sister. Rather, the point is that Enmebaragesi was the historical ruler of Aratta, a land typically at enmity with Sumer. The empirical truth-claim of the text is not Gilgamesh’s offering, but the Sumerian (pejorative) view of Aratta and Enmebaragesi as a sister. Fiction, but real.

One could also use an example from science. Science regularly uses models in teaching and research, models that prove false (fiction) upon close examination. Electrons are described as moving around the nucleus of an atom in ‘orbitals,’ and the initial model I was given in ninth grade science was very much like the orbitals of the planets revolving around the sun. Then when I got to college I learned that the ‘orbitals’ are not really orbitals. Rather, they are domains that the electron will be found in, and the electron itself does not move in an orbital-like (circular) path. Thus, in learning ninth grade ‘science,’ I was learning a fiction, a model, that would form a construct that could be built on as my learning developed. Myths, like science, contain *interpretations* of the world, and interpretation “in this context is neither pejorative nor congratulatory, but simply refers to the fact that interpretation and explanation, like any other human artifacts, have to be made.”³³

Doty’s main point in this discussion is that “the heavy burden of our cultural background

³³ Mark Schneider, *Culture and Enchantment*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 45.

lies upon the all too frequent weighting of mythology with the sense ‘unreal, fictional.’”³⁴ This weighting has a rationalizing effect on myths which has ruled the study of individual myths, mythology in general, and mythography (the study of myth making). “Later phases of a myth’s situation within a culture are marked by increasing rationalization, so that most theories of myth and ritual derive ultimately from the tendency to rationalize, to substitute abstract social or philosophical-scientific meanings for the graphic imagery of narrative myths...”³⁵ This is most eloquently true of the systemitician’s delight in exchanging mythic imagination for the lofty heights of *fiat, imago dei*, and *ex nihilo*. As Lincoln notes, mythic speech is often raw and crude in its forcefulness and, “it denotes a blunt and aggressive act of plainspeaking: a hardboiled speech of intimidation.”³⁶ It is not the lofty speech of scholastics and academic rationalists.

Unfortunately, as Doty notes, the development pattern *mythos* → *logos* became the norm in western scholarship.³⁷ Thus, Lincoln can rather fancifully say, “*Mythos* is a blunt speech suited for assembly and battle, with which powerful males bludgeon and intimidate their foes. *Logos*, in contrast, is a speech particularly associated with women, but available to the gentle, the charming, and the shrewd of either sex. It is a speech soft and delightful that can also deceive and entrap.”³⁸

Further, it became assumed that *mythos* was of unquestioned validity whereas *logos* was speech “whose validity or truth can be argued and demonstrated.”³⁹ In my opinion, this statement sums up the two main evangelical handlings of the Hebrew creation account: either the account is assumed valid and any questioning of the text is viewed as a lack of faith, or its mythic nature is denied and it is treated as *logos* in attempts to validate the text through rational argument and

³⁴ Doty, 8. Confusing is the fact that he says this within less than a page of claiming that ‘our myths are *fictional*, to be sure...’

³⁵ Doty, 8.

³⁶ Bruce Lincoln, “Gendered Discourses: The Early History of *Mythos* and *Logos*.” *History of Religions* (1996) 36/1: 1-12. On the use of speech in Greek myth, see also Richard Martin, *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the “Iliad.”* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

³⁷ Due primarily to Wilhelm Nestle, *Vom Mythos zu Logos: die Selbstentfaltung des griechischen Denkens von Homer bis auf die Sophistik und Sokrates*. Stuttgart: Kröner, 1940; 2nd ed., 1942.

³⁸ Lincoln, p. 10.

³⁹ Kees W. Bolle, Richard G. A. Baxton, and Jonathan Z. Smith, “Myth and Mythology.” *New Encyclopedia Britannica* (1993) 24: 715. For a more developed expression of this view, see Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*. Boston: Routledge, 1983.

scientific demonstration. Both of these approaches, as well-meaning as its adherents may be, rob the text of its historical-cultural context. As Cooley says, “abstracted from any historical context, the exercise of reason has often masked authoritarian ideological concerns, such that one necessarily comes to regard appeals to reason as suspicious and to view the authority vested in both reason and science as troubling and problematic.”⁴⁰ This suspicion has, in our time, spread to the text as well. Frankly, I would be suspicious of the text also if my only approach to it was through science and ratiocination (to use Cooley’s term), i.e., through *logos*.

In attempting to establish the parameters for an emic reading of Genesis 1-11 I will first provide a literature review of mythographic studies (chapter 1), designed to bring the bible scholar up to date on the field of mythography. Focus will be placed on functional approaches to myth. This will set the stage for an attempt to assess ancient Near Eastern myth's function as 'speculative philosophy' (chapter 2). The Sumerian myth Gilgamesh and Hūwawa will be used as a case study (chapter 3), culminating in an effort to demonstrate how viewing ancient Near Eastern myth as (functionally) speculative philosophy affects interpretation of Genesis 1-11 (chapter 4). This will be accomplished via an exposition of Genesis 11:1-9.

One note on bibliography is in order. Aside from the bibliography for the Introduction which immediately follows, I have separated out the bibliography by topic and included works not cited in the dissertation. My hope is that the bibliographies will be useful to scholars interested in further research on the various topics addressed in the dissertation.

⁴⁰ Paula Cooley, *Religious Imagination and the Body: A Feminist Analysis*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

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Chapter 1. History of Myth Studies/Literature Review

In this dissertation, written for Hebrew Bible scholars, I am assuming familiarity with the literature on Genesis 1-11. However, I am *not* assuming familiarity with mythographic studies or Sumerological/Assyriological studies. Therefore, I offer the following literature review primarily of mythographic studies, but with some Assyriological observations where pertinent. Functionalism (also called sociofunctionalism and structural-functionalism) will be reviewed in the most depth because in the next chapter I will be discussing ancient Near Eastern myth's role as speculative philosophy, a functional concern.

According to Doty, "most modern myth analysis stands directly in the euhemeristic tradition, a tradition that participates in the wider context of debunking."⁴¹ By euhemeristic he means an approach that takes myth simply as fancifully embellished descriptions of the deeds of the society's heroes.⁴² He goes on to refer to this "debunking" as a "hermeneutic of suspicion." The history of mythographic studies, especially those from post-enlightenment western societies, is littered with potentially ethnocentric studies that presuppose that any myth from an earlier time or from a foreign culture must be reinterpreted through one's own cultural grid in order to tease out what the myth is actually about. Most dramatic are perhaps the existentialist interpretations of Bultmann and Jonas. Thus the voices of pre-modern (often labeled "pagan" in biblical studies)

⁴¹ Doty, 128.

⁴² Euhemerus was the ancient Greek mythographer who started the tradition of looking for the historical basis of myths.

writers are viewed as “tainted by overarching values and belief structures in such ways that *the indigenous viewpoints can be safely disregarded* in favor of the outside (i.e., etic) analyst’s coding of the materials.”⁴³ Doty insightfully notes, “myth analysis has followed such pathways of negative hermeneutics, debunking and disassembling, deconstructing rather than reconstructing and reassembling.”⁴⁴

Sociofunctionalism

Earliest among the etic hermeneutics of suspicion is the sociofunctional, or structural-functional approach to myth. Although there are some exceptions, most studies in this tradition reinterpret myths as “statements and activities that reflected or fulfilled social needs.”⁴⁵ These needs were very seldom named in the texts themselves but were the true reason for the creation and perpetuation of the myth. Exemplary here is the sociofunctionalist Kluckhohn’s statement: “Both myth and ritual satisfy the needs of a society and the relative place of one or the other will depend upon the particular needs (conscious and unconscious) of the individuals in a particular society at a particular time.”⁴⁶

The sociofunctional approach seeks to identify how the myths and rituals are used within a particular society. One of the challenges of the approach is the acknowledgement that the meaning of a particular myth varies from individual to individual and from group to group even within a given society. For example, Gene Rodenberry’s modern myth *Star Trek*, a product of twentieth century America, is to some a boring story, to others a fun bit of entertainment, and to still others a profound exposé of modern values, *all within its originating culture*. It is passé to speak of the ‘meaning of a myth’ in its original social context simply because it is acknowledged that different

⁴³ Doty, 129.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Clyde Kluckhohn, “Myths and Rituals: A General Theory.” *Harvard Theological Review* 35 (1942): 45-79. See also Norman Brown, *Hermes the Thief: The Evolution of a Myth*. Theorists of Myth series. New York: Garland, 1947, Anne Ward, ed. *The Quest for Theseus*. New York: Praeger, 1970, and Charles Seltman, *The Twelve Olympians*. New York: Crowel, 1960.

individuals and groups would have derived differing meanings, or even no meaning at all.

Tylor

Much of the work of the sociofunctional approach is comparative methodologically. Although mythographers do not usually address the issue of comparativism as directly as they used to, late nineteenth century anthropological approaches (the forerunner to sociofunctionalism) were globalizing in their comparisons of ethnological traits.⁴⁷ Edward B. Tylor (1832-1917), considered the father of modern social anthropology, proposed in his *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, originally published in 1871, that evolutionary theory could be used to trace the development of societies from ‘primitive’ through various stages to modern states.⁴⁸ Since progress is inherent in the idea of evolution, societies that were deemed primitive were considered inferior, even if this was not overtly stated. Stunning in Tylor’s study is the *universal* nature of the development of societies, i.e. all societies develop in essentially the same way. This broad comparativism obviously glosses over historical context and has been criticized for its seemingly arbitrary selection of comparative materials.⁴⁹ It also runs the risk of doing justice to *none* of the materials being compared because of its inherently etic approach.⁵⁰

Tylor views myth as a subset of religion and religion not as primitive science but as the unscientific counterpart to modern science. His dependence on an evolutionary model meant he fully expected myth to give way to science in the modern world. Rather than setting forth a clear argument for the incompatibility of myth and science, his writings presume the dichotomy. He

⁴⁷ Doty, 126.

⁴⁸ Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*. New York: Gordon Press, 1976. See also his 1865 work *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization*. His theory of myth is explicated in *Primitive Culture* volume I: chapters 8-10.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Alan Dundes, “The Anthropologist and the Comparative Method in Folklore.” *Journal of Folklore Research* 23/2-3: 125-146.

⁵⁰ Similar to Tylor in his evolutionary views and his insistence on the ‘primitive’ nature of pre-modern societies was the highly influential James Frazer, to which I will return later.

considers myth and science to be redundant because they both seek to explain the natural world. Inherent in this view of myth is the idea that ancient myths are the attempts of primitive man to understand the world around them. In this regard, his theory has much in common with attempts to explain myth as the attribution of natural phenomena to the actions of deities.

Tylor believed that whereas myth ascribed events to the actions of personalities, typically gods, science ascribed those same events to mechanical processes. This lies at the heart of the incompatibility of myth and science, in that they are competing explanations of the same events. Note that it is not descriptions from different angles, as per Doty, but competing, contradictory explanations. “But just as mechanical [i.e., modern, scientific] astronomy gradually superseded the animistic [i.e., primitive, religious and mythic] astronomy of the lower races, so biological pathology gradually supersedes animistic pathology, the immediate operation of personal spiritual beings in both cases giving place to the operation of natural processes.”⁵¹

Tylor insisted that myth be read literally, not metaphorically. For him, myths are “not to be narrowed down to poetic fancy and transformed metaphor. They rest upon a broad philosophy of nature, early and crude indeed, but thoughtful, consistent, and quite really and seriously meant.”⁵² Modern commentators who insist on reading Genesis 1-11 as history,⁵³ and therefore engage in apologetic enterprises such as ‘creation science,’ are unwittingly falling into Tylor’s trap.

An example of a present-day advocate of Tylor’s view of the incompatibility of myth and science is Robin Horton.⁵⁴

Frazer

Sir James Frazer (1854-1941) studied classics at Trinity College, Cambridge, and remained there as Classics Fellow for the entirety of his career. He was influenced by Tylor (twenty years his

⁵¹ Tylor 1976: II: 229.

⁵² Tylor 1976: I: 285.

⁵³ I am using ‘history’ as a genre category. One can read Genesis 1-11 (or any other myth) as ‘historical’ without reading it as ‘history.’

⁵⁴ See Robin Horton 1997: 53-62. On Horton, see Segal 1993.

senior) and credited him with sparking his interest in social anthropology. Frazer was encouraged to continue on the anthropological path by his friend William Robertson Smith, Old Testament scholar and protagonist of Wellhausen. He is best known as the author of *The Golden Bough*.

Frazer was in many ways similar to Tylor. He was a classicist who viewed myth as part of primitive religion. In his view, primitive religion was the ancient counterpart to modern science. Thus, as with Tylor, myth and science cannot coexist. Like Tylor, Frazer viewed myth, and the primitive religion it expressed, as false while modern science he viewed as true.

The primary difference between Tylor and Frazer is that Tylor viewed myth as primitive scientific *theory* whereas Frazer viewed it as *applied* science (i.e., technology). "Where for Tylor primitive religion serves to *explain* events in the physical world, for Frazer it serves even more to *effect* events, above all the growth of crops." (Segal 2004: 24; emphasis his) In this respect Frazer was a forerunner to the myth and ritual school. The acting out of the myths in ritual was what caused crops to grow, etc., in the ancient worldview. Thus, to act out a Dummuzi ritual would be to effect the rebirth of crops.

Frazer reductionistically divides all culture into three stages: magic, religion and science. However, he spends the bulk of *The Golden Bough* describing the intermediate stage between religion and science, a stage marked by the need for a hero willing to die for a cause, famously expressed in the aphorism, 'The king must die.'

Obviously the "biggest difficulty for Tylor's and Frazer's view of myth as the primitive counterpart to science [whether theoretical or applied] is that it conspicuously fails to account for the retention of myth in the wake of science." (Segal 24) This is exactly where the theories of Blumenberg and Eliade so radically departed from earlier theorists.

Lévy-Bruhl

Lucien Lévy Bruhl (1857-1939) was an armchair anthropologist trained in philosophy. He

was in many ways a reaction against Tylor and Frazer. He believed there was a great divide between myth and science. Myth is not logical. Rather, it is 'prelogical.' He viewed it as 'prelogical' because it regularly breaks the law of noncontradiction. For example, in his work as an armchair anthropologist he declared the Bororo belief that they are both human and red parakeet prelogical.

Myth to Lévy-Bruhl is part of religion. Whereas modern philosophy is free of the mystical, 'primitive' thought as expressed in myth cannot be philosophical because it is not free of the mystical. He believed the function of myth is to restore the mystical connection with the natural world, what he called *participation mystique*. "Where the participation of the individual in the social group is still directly felt, where the participation of the group with surrounding groups is actually lived--that is, as long as the period of mystic symbiosis lasts--myths are meager in number and of poor quality. Can myths then likewise be the products of primitive mentality which appear when this mentality is endeavouring to realize a participation no longer felt--when it has recourse to intermediaries, and vehicles designed to secure a communion which has ceased to be a living reality?"⁵⁵ Myth (and presumably ritual) allowed people to get in touch, so to speak, with the mystical, that is, those parts of the natural world that are beyond their comprehension.

Lévi-Strauss

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009) is considered, along with Frazer, the father of modern anthropology. The bulk of his academic career took place at the prestigious Collège de France in Paris where he held the Chair of Social Anthropology for over twenty years (1959-1982).

Lévi-Strauss, deemed the pioneer of a structuralist approach, *contra* Lévy-Bruhl, believed myth to be intellectual rather than mystical. 'Primitives' made myths because they viewed the world in general and nature in particular differently than moderns, but it was not illogical. Rather, it was

⁵⁵ Lévy-Bruhl 1966 [1926]: 330.

simply *different* on the conceptual level. He viewed 'primitive' thought, as expressed in myth, as concrete rather than abstract, qualitative rather than quantitative. In this way he took myth as science, rather than Tylor's view that it was 'pre-scientific' and would be replaced by science. To Lévi-Strauss, myth is science done concretely rather than abstractly and therefore it is not inferior to modern science. Instead it is methodologically different.

There are two distinct modes of scientific thought. These are certainly not a function of different stages of the human mind but rather of two strategic levels at which nature is accessible to scientific enquiry: one roughly adapted to that of perception and the imagination: the other at a remove from it.... What separates the savage thought from scientific thought is perfectly clear--and it is not a greater or lesser thirst for logic. Myths manipulate those qualities of perception that modern thought, at the birth of modern science, exorcised from science (*Savage Mind* p. 15).

Thus, Tylor pitted myth against science, whereas Lévi-Strauss drew a distinction between 'primitive science' (i.e., myth) and modern science. Myth is orderly, and therefore the mind that created it is orderly, not 'prelogical.'

Lévi-Strauss referred to his approach to myth as 'structuralist.' He did this to distinguish it from what he called 'narrative' interpretations. Narrative interpretations of myth, whether taking it literally or symbolically, see myth as story with a plot that needs to be followed. In this regard, virtually all other theories of myth are 'narrative,' and Segal even goes so far as to have 'story' as his primary criterion for labeling something as myth. However, Lévi-Strauss threw out the plot and focused the meaning of myth on its structure. In this way his approach is deemed synchronic rather than diachronic.

As a final point, Lévi-Strauss was different than Lévy-Bruhl in believing that the contradictions present in myth were in fact *resolved* in mythic thought. Myth, he believed, resolved contradictions dialectically: "The purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction."

Durkheim

Although Bronislaw Malinowski's name is linked with the origins of the sociofunctional approach, it is perhaps Émile Durkheim who should be considered the father of the approach. Durkheim (1858-1917) was a French sociologist whose influential thesis was that "social values are the highest and most important human constructs and that religious terms such as "god" are ciphers used to express these values."⁵⁶ Although it never appears in Durkheim's writings, Doty uses the phrase "society equals God" as a summary of his thesis.⁵⁷ Religion becomes for Durkheim a means of grounding social goals in the transcendent, allowing them to take on the import of canon. This, in turn, allows social goals to bind a society into a cohesive unit. According to Durkheim, we can transcend ourselves through our inclusion in society.⁵⁸

For Durkheim, myth, expressed in religious terms, was a "means of supporting cultural and social values by grounding them in a transcendent realm, by projecting them outside the culture *so that they become models for the society....*"⁵⁹ Durkheim's goal was to "go underneath the symbol to the reality."⁶⁰ He demanded a historical, developmental method for the analysis of myths, and his goal was to show how they developed and became complicated little by little over time.⁶¹ He put what he called naturism alongside animism as the religious form that stood at the beginning of the evolution.⁶² He boldly claimed that in 'lower societies' all is uniform, there is moral and intellectual conformity, and that myths are "all composed of one and the same theme which is endlessly repeated.... Primitive civilization offers privileged cases, then, because they are simple cases."⁶³ It almost goes without saying that this thesis of simplicity has fallen apart in assyriological studies.⁶⁴

The idea of myths as models for the society is at the heart of Durkheim's thesis, because it is

⁵⁶ Doty 130.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* Durkheim's phrase was "religion is social." See Durkheim 1915: 22.

⁵⁸ Durkheim 1915: 29.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

⁶⁰ Durkheim 1915: 14.

⁶¹ Durkheim 1915: 15.

⁶² Durkheim 1915:17.

⁶³ Durkheim 1915: 18.

⁶⁴ See, as but one example, the debate between Jacobsen and Bottero as to whether or not a history of Mesopotamian religion can even be written.

through myth and the associated rituals that a community's values can be enforced and perpetuated. As Douglas notes, "So it was that instead of being interested in class conflict, [Durkheim] was primarily interested in group solidarity. His synthesis of then-current theories about the social construction of categories argued that shared categories of thought are a function of and a prerequisite for society. To teach this he turned away from European history and introduced accounts of very distant, very curious small societies."⁶⁵

Obviously, one of the by-products of this view of myth is the idea that myths are primarily created for the elite to perpetuate their grasp of power over the community. In this way, religion becomes a tool of slavery rather than liberation. While this may seem a bit of a disparaging way of looking at myth (and religion), it needs to be set in its context of a reaction against late-nineteenth century views of myth as pure entertainment. Durkheim's views were meant to elevate the importance of religious and mythic materials, not disparage them. They were "a reaction to the late-nineteenth-century view that myth and ritual were primarily *entertainments*, spin-off stories and activities intended for enjoyment and recreation—especially by the less-well-educated masses."⁶⁶

There is little doubt that myths have been made for sociological purposes. In ancient Near Eastern myth, one quickly points to Enuma Elish as the paradigm of myth for social purposes. It is thought that the myth, which elevates Marduk to the head of the Babylonian pantheon, was created by the priests of Marduk in Babylon in roughly the 11th century in order to secure political sway for themselves. This may certainly be the case, but it does not mean that this is *all* that can be gleaned from a study of the myth. What the sociofunctional approach has done is alert us to larger societal concerns driving the creation of certain myths. Where it goes too far, in my opinion, is its reductionist tendency to view the social cause as the only reason for the creation of myth. More importantly, the themes and worldview reflected in the myths is often rejected by the mythographer as having any basis in the larger society because of the way the theme is *used*. I contend that we

⁶⁵ Douglas 1980: 11.

⁶⁶ Doty 130, emphasis his.

must be very careful about throwing out or reinterpreting themes simply because those themes have been used by the creators of the myth.

For example, Genesis 1:17 contains a bold polemic against the sun and moon gods. Rather than name them, which we would expect in an ancient Near Eastern theogony, they are referred to as the greater light and the lesser light. Clearly there is polemic here that is being used to help justify the societal demand that Israel worship Yahweh alone. However, the presence of social function or polemic does not mean that only the intelligentsia was interested in the elevation of Yahweh at the expense of the sun and moon gods. We should not assume, in good sociofunctional fashion, that the average Israelite was concerned with the worship of the sun and moon gods and their voice was silenced by the elite who demanded elevation of Yahweh for political reasons. This goes beyond the bounds of the text and takes us into theories that simply cannot be verified with the limited data we possess.

Another example of social agenda in myth formation is given by Grant in his study of Roman myth.⁶⁷ Grant contends that the purpose of the Roman myths was to justify traditional social institutions as a means of keeping in power those that were already in power. He shows how rulers used the myths for polemical purposes, even noting Quintus Mucius Scaevola's comment that he desired the people be deceived in matters of religion.⁶⁸ Presumably the purpose of the deception was to secure power and influence for himself. Particularly damning to the Roman rulers from a sociofunctional perspective is the frequent rewrites of Roman history designed to serve the special interests of particular people in power (family or individual) and the frequent use of myth (religious material?) to justify the public rituals prominent at the time. "Myths—taken here in the broadest sense as the primary religious and political stories—clearly served the Romans as a justifying "charter" for their society, to use the functionalist term Malinowski made famous."⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Michael Grant, *Roman Myths*. New York: Scribner, 1971. See also his earlier work *Myths of the Greeks and Romans*. New York: New American Library, 1962.

⁶⁸ Grant 1971, p. 228.

⁶⁹ Doty 130.

Malinowski

As mentioned above, Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) is considered the innovator of the socio-functional approach to myth. He was born in Poland but was a naturalized citizen of Britain and had a productive teaching career in anthropology at the London School of Economics. Among his students were Raymond Firth, credited with forming a British economic anthropology, E. E. Evans-Pritchard (see below), Edmund Leach, provost of King's College, Cambridge, and Meyer Fortes, author of *Oedipus and Job in West African Religion* (1959).

Malinowski is primarily concerned with the *function* of myth. He does not attempt to answer the question of the origin of myth, considering it unknowable. He also seems to be indifferent to the issue of the differing subject matter of myths.

Malinowski made his claims based on his fieldwork among a Melanesian tribe of New Guinea. He believed that the study of myth apart from its practitioners led to error:

The limitation of the study of myth to the mere examination of texts has been fatal to a proper understanding of its nature. The forms of myth which come to us from classical antiquity and from the ancient sacred bonds of the East and other similar sources have come down to us without the context of living faith, without the possibility of obtaining comments from true believers, without the concomitant knowledge of their social organization, their practiced morals, and their popular customs—at least without the full information which the modern fieldworker can easily obtain. Moreover, there is no doubt that in their present literary form these tales have suffered a very considerable transformation at the hands of scribes, commentators, learned priests, and theologians. It is necessary to primitive mythology...which is still alive—before, mummified in priestly wisdom, it has been enshrined in the indestructible but lifeless repository of dead religions.

Studied alive, myth, as we shall see, is not symbolic, but a direct expression of its subject matter.⁷⁰

As the prior quote shows, Malinowski did not view myth as a *symbolic* statement of other realities. In fact, he cast the word 'symbol' in a very negative light. Rather, he viewed myth

⁷⁰ Malinowski 100-01.

as *direct statements* of the social realities of which they spoke, and he thought their primary purpose was for the establishment of a social order. “Myth fulfills in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safe guards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale [*contra* the nineteenth century view of myth as *entertainments*], but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom.”⁷¹

Douglas contends that, “Demanding the *social context* for interpreting verbal utterances was Malinowski’s great teaching.”⁷² Malinowski claimed myth was “not an aimless out-pouring of vain imaginings, but a hardworking, extremely important cultural force...Myth, *as it exists in a savage community*, that is, in its living primitive form, is not merely a story told, but a reality lived.”⁷³

Moving on from Malinowski, scholars have tended to work with broader views of myth, differentiating between myths as models of society and models for society. Myth as a model of society sets out an image of the culture as it is. Myth as a model for society views myth as a statement by the mythographer of what society should be or the ideals it should seek to attain. It has a sense of a movement *toward* some goal. Geertz claims that the “acceptance of authority that underlies the religious perspective that the ritual embodies ...flows from the enactment of the ritual itself. By inducing a set of modes and motivations—an ethos—and defining an image of cosmic order—a world-view—by means of a single set of symbols, the performance makes the model *for* and model *of* aspects of religious belief mere transpositions of one another.”⁷⁴ The point here is that

⁷¹ Malinowski 101.

⁷² Douglas 1980: 28-29 (emphasis mine). She goes on to note that, “Evans-Pritchard was to go much further in defining social contexts” (p. 29).

⁷³ Bronislaw Malinowski, “Myth in Primitive Psychology,” in *Magic, Science, and Religion and Other Essays*. Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1948, pp. 97, 100. Emphasis mine. For more on Malinowski, including insightful analysis of his sociofunctional approach, see Ivan Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History: Cassirer, Eliade, Lévi-Strauss, and Malinowski*, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987.

⁷⁴ Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York: Basic (1973), p. 118.

according to Geertz one's view of myth should not be static, and the same holds for one's use of a functionalist approach. Ongoing work on functionalism modified Malinowski's "myth as pragmatic charter" to limit the "charter" to justifying and exemplifying the social order.⁷⁵

One of the primary values and lasting contributions of the sociofunctional approach to myth is the way it establishes the relationship between the myth and the social order, regardless of whether the myth was a model of what *was* or what *should be*. As mentioned earlier, this connection was made as a refutation of the idea that myth was nothing more than an entertainment or a pre-modern, pre-scientific explanation of modern phenomena, a view that unfortunately still crops up in the Assyriological literature.⁷⁶

Generalizations are often made, especially in comparative studies, but it is generally acknowledged that all individual occurrences of myth or ritual need to be considered in light of the shaping it received in its particular social-historical context. Even broad myths finding expression in a wide variety of social-historical contexts are localized in their various expressions. Thus, interpreters are often influenced by the broader generalizations and abstractions they are forced to use when considering the broad swath of a particular myth. This has the almost necessary byproduct of reductionism.

For example, the myth of the flood could be considered universal in that it appears in various cultures, places and times. One can speak abstractly about the catastrophic nature of the flood, the role the god(s) play, the motivation for the flood, etc. Generalizations are then made as the mythographer seeks to identify common themes or trends in the various flood stories. The problem is when the individual social context that is expressed in the particulars of the story are ignored in favor of the reductionist tendency to claim literary borrowing (an unverifiable stance in the example of the flood). Just because there are commonalities of themes or even details (such as the raven), literary borrowing is not as viable as pointing to common cultural heritage. In the case

⁷⁵ Doty 132.

⁷⁶ See, for example, Vantiphout in *What is a God?*

of the raven, what else would one send in the ancient Near East if one is trying to determine the relative safety of the land without leaving the boat? The raven is the bird that can be trained for the task in the ancient Near East and therefore it is the logical choice. To say that the use of the raven demonstrates simple borrowing (either by the Hebrew writers or vice-versa) is akin to saying that every medieval story that uses a messenger pigeon is borrowed while those that use a dove or hawk are not.

Goode expanded the sociofunctional method beyond the sociological. Doty summarizes his main points as follows:⁷⁷

1. Religion seeks to *act out* deeply held beliefs and is not merely “a set of philosophical reflections about another world.” Even though religion is a set of ideas believed by people of faith, more important is the fact that these beliefs are *acted upon* in society.
2. The emotional aspect of religion is important and should not be ignored at the expense of stressing the social ordering and enculturation accomplished by myth and ritual. There are a set of “internal meanings *experienced* by the participants” in the religious movement, and it is not enough to write off myth as a tool of social control in the hands of elites. “Participants in a culture accept and internalize the myths in many ways other than the purely intellectual.”
3. Religion cannot adequately be explained as a hedonistic acceptance of only those ideas in myths and rituals that are enjoyable or overtly beneficial to the group. Objectivism fails to provide adequate explanation for everything lived out in a religious society.
4. Religion and the myths and rituals embodied in the religion serve as models *of* society and models *for* society, providing the group with a sense of social cohesion, as already discussed. “Religion *expresses* the unity of society, but it also helps to *create* that unity.”

⁷⁷ Doty 132-133, drawn from William J. Goode, *Religion among the Primitives*, New York: Free Press (1951). See particularly Goode pp. 222-223.

Wallace expanded the sociofunctional approach even further “by showing that it looks primarily at the various consequences of the performance (or nonperformance) of rituals in a given cultural setting, and by showing that such analysis must be balanced by attention to biological, psychological, and sociological consequences.”⁷⁸ Best known is Wallace’s use of hunting rituals to show that they fulfill a biological need (by providing food), a psychological need (by providing emotional satisfaction and a sense of community), and a sociological need (by enculturating the hunters in the group to approach the game in a particular way). At this point one may say that we have moved beyond *sociofunctionalism* to the simpler (and broader) *functionalism*.

A coherent exposition of the functionalist approach is that of Clyde Kluckhohn. He develops his argument around the following three (obviously interrelated) points:⁷⁹

1. Myths are “cultural forms defining individual behaviors which are adaptive or adjustive [sic] responses.”⁸⁰
2. Myths represent “a cultural storehouse of adjustive [sic] responses for individuals.”⁸¹
3. Myths provide “cultural solutions to problems which all human beings face.”⁸²

If Kluckhohn’s theses are correct, Doty rightly observes that “myths and rituals can be studied in terms of their functional ability to provide social solidarity, to transmit cultural values, to provide a firm standpoint in a threatening world, to reduce anxiety, to show relationships between cultural values and particular objects, to explicate origins, and so forth.”⁸³

The significance of Kluckhohn’s work is that it expands the sociofunctional approach to include other aspects, especially psychology. Interestingly, Davis would later critique the

⁷⁸ Doty 133, based on Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Religion: An Anthropological View*, New York: Random House, (1966).

⁷⁹ Doty 133, based on Clyde Kluckhohn, “Myths and Rituals: A General Theory,” *Harvard Theological Review* (1942) 35: 45-79.

⁸⁰ Kluckhohn p. 64.

⁸¹ Kluckhohn p. 65.

⁸² Kluckhohn p. 65-66.

⁸³ Doty 134.

sociofunctional approach for being too sociological in its outlook and thereby ignoring the contributions of individuals in societies.⁸⁴ He was apparently unaware of Kluckhohn's contribution. Penner went so far as to claim that functionalism is not a method and does nothing to explain the role of religion and myth in society.⁸⁵

One of the major critiques leveled against the functionalist movement is its tendency to assume social stability and its lack of ability to account for social change. Geertz points out that functionalists favored stable societies in their studies and thus "ignored the problematic tensions in societies where the mythic and symbolic structures were out of phase with the societal structures."⁸⁶

One consequence of favoring stable societies was that myths tended to be presented in a very conservative way. For example, Jarvie demonstrates that the cargo cults of southeast oceanic societies are the result of external influences and thus the functionalist ideal of myth as a model of its own society fails to grasp the complexity of the situation.⁸⁷ In other words, functionalist approaches to myth "are entirely inadequate to explicate situations where social changes are caused by outside factors."⁸⁸ Crocker, in his work on the various types of masks used in religious ceremonies, noted that sociofunctionalists have a tendency to ignore those myths and rituals that are faithfully perpetuated even after the society they are a part of deems them useless.⁸⁹

Later studies tend "to be focused more precisely upon specific societies in specific historical frameworks, passing over the earlier questions of the roles of myth and ritual in culture as a whole."⁹⁰ This is called "historical particularism," and this dissertation is indicative of this kind of particularist approach. Later studies also tend to be interdisciplinary, drawing on scholarship in

⁸⁴ Kingsley Davis, "The Myth of Functional Analysis as a Special Method of Sociology and Anthropology," *American Sociological Review* (1959) 24: 757-772.

⁸⁵ Hans H. Penner, "The Poverty of Functionalism," *History of Religions* (1971) II/I: 91-97.

⁸⁶ Doty 134. See Geertz "Religion as a Cultural System," pp. 118ff.

⁸⁷ I. C. Jarvie, *The Revolution in Anthropology*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, (1964).

⁸⁸ Doty 134.

⁸⁹ J. C. Crocker, "Ceremonial Masks," in *Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual*, Victor Turner, ed., Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, (1982) pp. 77-88.

⁹⁰ Doty 134.

fields such as psychology, anthropology, and feminist studies.⁹¹ Others showed interest in the relationship between social customs and the practice of religion.⁹² The development of this cross-pollination of approaches revealed some of the limitations of a strictly functionalist approach. For example, a strictly functionalist approach “excludes the question of the origins and early history of mythic materials that predate actual examples being studied; it excludes features that have been introduced from a second culture group; and it deals insufficiently with the fact that many myths are found throughout the world in similar form but having different social functions.”⁹³

Although the sociofunctional method is now considered dated and out of vogue, it has had a continuing impact on the study of myths and rituals. Comstock’s discussion in particular has been well received,⁹⁴ showing how myth and ritual works together to serve social functions that bind a society together through their use of rites and storytelling. His study can be considered a sophisticated attempt at combining the view of myth as a model *of* society and the view of myth as a model *for* society. Doty gives the following list of “functionalism’s lasting values” drawn from the work of Comstock:⁹⁵

1. Myth and ritual (particularly as they are realized in religious systems) give “assistance in the symbolic articulation of the social patterns and relationships themselves.”⁹⁶ By “symbolic articulation” Comstock means the way characters from various myths (whether human or deity) and their relative positions in society are acted out in the social reality of the religious

⁹¹ For examples, see the structural functionalism of A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society: Essays and Addresses*, Glencoe, IL: Free Press, (1952); the social anthropology of Fred Eggan, *The American Indian: Perspectives for the Study of Social Change*, Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, (1966); E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Position of Women in Primitive Society and Other Essays in Social Anthropology*, New York: Free Press, (1965); and the psychological-functionalist approach of Alan Dundes, “Earth-Diver: Creation of the Mythopoeic Male,” *American Anthropologist* (1962) 64/5: 1032-1051.

⁹² See Robert Forster and Orest Ranum, eds., *Ritual, religion, and the Sacred*, trans Elbourg Forster and P. M. Ranum, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, (1982), reprinted from *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 7.

⁹³ Doty 135, based on Dundes, “Earth-Diver: Creation of the Mythopoeic Male.” See further Edmund R. Leach, “Magical Hair,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (1958) 88/2: 147-164; Raymond Firth, *Symbols: Public and Private*, Symbol, Myth, and Ritual series, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, (1973).

⁹⁴ Despite his outdated use of the word ‘primitive.’ Richard Comstock, *The Study of Religion and Primitive Religions*, New York: Harper and Row (1972). Doty calls it, “Exceptionally well balanced.”

⁹⁵ Doty p. 135, based primarily on Comstock pp. 38-40.

⁹⁶ Comstock p. 38.

practitioners. For example, common in ancient Near Eastern story is the divine council. The divine council is a reflection of the earthly throne room, and is thought to be a reflection of the mythographer's reality. In other words, the reason the stories contain divine council imagery is because the myth-tellers were familiar with how a throne room operated and they assumed that deities related in similar manner. While statements about "what the ancients believed" are ultimately unverifiable, Doty is correct in noting that, "This feature of the this-worldly mirroring the other-worldly is especially prominent in Ancient Near Eastern [sic] mythologies."⁹⁷

2. Myth and ritual validates the particular society. Myth relates very human needs and desires to paradigms contained in the myths. For example, when Gilgamesh desires to make a name for himself and establish his renown, we are meant to see ourselves and our own desires for renown. In this way, myth functions as a mirror of the society but in a different way than point one above. Whereas point one emphasizes the way human relationships and societal structures mirror divine relationships, point two emphasizes justification and rationalization of human hopes and desires. Sometimes this results in enforcement of "social conformity." For example, the *theological* (not simply anthropological) view of the Egyptians that native Egyptians were inherently superior to foreigners and resident aliens, reflected in their myths, served to develop and enforce conformity and was a justification for slavery of non-natives.
3. Myths, and particularly the rituals associated with them, served a performatory function. The rituals allow for social inclusion in the group through their enactment and through the recitation of myths. As Doty notes, rituals brought about "social integration, making members known to one another, establishing social roles, and publicizing the benefits of living together harmoniously."⁹⁸ Perhaps the most famous ancient Near Eastern example of this is the annual recitation of *enūma eliš* as part of the *akītu* (New Year's) festival. By expounding the virtues of the local deity the members of the community feel they are a part of something bigger than

⁹⁷ Doty 135-136.

⁹⁸ Doty 136.

themselves, ideally creating a sense of pride and solidarity. Further, by virtue of *doing* a ritual, regardless of what exactly that ritual is, the community is more likely to stay together because in the performance of the ritual they *are* together.

4. Myths and rituals have a heuristic function. “Myths and rituals focus energy upon adaptive responses, upon ways of utilizing social and individual energies that have proved their efficacy over time.”⁹⁹ Comstock states that the hunter, who needs to be quiet in the stalking of his quarry, is likely to be more effective in the hunt (i.e. more quiet while stalking) because he recalls the myth that animal speech is only heard in absolute quiet and he has performed the rituals where he acts out that silence.¹⁰⁰ In this sense, myths “are not merely entertaining but provide a reservoir or encyclopedia of useful information”¹⁰¹ that allow the practitioner to be more effective in society. Comstock notes that when society changes such that the myths and rituals no longer effectively serve the society heuristically they are adapted through reinterpretation or the inclusion of other materials, sometimes native but often foreign.¹⁰²
5. Echoing some of the work of Kluckhohn, Comstock argues that myths and rituals help solve interpersonal and social ills. By providing an outlet for the acting out of approved interactions, rituals give a context for the enculturation of social values of interaction. Hostility (amongst group members, *not* toward outsiders) is reduced through the acting out of hostilities in an approved manner. Where I teach we have an annual student vs. staff basketball game that Comstock would call an opportunity for “ritualized combat.” This ritualized combat provides “a forum for the acting out of familial and societal conflicts within a socially safe and socially approved manner” where “conflicts are regularized and given a context and social and behavioral controls.”¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Doty 136.

¹⁰⁰ Comstock 39.

¹⁰¹ Doty 136.

¹⁰² Comstock 39.

¹⁰³ Doty 137.

Summarizing the impact of sociofunctional approaches, Doty states the following:¹⁰⁴

It may be a bit difficult for the contemporary students to appreciate the impact of the development of the disciplines of sociology and anthropology, and subsequently of sociofunctionalism, at the beginning of the twentieth century. Most of us today are so accustomed to the apparent importance of social analysis that much of the sociofunctionalist approach seems almost self-evident. But *in its historical context the movement provided an important corrective to the views that myths were only literary games or only the preoccupation of the priestly classes.*

The lasting influence of the sociofunctionalist approach ensures that we will not ignore the important social contexts of myths and rituals, their cohesive function in providing the social cement that binds societies together. In large measure, myths and rituals have importance because *they represent corporate significances, meanings that transcend individual needs, desires, and values.* They provide a mechanism for enabling holistic interaction between individuals who otherwise might remain independent and disengaged. Hence myths and rituals mean culture, mean social structure and interaction, and a sociofunctionalist view stresses the ways they bring about and sustain the social worlds of their performers.

Modern Critiques of the Sociofunctional Method

Perhaps the most significant critique leveled against sociofunctional approaches is their lack of accounting for the various ways the members of a particular society handle particular myths and rituals. Sociofunctionalism has a leveling tendency in its handling of native materials, assuming that if one does good exegesis of a myth or ritual then one has arrived at how the native society viewed said myth or ritual. In fact, there is good evidence that ancient societies are just as varied in their approach to particular myths as modern America is toward, say, the book of Genesis. Or, to give another example, there are people today who view the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as historical fact, some who take it as historical with embellishments, and some who take it as utter fantasy, with many other views somewhere between those extremes. It would be easy to look at the gospels and assume that everyone in first-century Palestine believed the story of the resurrection. Obviously, this is not the case, as attested in early Roman writings and even in the gospels themselves.

¹⁰⁴ Doty p. 137, emphasis mine.

Similarly, one should not assume that just because *enūma eliš* names Marduk as the creator God that everyone in tenth century Babylon believed that to be the case. Often with ancient Near Eastern myth we do not even know how widespread the stories were in the culture, given that we know of them from the scribal schools of the urban elite. As Doty says, “there may be great variation within a society in the ways traditional materials are applied or ignored.”¹⁰⁵

Doty proposes three phases in what he calls the “relative vitality” of a myth.¹⁰⁶ By relative vitality he means the varying degrees to which a society adheres to particular myths, moving from the “original, most powerful and dynamic context” in the early stage of myth to the “most rationalized form” of a myth in late stages of acceptance. Obviously, there is a strong diachronic emphasis in this view.

The first stage is the “primary myth.” “Here the myth addresses itself directly to the need of the culture to have answers concerning the significant questions and problems of human existence.” Doty is here emphasizing a particular *kind* or *type* of myth that is more concerned with what we might call “speculative philosophy” (my term, not Doty’s) rather than those stories that have more of an entertainment or “court jester” type of story. Myths in this stage are not “developed mythic narrative” (and thus not likely to have been recorded in the ancient Near East) because the stories are in their initial phase composition and acceptance into the community. The stories have “rough edges” and inconsistencies that will be dealt with in later phases of mythic development. This phase is “when a new cultural model and a new mode of self-understanding begin to be assimilated...the appeal of the protomyth is precisely its newly discerned ability to explain how the world got the way it is and how the parts of the experienced universe fit together.” What we call science often fits this phase, despite the fact that we do not usually think of science as mythic. Nonetheless, new *models* of scientific thought are proposed that may meet with initial skepticism but eventually stand the test of time. “Think of someone undergoing conversion to a new religious

¹⁰⁵ Doty 137-138.

¹⁰⁶ Doty 138-139.

or political theory at the point where the person has just begun to think it explains most of human history, and that will illustrate what I mean by primary myth.” Some of the inconsistency or contradiction can come not from the myth itself but from the new practitioner having not yet reconciled the myth with other beliefs.

Doty calls his second phase “implicit myth.” It is in this stage of development that the myth gains widespread acceptance. As the myth becomes more and more accepted in the society it gains the reputation of *orthodoxy* and will eventually be used as a means of antagonistically driving out competing worldviews. The new myth may (and generally does) use elements of competing worldviews, but it recasts them in such a way as to fit with the new myth in an internally consistent way. Part of making the mythic elements drawn from various sources internally consistent is smoothing out inconsistencies or contradictions present in the first phase. “At this stage of development, the myth is so much a part of the culture that its terms seem to be to the only ‘natural’ way of conceiving the world.” This inherently “natural” feel that the myth has for its adherents is what led Moore to refer to this phase as the “subliminal phase of myth.”¹⁰⁷ The myth has become self-evidently true and it is no longer questioned or modified by practitioners.

The third phase is called “rationalized myth” and occurs when the myth “no longer seems to have such compelling wholeness.” At this stage there are new and competing myths threatening the old myth’s view of reality and the old myth is no longer considered (at least by many) self-evidently true. Adherents to the old myth often feel the need to engage in apologetics to defend it from the new myths. An obvious example of this dynamic is the Genesis creation narrative, long held to be self-evidently and referentially true in Western (particularly Christian) society, and the challenge posed to its cosmological hegemony by theories of evolution.

Often in this third phase there is a utilization of interpretations of the myth that rewrite the myth in terms consistent with newly developed worldviews. This is done in an effort to remove

¹⁰⁷ Richard E. More, *Myth America 2001*, Philadelphia: Fortress, (1972).

contradiction. However, whereas the second phase sees the removal of *internal* contradiction, the third phase is concerned with the removal of external contradiction. Moore claims that when members of the group start to say things like, “What the myth really means is...” then they are well into the rationalizing stage.¹⁰⁸ “At this stage, persons may well follow unique private interpretations of a foundational myth even though giving lip service to the society’s ‘official’ interpretations.”¹⁰⁹

Although Doty speaks of these phases in terms of development, he is careful to note (*contra* early comparativists such as Tylor) that the stages are not necessarily progressive and that it is a mistake to assume evolutionary development from the primitive to the sophisticated. “The total patternings [sic] must be perceived as dynamically interacting rather than as normalized once and for all.”¹¹⁰

Similarly (but note the evolutionary element), Claude Lévi-Strauss comments:

A mythic system can only be grasped in a process of becoming; not as something inert and stable but in a process of perpetual transformation. This would mean that there are always several kinds of myths simultaneously present in the system, some of them primary (in respect of the moment at which the observation is made) and some of them derivative. And while some kinds are present in their entirety at certain points, elsewhere they can be detected only in fragmentary form. Where evolution has gone furthest, the elements set free by the decomposition of the old myths have already been incorporated into new combinations.¹¹¹

While Doty’s phases of relative vitality are perhaps helpful in stimulating further thought on myth, I do not find them particularly compelling for ancient Near Eastern myth. His first phase is one of prehistory from an ancient Near Eastern context, and therefore entirely speculative. While most maintain a developmental, *oral* phase for ancient Near Eastern myth, it is acknowledged that this phase is unrecoverable and therefore not worth speculation.¹¹² Mesopotamian scribes do not

¹⁰⁸ Moore, *Myth America 2001*, p. 37.

¹⁰⁹ Doty 139.

¹¹⁰ Doty 140.

¹¹¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, translated by John Weightman and Doreen Weightman, Introduction to a Science of Mythography 2, New York: Harper and Row, (1973), p. 354.

¹¹² The obvious exception here is biblical scholars, who are particularly fond of hypothetical speculation devoid of data,

seem to be nearly as concerned with smoothing out the “rough edges and inconsistencies” as Doty claims, and it is very difficult to claim that the myths were believed when we have no substantial evidence beyond the myths themselves. The only exception I am currently aware of is the use of *Huwawa* in the cult of southern Mesopotamia, but this hardly counts as firm evidence for what the culture as a whole thought or believed. In the end we simply cannot say with confidence whether the scribes themselves believed the stories they were copying. For example, did the scribes *believe* that Gilgamesh journeyed into the Zagros and confronted *Huwawa*, or is the story merely a vehicle for speculating on the search for renown? In other words, did the scribes take the stories as *referentially true*? In my opinion, we cannot answer this question without further evidence.

The implications for this when it comes to the Hebrew bible and modern faith practitioners is obviously profound. Today there are people of faith (whether Christian, Jewish, or Islamic) who hold that the story of the flood recorded in Genesis 6-9 is referentially true. Likewise, there are people of faith (again whether Christian, Jewish, or Islamic) who take the flood as a story meant to communicate theological truth without ever intending to record referential, historical fact.

Another problem for Doty’s phases, particularly for ancient Near Eastern materials, is that Doty places canonization of the materials *after* the third, rationalizing, phase. Yet in the ancient Near East there is a canonizing of the stories coincident with the widespread acceptance of the

much to the consternation of assyriologists. By way of anecdote, at the 2007 meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in San Diego there was a special session on Karel van der Toorn’s book *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press). The session included a panel of invited scholars responding to van der Toorn’s work. One of the panelists was Nieck Veldhuis, an accomplished assyriologist specializing in Mesopotamian scribal training and practices. He was invited because van der Toorn based some of his comparative work on Mesopotamian scribal practices, and thus Veldhuis was an obvious choice for comment. At the session, Veldhuis admitted that van der Toorn’s was the first book he had ever read on biblical studies. In the Q & A part of the session, the bible scholars were naturally spending much of their discussion on the oral phase of the composition of the Hebrew bible and how that impacted the final form of the text. Finally, Veldhuis had had enough and he stood up and, in a rather disgruntled tone, said, “All this talk about oral tradition is meaningless to me.” His point was that *there is no evidence*, and therefore we should drop the discussion. This created a furor in the room, and I think I may have been the only one who agreed with Veldhuis. In biblical studies, all we have for data is the final form of the text; everything else in terms of its composition is hypothetical. In Assyriology, *we have the actual sources*. For example, there is a final form of the Assurnasurpal chronicle and we can talk about the redactional process because we have the sources used to compose the final form. When a scholar attempts to propose a hypothetical reconstruction of proposed sources in assyriological circles, the reaction is usually very negative. Such was the case at the 2008 meeting of the American Oriental Society where Tzvi Abusch proposed sources for an incantation text. To say the response in the room was a bit icy is perhaps an understatement. There is a healthy skepticism amongst assyriologists about going beyond the data.

stories (at least from a scribal perspective), Doty's second or "implicit" phase.

Modern Continental functionalism is best represented by Hans Blumenberg (1920-1996) and Manfred Frank (b. 1945), two German scholars who have been very influential in Europe. Blumenberg's field is philosophical hermeneutics and Frank's is philosophy, although Frank refers to his work as *Literaturwissenschaft*. Both Blumenberg and Frank consider myth to be a 'problem' in the modern age.

Although neither Blumenberg nor Frank, as far as I am aware, ever referred to themselves as functionalists, they were both concerned with the function myth has in post-Enlightenment cultures. The reason myth is addressed as a 'problem' is that myth ought to have vanished in truly rationalistic, post-Enlightenment society.

Blumenberg's main contribution to the study of myth is to explore relationship between myth and science. Wallace notes that Blumenberg seeks to overcome the dichotomy between myth and science "by showing that scientific rationality and ongoing "work" on our inherited myths are not only not incompatible but are both indispensable aspects of the comprehensive effort that makes human existence possible."¹¹³ In this he is arguing against both the rationalistic views of myth and the romantic views of myth—views epitomized by Tylor on the one hand and Campbell on the other. Following Campbell, he rejects the idea that myth is merely the primitive precursor to science, but *contra* Campbell he argues that myth is not the eternal wisdom of the ancients. Segal notes that Blumenberg "maintains that the survival of myth alongside science proves that myth has *never* served the same function as science."¹¹⁴

Blumenberg speculated that myth "came about through the combination of leaving the shrinking forest for the savanna and settling in caves" in order to obtain food.¹¹⁵ How one can be convinced that the above ever happened, let alone that it was the cause for the creation of myth, and

¹¹³ Robert M. Wallace in his introduction to his translation of Blumenberg's *Arbeit am Mythos*, p. viii.

¹¹⁴ Segal 2004: 24.

¹¹⁵ Blumenberg 1985: 4.

that myth did not exist before “leaving the shrinking forest,” is beyond me. In fact, I consider his view an ironic, “mythogonic” myth on the topic of myth, in that he is philosophically speculating on origins, in this case on the origin of myth.

Contexts of Myths from a Functional Perspective

This literature review concludes with perhaps the two most influential mythographers of the twentieth century: Joseph Campbell and Mircea Eliada. All subsequent work on myth has had to reckon with these towering figures. I place them together at the end of this review in order to specifically address the issue of the contexts of myths from a functional perspective, i.e., the function of myths within mythological systems.

Campbell

Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) was an American born mythographer best known for his popular *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* which traces what he calls the 'monomyth,' otherwise known as 'the hero's journey.' He taught for many years at Sarah Lawrence College despite having never earned the Ph.D.

Campbell's popularity is sometimes attributed to his romantic approach to myth.¹¹⁶ He vehemently counters Tylor's view of myth as primitive and needing to be replaced with science. As Segal aptly states, “Where for Tylor myth is an outdated, merely primitive attempt to do what today science does so much better, for Campbell myth is an indispensable source of eternal wisdom about the nature of both human beings and ultimate reality.”¹¹⁷ Campbell's love of his subject matter is immediately apparent in his writings, and his work on the ‘hero's journey’ has caught the imagination of theorists and film-makers alike.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ See, for example, Segal 1999: chapter IX.

¹¹⁷ Segal 1999: 5.

¹¹⁸ Steven Spielberg, maker of the wildly popular *Star Wars* movies, credits Campbell with the inspiration for the patterning of the stories.

Campbell provides four functions that myths serve within larger mythological systems: the mystical, the cosmological, the sociological, and the psychological.¹¹⁹ This is a functional approach, but rather than examining the function of the myth in its society we are here instead examining the function of the myth within its own mythological system.

The first, mystical, Campbell describes as dealing with “the reconciliation of consciousness with the preconditions of its own existence” and “redeeming human consciousness from its sense of guilt in life.” Campbell believed that the foundational myths of a society would “waken and maintain in the individual a sense of awe and gratitude in relation to the mystery dimension of the universe” and would provide a sense of ontological mystery as the individual wrestles with his “sense of awe before the mystery of being.” In this first category Campbell emphasized cosmogonies, in which things did not come to be the way they are by accidents of chance but rather through the workings of the supra-human, whether deity or some numinous cosmic force.¹²⁰

Campbell’s second function of myth is the cosmological. He defines cosmology as those stories that formulate and render an image of the universe that is in step with the science of the time. Cosmologies often reinforce the mysterious aspects of the universe as they seek to create a sense of awe before the presence of a mystery and the mystery of a presence. However, cosmologies that lost touch with modern science were anathema to Campbell:

If, in a period like our own, of the greatest religious fervor and quest, you would wonder why the churches are losing their congregations, one large part of the answer surely is right here. They are inviting their flocks to enter and to find peace in a browsing-ground that never was, never will be, and in any case is surely not that of any corner of the world today. Such a mythological offering is a sure pill for at least a mild schizophrenia.¹²¹

Campbell is often stereotyped as being anti-religion, but as this quote shows he was not against

¹¹⁹ See, for example, Joseph Campbell, *Oriental Mythology*, Masks of God 2, New York: Viking Press, (1962); *Occidental Mythology*, Masks of God 3, New York: Viking Press, (1964); “Mythological Themes in Creative Literature and Art,” in Campbell, ed., *Myths, Dreams, and Religion*, New York: Dutton, (1970); and *Myths to Live By*, New York: Viking Press, (1972).

¹²⁰ It is interesting to note here that the modern, western idea of naturalistic origins through indeterminate chance is startlingly unusual in the history of myth.

¹²¹ Campbell 1972: 215.

religion so much as religion's inability to keep pace with modern science. Doty reflects this understanding (while perpetuating the borrowing fallacy): "Those who have held tenaciously to the Genesis stories, for instance, have not even been interested in understanding the rich store of Babylonian, Assyrian, Phoenician, and other mythologies from which the Israelite material clearly were derived."¹²²

Campbell's third function of myth is the sociological. Myth serves to support the prevailing social order while simultaneously integrating individuals into the group. In this, Campbell strikes a familiar chord: As noted earlier, Durkheim considered this sociological function of myth to be its main function.

Last is Campbell's psychological function of myth. Myth shapes individuals to the norms and expectations of the social group, but unlike the sociological function, the psychological function emphasizes the way myths "relate the inner, personal, private human being to the outer, impersonal, public roles that are offered in a particular culture."¹²³ Campbell's later works emphasize the psychological role to the point of referring to it as the pedagogical value of myths.

Critiques of Campbell center around three main issues: his nebulous use of the word 'myth,' his use of the very modernist methods he criticizes, and his tendency to reductionism. As Gulick notes, "it is difficult to know just what he [Campbell] is talking about when he refer to myth, so diffuse is his usage, so varied are his claims. He loosely holds his understanding of mythology together through his oft-repeated claim that traditional mythology has functions relating to four realms of being [discussed above]. The mystical and the psychological functions, rooted in human ontology and biology, have remained relatively constant through the ages and across cultures. Thus his claims about the consistent, archetypal quality of myths tend to refer to the mystical and psychological functions, while his comments about the protean, fluid nature of myths tend to refer to the cosmological and sociological functions. Because his notions of the myth are so fluid,

¹²² Doty 143.

¹²³ Doty 144.

internal contradictions crop up.¹²⁴

Manganaro is particularly critical of Campbell's use of modernist methods such as reductionism, arbitrary use of details that have been removed from their context, evolutionary assumptions, and "ethnocentric valorization of Western power mechanisms."¹²⁵ For example, Campbell was able to very helpfully reduce Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* to a mere skeleton, but that same reductionism was then applied to comparative mythology, resulting in skeletons of myth removed from their context and presented as universal.¹²⁶ Manganaro goes on to state that "Campbell's 'synthetic' master-myth ignores cultural holism in the colossal authorial effort of fitting together a piecework universalism."¹²⁷

Eliade

Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) was born in Romania, educated at the University of Bucharest and the University of Calcutta where he wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on Yoga techniques, and taught at the University of Chicago. His most influential works in the field of mythography include *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, *Myth and Reality*, *The Sacred and the Profane*, and *The Forge and the Crucible*.

Like Tylor, Eliade took myth as explanatorily functional, serving to explain origins and the ways of deities. "Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the 'beginnings.' In other words, myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality—an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior, an

¹²⁴ Gulick 1990: 35. Note also the similar comments of Doty in "Joseph Campbell's *Myth and/or Religion*," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 79/3-4: 421-45.

¹²⁵ Manganaro 1992: 175.

¹²⁶ Manganaro 1992: 156.

¹²⁷ Manganaro 1992: 166.

institution.”¹²⁸ While restricting sacred history of primordial times and beginnings is normally referred to as ‘cosmology,’ note the emphasis on etiologies. Eliade goes a step further than Tylor and reflects the work of Durkheim when he says myths “narrate not only the origin of the World, of animals, of plants, and of man, but also all the primordial events in consequence of which man became what he is today—mortal, sexed, organized in a society, obliged to work in order to live, and working in accordance with certain rules.”¹²⁹ In other words, Eliade views myth as explanatory of the natural world, *ala* Tylor, and of society, *ala* Durkheim.

Where Eliade significantly differs from Tylor is the relationship between myth and science. As noted above, Tylor believed that science rightfully replaces myth in the modern world and he fully expected myth to cease to exist in the wake of science. Eliade, on the other hand, believed myth served functions other than explaining nature, namely the justification and regeneration of certain phenomena. Therefore, myth can coexist with science in the modern world because myth has functions science does not.

Eliade also argued for an eternity of myth, whereby myth should and will continue to be viable to modern man. “A whole volume could well be written on the myths of modern man, on the mythologies camouflaged in the plays that he enjoys, in the books that he reads. The cinema, that ‘dream factory,’ takes over and employs countless mythical motifs—the fight between hero and monster, initiatory combats and ordeals, paradigmatic figures and images (the maiden, the hero, the paradisaic [sic] landscape, hell, and so on). Even reading includes a mythological function because, through reading, the modern man succeeds in obtaining an ‘escape from time’ comparable to the ‘emergence from time’ effected by myths. Whether modern man ‘kills’ time with a detective story or enters such a foreign temporal universe as is represented by any novel, reading projects him out of his personal duration and incorporates him into other rhythms, makes him live in another

¹²⁸ Eliade 1963: 5-6.

¹²⁹ Eliade 1963: 11.

‘history.’”¹³⁰

As can be seen in his comments on the cinema, Eliade investigated non-religious as well as religious myths. He considered myth to be any story (contra Levi-Strauss) whose hero does something so extraordinary as to be considered beyond human ability.

Unlike Bultmann and Jonas, he was concerned with the origins of myths and with myths of origins. He believed that myth “tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality--an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior, an institution.”¹³¹

However, beyond mere explanations of origins or of natural phenomena, Eliade believed myth regenerates. “But since ritual recitation of the cosmogonic myth implies reactualization of that primordial event, it follows that he for whom it is recited is magically projected in illo tempore, into the 'beginning of the World'; he becomes contemporary with the cosmogony... What is involved is, in short, a return to the original time, the therapeutic purpose of which is to begin life once again, a symbolic rebirth.”¹³² In short, science explains, myth regenerates. Science and myth have different functions, which is why they coexist in the modern world.

¹³⁰ Eliade 1968: 82. For a critique of Eliade’s view of the eternality of myth, see Segal 1999: 23-4.

¹³¹ Eliade 1963: 5-6.

¹³² Eliade 1968: 82.

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Chapter 2. ‘Speculative Philosophy’ as One Function of ANE Myth

Defining Myth

The Difficulty of Defining Myth

Defining myth is a notoriously messy task.¹³³ In fact, Rogerson claimed that there is such diversity of opinion about what constitutes a myth that it is impossible to offer a single definition.¹³⁴ I make no effort to propose a new definition here. Instead I will review some of the more prominent definitions and then propose a *function* of myth rather than a definition. The purpose of looking at the definitions and statements about myth is to attempt to find some minimal common ground on what myth is, a task opposite to Doty's attempt at an all inclusive definition. It is hoped that enough evidence will be marshaled to demonstrate the viability of the idea that myth, whatever it may be, functions as a way to express speculative thought via analogy.

A Sampling of Proposed Definitions

Chapter one offered a review of mythographic literature and it should be obvious from that review that there is much diversity of opinion on what exactly constitutes myth. Also, ideas of myth changed over time. I will not repeat information from chapter one here, but I will bring the discussion up to date by looking at a couple of influential ideas currently held.

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See Lauri Honko, *The Problem of Defining Myth*, Helsinki: Finnish Society for the Study of Comparative Religion, 1972.

¹³⁴ Rogerson 1978: 13.

A leading mythographer today is Robert Segal, although his interests have largely turned to comparative religions. He is currently Chair in Religious Studies at the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy at King's College, University of Aberdeen. Although Segal has written extensively on the relationship between myth and science and by all accounts is one of the leading myth theorists working today, he has not been interested in pinning down a precise definition of myth. He believes that myth and the various theories of myth are difficult to compare, primarily because he views myth as an applied subject, i.e., myth is an application and therefore a subset of some larger topic. "Theories of myth are always theories of something broader that is applied to the case of myth. To compare theories of myth is ineluctably to compare theories of the broader categories, themselves as varied as the physical world, the mind, society, culture, literature, and religion."¹³⁵ He goes on to say that the comparison of myth theories is further complicated by the fact that it is often an interdisciplinary study. For example, to compare the theories of Jung and Malinowski is to compare the fields of psychology and anthropology, which is no easy task. Each field brings not only its own perspective, but also an entire vocabulary and history of thought. This should not be seen as a weakness in the study of myth—it is a strength—only a complicating factor in comparative work. Although he does not define myth, *per se*, he does consistently point to its narrative nature as a necessary component of what is called 'myth.'

The most recent lengthy discussion of the complexities and pitfalls of attempting to define myth of which I am aware is Doty's *Mythography* pp. 31-87 where he spends two full chapters developing and explaining his definition. His aim is to develop a (self-described) complicated definition that "provides a step toward an inclusive matrix for understanding many types of myths, myths that function differently within distinct social settings yet share a sufficient number of common features among those of the definition to be recognizable as 'myth.'"¹³⁶ His concern for an inclusive definition stems from his desire to propose "an alternative to single-feature, monomythic

¹³⁵ Segal 1999: 1.

¹³⁶ Doty 2000: 33.

definitions.”¹³⁷ This inclusivity forces Doty to offer what has to be the longest definition of myth:

A mythological corpus consists of a usually complex network of myths that are culturally important, imaginal stories, conveying by means of metaphoric and symbolic diction, graphic imagery, and emotional conviction and participation the primal, foundational accounts of aspects of the real, experienced world and humankind's roles and relative statuses within it. Mythologies may convey the political and moral values of a culture and provide systems of interpreting individual experience within a universal perspective, which may include the intervention of suprahuman entities as well as aspects of the natural and cultural orders. Myths may be enacted or reflected in rituals, ceremonies, and dramas, and they may provide materials for secondary elaboration, the constituent mythemes (mythic units) having become merely images or reference points for a subsequent story, such as a folktale, historical legend, novella, or prophecy.

Assyriologists typically do not attempt to define myth. Henri Frankfort (1897-1954) was an Egyptologist at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago for much of his career, having led digs at El-Amarna and Abydos prior to coming to the Oriental Institute and leading digs in Iraq during his tenure at Chicago. Because he is considered an 'insider' by assyriologists and egyptologists, his work on myth is particularly influential in those circles. However, his mythographic work is largely unrecognized in mythographic circles—he is not even mentioned in Doty's monstrous review of mythographic literature¹³⁸—and thus I did not include him in my review of mythographic literature. His 1939 monograph *Cylinder Seals: A Documentary Essay on the Art and Religion of the Ancient Near East* is generally considered his best work in the field,¹³⁹ but his two works *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (1946; an edited volume of which he penned the first and last chapters) and *Kingship and the Gods* (1948) have provided the most fodder for studies relevant to the topic of myth.¹⁴⁰

Particularly influential among Bible scholars is Frankfort's 1946 article “Myth and Reality.”¹⁴¹ He is careful to distinguish what he calls 'critical thinking' from 'mythopoeic thinking' (i.e., myth making). The distinction is a good one and similar to the distinction Douglas makes (see

¹³⁷ Doty 2000: 30.

¹³⁸ Doty 2000.

¹³⁹ See the remarks of Chavalas in “Review of *Ritual and Politics in Ancient Mesopotamia*,” *JAOS* 126 (2006): 628-9.

¹⁴⁰ See below for further comments in this regard, particularly the critiques offered by Rochberg.

¹⁴¹ Pp 11-36 in *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*, University of Chicago Press.

below). However, the problem is his evolutionary view of thought, claiming that “the Greeks evolved critical from mythopoeic thought.”¹⁴² As will be demonstrated below, this evolutionary view has (for good reason) fallen out of favor. Another major flaw of Frankfort's, which I hope to redress in this chapter, is looking exclusively at myth in an effort to discern how the ancients thought. Because the myths were the first to be translated and made widely available they have maintained a certain prominence in discussions of 'ancient thought' that has thrown the discussion out of balance. The work of Francesca Rochberg has gone a long way in balancing the discussion.¹⁴³

As for a definition of myth, Frankfort offers the following:¹⁴⁴

Myth is a form of poetry which transcends poetry in that it proclaims a truth; a form of reasoning which transcends reasoning in that it wants to bring about the truth it proclaims; a form of action, of ritual behaviour, which does not find its fulfilment in the act but must proclaim and elaborate a poetic form of truth.

A few bible scholars have offered definitions of myth. However, I make no effort to provide an exhaustive list of those definitions. Rather, I offer a few as representative of the lack of consensus in the field.

Bultmann held that a myth was a “story involving a pre-scientific world-view.”¹⁴⁵ The idea that myth represents pre-science, so popular among Tylor and his followers, was successfully debunked by Eliade. However, Enns continues to offer this line of reasoning when he defines myth as “an ancient, premodern, prescientific way of addressing questions of ultimate origins and meaning in the form of stories.”¹⁴⁶

Gaster expressed a typical euhemeristic view of myth when he stated that “myth is a story of

¹⁴² Frankfort 1946: 8.

¹⁴³ In particular see *The Heavenly Writing* which is discussed below in the section labeled 'Divination as Rational-Instrumental Thought.'

¹⁴⁴ Frankfort 1946: 16.

¹⁴⁵ Bultmann 1953: 1.

¹⁴⁶ Enns 2005: 40, 50. Ironically, Enns contends that his definition is a “generous way of defining myth” (p. 40).

the gods in which results of natural causes are accounted for supernaturally.”¹⁴⁷ Oden, often quoted by bible scholars because he wrote in the influential *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, wrote that in order for something to be myth it must be in story form, show signs of “traditional transmission in a communal setting,” and have supernatural beings as characters.¹⁴⁸

In a recent monograph, John Oswalt defines myth as “a form of expression, whether literary or oral, whereby the continuities among the human, natural, and divine realms are expressed and actualized. By reinforcing these continuities, it seeks to ensure the orderly functioning of both nature and human society.”¹⁴⁹ He does not cite the work of mythographers in his chapter on “The Bible and Myth: A Problem of Definition” but instead relies on the work of fellow bible scholars. The second sentence of his definition expresses a proposed function of myth, even though he elsewhere critiques having function as part of a definition. One gets the impression that Oswalt has constructed a straw man with his definition (his emphasis throughout is the issue of 'continuity') so that by knocking it down he can prove the uniqueness of the bible.

André LaCocque has recently written a wonderful little book entitled *The Captivity of Innocence: Babel and the Yahwist*.¹⁵⁰ LaCocque defines myth as follows: “In order for a narrative to be mythic, at least four conditions need be fulfilled. First, it has to send us back to a primeval time. Second, myth shows a divine intervention in human affairs. Third and most important, the narrative must be highly symbolic; in fact it must serve as paradigm in the history of humankind. Fourth, myth is etiological.”¹⁵¹ He is not clear on how he develops his definition, although he seems to be primarily influenced by his friend Paul Ricoeur in particular and the psychoanalytic school of myth studies in general. In fact, he offers what he calls a “psychological approach to Genesis 11:1-9.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Gaster 1962: 481.

¹⁴⁸ Oden 1995: 949.

¹⁴⁹ Oswalt 2009: 45-6.

¹⁵⁰ See my forthcoming review in *RBL*.

¹⁵¹ LaCocque 2010: 69.

¹⁵² The title of the fourth chapter of the book is “A Psychological Approach to Genesis 11:1-9—Psychological Biblical

Christopher Woods, citing the work of Givón and Rosch, among others, gives an excellent description of the difficulty of ascribing definitions, even to something as common as 'bird.'¹⁵³

As Rosch's experiments have shown, cognitively, the category is based on the co-occurrence of a number of properties or parameters: birds have feathers, birds have wings, and birds can fly. Central or stereotypical members of the category, such as robins and sparrows, have all of these properties. In fact, in Rosch's experiments with North American students, *robin* was the most typical member of the bird category. But then there are more distant peripheral members, which, although classified as birds, are cognitively less bird-like since they do not satisfy all of these properties, and so diverge from the prototype. Ostriches have wings and feathers, but cannot fly; penguins, further removed still, cannot fly and can hardly be considered to have feathers in the sense that robins and sparrows do.... No one parameter, no matter how seemingly central to the category as a whole, can itself define the category. This is the critical difference between prototype categories, which are inherently graded, and discrete Aristotelian categories.

Woods goes on to give flight as an example of a prototypical category that cannot in and of itself define 'bird.' Some birds, such as ostriches and penguins, cannot fly and some things that can fly are not birds.

The notion of a prototype category is important to my description of the function of myth. Specifically, I posit 'speculative philosophy via analogy' as a prototypical category of myth without *defining* myth.

While I am positing *a* function of myth, even a prototypical function, it is important to note that I am not positing *the* function of myth. Myths can be polyfunctional, as in the Gilgamesh and Huwawa example. The story served the function of speculative philosophy via analogy in its description of a search for a name, the perceived futility of existence as expressed in Gilgamesh's lament over the common fate of all humanity, the numinous commonality of such diverse entities as nature and prisons, etc. But it also functioned as an etiology for the numinous in nature and as a satire of the economic practices of the Ur III dynasty.

Since I am positing 'speculative philosophy via analogy' as a prototypical function of myth, I

Criticism" (pp. 89-126). I am not offering a fuller review of his work here because I am primarily interacting with functional rather than psychological views of myth.

¹⁵³ See Woods 2008: 53-4 and the literature cited there.

turn now to a description of analogical thought in ancient Near Eastern myth, particularly as it contrasts rational-instrumental thought.

How Analogical Reasoning Differs from Rational-Instrumental

One of the contentions of this dissertation is that myth needs to be read analogically rather than discursively. The mythic literature of the ancient Near East “belongs to a now obsolete and completely foreign order of thought,”¹⁵⁴ to use Douglas's phrase. While I think she overstates the case, there is a difference between analogical and rational-instrumental reasoning (to use Douglas's terms) and the modern proclivity is for rational-instrumental. In the section that follows I will be reviewing the work of Douglas, followed by Averbeck, then summarizing implications for ancient Near Eastern myth in general and Genesis 1-11 in particular. Although Douglas has changed some of her views on Leviticus over the years, her observations on “Two Styles of Thought” seem to have stood the test of the last ten years.

Douglas bases much of her work on the sinologists Ames, Graham and Hall who, in their introductions to Confucius' social and political theory, introduce a distinction between discursive and what they call aesthetic or analogical thinking.¹⁵⁵

[Ames, Graham and Hall] emphasize the difference between the aesthetic ordering of the Han cosmology and the rational ordering which we [the West] have inherited from Aristotelian logic. Our logic is based on part-whole relations, the theory of types, causal implications and logical entailments. It organizes experience in theoretical terms. Rational construction based upon it always goes in a direction away from the concrete particular towards the universal.... Most important of all, the rational ordering which we employ presupposes a unique structure or pattern, complete, comprehensive, and closed.¹⁵⁶

Graham, Hall and Ames, and Douglas all note the attack on this rational ordering leveled by critics of Enlightenment philosophy. Most notorious among those attacks is Derrida, but also include Ryle and Kuhn, among others.

¹⁵⁴ Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*. Oxford, 1999, p. 15. Douglas is referring to Leviticus in the line quoted.

¹⁵⁵ A. C. Graham, *Disputes of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China*. Open Court, 1999. D. Hall and R. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*. SUNY, 1987. D. Hall and R. Ames, *Anticipating China*. SUNY, 1995.

¹⁵⁶ Douglas 1999: 15.

Contra 'rational ordering,' sinologists introduced what they variously call 'correlative,' 'aesthetic,' or 'analogical' ordering. Whereas rational ordering functions on dialectical principles, uses linear and hierarchical models, and is primarily expressed via discursive literary style, analogical ordering functions on analogical associations “of concrete experienceable items.”¹⁵⁷ First, an item, event, idea or concept is explained not by discursive build up from the concrete to the abstract but by placing it “within a scheme organized in terms of analogical relations among the items selected for the scheme.”¹⁵⁸ Second, meaningful reflection is sought through the suggestiveness of the associations. Third, the associations are what drives meaning, rather than cause-and-effect relationships. For example, “Han dynasty cosmologists used the five directions, North, East, South, West, and Centre, five phases (water, fire, wood, metal, earth), five smells, five sounds, five tastes, etc. to build up a correlative cosmos.”¹⁵⁹ Meaning in Han cosmology is not derived from cause-and-effect (first there was a big bang, then a cooling off period, etc.) but from the relationships within and without the groupings of fives.

Contained in the work of Douglas is a critique of the evolutionary approach to language, myth, and morals developed by Max Müller and championed by Ernst Cassirer. Claiming that bible interpretation is dominated by the evolutionary approach, she points to Cassirer's dependence on the work of Codrington, Lévy Bruhl, and Malinowski¹⁶⁰ in developing a theory of two kinds of thought and their order of appearance in human history. Cassirer took a philosophical approach to myth, and Douglas says, “We have some cause now to regret the strong antiquarian bent that biblical studies received from Cassirer.”¹⁶¹ Her regret stems from the fact that historical priority became the prime issue in biblical scholarship.

If Douglas sees two main styles of thought (analogical and rational-instrumental) and Cassirer identified two kinds of thought (that correspond to analogical and rational-instrumental),

¹⁵⁷ Hall and Ames 1995: 124; quoted Douglas 1999: 16.

¹⁵⁸ Hall and Ames 1995: 125.

¹⁵⁹ Douglas 1999: 16.

¹⁶⁰ See the reviews of these theorists in Chapter One.

¹⁶¹ Douglas 1999: 17.

then why is Douglas so critical of Cassirer and his influence on biblical studies? The answer stems specifically from the evolutionary belief in the antiquity of myth and the advancement towards science.¹⁶² Douglas rightly reacts against the idea that, “Human culture taken as a whole may be described as the process of man's progressive self-liberation” from mythology and religion to rationalist agnosticism and naturalistic science.¹⁶³ Here we see the influence of Evans-Pritchard (her teacher) on Douglas. As noted in Chapter One, Evans-Pritchard believed that ancients, as people coming from alien traditions and societies, were just as logical as moderns, regardless of their differences in religious beliefs.

However, for Cassirer (and others; see Chapter One) the study of myth was laden with prejudice and ethnocentrism. Since myth and religion were primitive they were inferior to modern science. Myth was assumed to be irrational, whereas science represented the triumph of rationalism. Cassirer “assumed, reasonably, that the rational-instrumental mode of thought as we know it was the result of slowly evolved cognitive experience, and that mythical thought was primitive.”¹⁶⁴ He appreciated the beauty and imagination of myth, but he saw it as traditional thought that “has no means of understanding, explaining and interpreting the present form of human life than to reduce it to a remote past.”¹⁶⁵ He thought myth, in its exposition of traditional thought, was immune to critique because to call it into question would be a sacrilege. Therefore, myth represents the beliefs of primitive religion, no matter how wonderfully or beautifully expressed, that by their immunity to critique represent the antithesis to freedom of individual thought. He then postulated that modern rational science offers an openness to progress via questioning. Douglas believes this call to freedom of individual thought and large scale questioning of long held beliefs is a large part of the popularity of Cassirer's approach to myth.

Douglas's primary thesis in her exposition of the thought of Cassirer is that “writing in a

¹⁶² For a critique of the myth/science dichotomy, see Chapter One.

¹⁶³ Douglas 1997: 17. Quote is from Cassirer 1944: 224.

¹⁶⁴ Douglas 1997: 17.

¹⁶⁵ Cassirer 1944: 225.

mytho-poetic style does not give internal evidence of a thought that is hidebound by ancient tradition, for myths change all the time.”¹⁶⁶ She posits that myth *may* represent stable, long held and unquestioned beliefs, but the myths are the product of the long held beliefs, not the cause. She maintained it was wrong was to pit the past against the present, and mythology against reason. Rather than myth being opposed to reason, it represents a different *style* of thought. Rather than *argument* myth relies on *analogy*.

Quoting Langer, Douglas points to two kinds of thought which Langer called “presentational” and “discursive.” Langer’s “presentational” is Douglas’s “analogical,” and Langer’s “discursive” is Douglas’s “rational-instrumental.”

'Discursive' is our idea of rational discourse, it develops propositions by the logic of non-contradiction. 'Presentational' discourse presents analogies which are abstract projections lifted from one context to another.¹⁶⁷

Langer wrote about art and how it is perceived by moderns.

When Langer wrote about perception as not a passive seeing but an organizing activity, following Immanuel Kant, she intended to offer a contribution to the philosophy of art rather than to the conversation going on in the West about two kinds of thinking, one primitive and one modern. In effect what she wrote should have been received as a blow against the prevailing current evolutionism. There is nothing primitive about art; it is not less logical than discursive reasoning, it is the logic of analogy, used all the time in the highest civilizations. She accepted or took for granted the evolutionary model which, in effect, she dismantled. Whereas philosophers assumed analogic discourse to be anti-logical, Suzanne Langer took a step towards removing that reproach. She succeeded in analysing the two genuinely distinctive modes of thought, showing both the discursive and the presentational to be equally legitimate forms of logic.... Neither mode is more primitive or more evolved than the other, *each serves different purposes*, the former [discursive] isolates elements, it deconstructs, while the latter [presentational or analogical] projects whole patterns.¹⁶⁸

In my opinion there are two important points here. First, the evolutionary model that supports the primitive/modern dichotomy claiming the superiority of rational-instrumental over

¹⁶⁶ Douglas 1997: 18.

¹⁶⁷ Douglas 1997: 19.

¹⁶⁸ Douglas 1997: 19-20; emphasis mine.

analogical thought has been undermined on several fronts. Second, to read analogical texts rational-instrumentally is to misinterpret them.

The implication for Genesis 1-11 becomes clear:

Does Genesis 1-11 contain elements of mytho-poetic, analogical reasoning? Definitely, Yes.

Is Genesis 1-11 written in the style of discursive logical reasoning? Definitely, No.

Can a work that reasons in the one way be read as if it had been written in the other way? It can, but to do so is certainly to misread.¹⁶⁹

Douglas claims the lesson of analogical as opposed to rational-instrumental thinking has not been accepted, despite the work of Langer. Citing work of the early twentieth century she notes that the tendency was to reject analogical as inferior to Aristotelian discursive logic, even if the evolutionary concerns were abandoned. The important point here is that discursive logic was the domain of science and analogical thought was supposedly only the domain of myth and religion. Even if it was accepted, *contra* Tylor and in line with Eliada (see Chapter One), that moderns have not moved beyond myth and religion, it was still believed that analogy was different than science and that 'scientific' thought, i.e., rational-instrumental thought, was better than reasoning from analogy.

At this point Douglas cites the work of the twentieth century philosopher Mary Hesse, born 1924 and still professor emerita at Cambridge University. Hesse's 1963 work *Models and Analogies in Science* became a standard introductory volume in the discipline of the philosophy of science. Her contribution here is significant because it was she who was able to convincingly demonstrate that science uses analogy. She did this by equating the use of models in science with analogical thought and then demonstrating how central models are to the work of mathematicians and scientists, particularly in the realm of the generation and advancement of new scientific theories. Often, in order to explore and come to terms with a new phenomena or tackle a new

¹⁶⁹ This paragraph is a play on Douglas's comments on Leviticus. See Douglas 1997: 20.

problem, scientists will create a model that allows them to compare the new data with something more familiar. As examples, perhaps the most accessible and popular models are the billiard ball model of dynamic gas theory, the orbital model of electron movement in an atom, and the movement of light via waves, analogous to the movement of waves in water.

Analogy is entrenched in scientific thought, and in all thinking in so far as it relies on projection of exemplification. Aristotelian logic can start when the categories present themselves ready made, but there is a preliminary process by which the categories are constructed and compared. Reliance on analogy is not in itself the main difference between our modern thought and theirs,¹⁷⁰ archaic or primitive. The real differences are where the initial categories come from, in their case from their social experience, in our case from a specialized professional process. Rational thought operates most powerfully where the thinking can be cut off from social experience and work inside the module of its own creation. It depends, in other words, on the institutionalization and professionalization of many different kinds of thought.¹⁷¹

It could be argued that Douglas makes too sweeping a claim when she says that ancient [Israelite?] categories come from social experiences, but the point remains: The starting point of the initial categories used in the discourse need to be examined. How were the categories constructed? How are they compared in the literature? Often there is not enough information in the literature to answer these questions, but by asking them we recognize that their starting point may have been (and likely was?) different than ours. This has implications for exegesis and interpretation, as will be demonstrated below.

Obviously, an analogy or a model is never a perfect fit with the thing being explained. For example, Jesus regularly used analogies to help explain his ministry. “I am the bread of life.” “I am the gate.” “I am the way....” It is easy to imagine how these analogies could be pressed too far. We easily understand that Jesus did not mean he is made out of iron bars when he called himself a gate and we do not look for a paved thoroughfare simply because he called himself the way. Even those who claim they always take the Bible literally easily account for the use of analogy in these sayings.

¹⁷⁰ I am uncertain here if Douglas is referring to ancients in general or ancient Israelites in particular.

¹⁷¹ Douglas 1997: 21.

However, I contend that the analogies used in Genesis 1-11 are regularly extended too far by interpreters. As a rather extreme example, young earth creationists posit the existence of a water vapor canopy to explain the lengthy lifespans of the antediluvian heroes and the presence of the water required for a worldwide, catastrophic flood. The theory was first proposed in 1874 by Isaac Newton Vail in his pamphlet *Waters Above the Firmament* and popularized by Henry Morris in his 1961 book *The Genesis Flood* and his 1976 work *The Genesis Record*.

A worldwide rain lasting forty days would be quite impossible under present atmospheric conditions; so this phenomenon required an utterly different source of atmospheric waters than now obtains. This we have already seen to be the “waters above the firmament,” the vast thermal blanket of invisible water vapor that maintained the greenhouse effect in the antediluvian world. These waters somehow were to condense and fall on the earth.¹⁷²

In addition to the “waters above the firmament” statement in Genesis 1:6-8, proponents of the theory also use Genesis 7:11 “all the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the floodgates of the sky were opened” as support for the presence of the canopy.

I cite here a rather extreme example to make the point about analogies. However, not all abuses are so extreme and most, in my opinion, stem simply from the importation of different cultural expectations. I will save my interaction with more balanced examples of stretching analogies too far for below. For now I want to return to Hesse's work on the use of analogies in science.

Hesse notes that in addition to areas of correspondence, analogies have what she calls 'negative areas' that have to be ignored in the construction of the theory as well as 'neutral areas' where the fit with the analogy may or may not hold. Interestingly, it is the areas of non-fit that become so critical in the advancement of scientific thought because, “The ambiguity of these grey areas stimulates the mind to find new extensions of the theory.”¹⁷³

In everyday use of analogy “Learned habit and the support of the speech community protect

¹⁷² Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1976, p. 191.

¹⁷³ Douglas 1997: 22. One could contend that it is the 'grey area' in Genesis 1-11 that led to things like the water vapor canopy theory. However, as will be shown, *genre* is the key to telling us how to appropriately handle the grey areas.

the analogy that does not fit very well by restricting the range of interpretation.”¹⁷⁴ For example, “Slow and steady wins the race” may easily be deconstructed. If I drive my Mini Cooper in the Indianapolis 500 and do 50 mph for the entire race I’ll do nothing but get myself killed. However, the speech community restricts the range of interpretation to staying on task. I think the same restricting of interpretation holds for the statements of Jesus mentioned above. Unfortunately, Genesis 1-11 lacks the support of the speech community in that it is being read and studied in a time and place far distant from the speech community that gave it birth.

Citing Lévi-Strauss as an example of the use of structuralism in the study of myth and totemism, she looks at his example of the elaborate food prohibitions followed by a tribe of Bushmen in South Africa. These prohibitions, she contends, represent a “notational scheme for the system of social categories”¹⁷⁵ where “Each thing has its meaning only in the relations it has within a set of other things.”¹⁷⁶

Here are Mary Hesse's scientific models transported to everyday behaviour. Here is Suzanne Langer's presentational thought exemplified. The carcass of the animal is a virtual space on which social distinctions are projected, and more than that, they are validated by giving the right portions of meat to the right people. Before the structuralist explanations of the distribution are finished the carcass of the animal will have presented a microcosm of the whole universe.... Microcosmic thinking uses analogies as a logical basis for a total metaphysical framework. A distinctive way of thinking, it is the essentially other thought style, foreign to our own.

The microcosmic views being spoken are to be interpreted withing the framework of the relationships built up by the microcosm itself. This is an important methodological point because it demonstrates that cotext and context are to be given priority over extra-microcosmic relationships. Bringing it closer to home, the biblical cotext and context, along with intrabiblical parallels, must always take precedence over extra-biblical data.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Douglas 1997: 22. Based on Thomas Kuhn, “Second Thoughts on Paradigms,” in F. Suppes, ed., *The Structure of Scientific Theories*, University of Illinois Press, 1974.

¹⁷⁵ Douglas 1997: 24. She cites Goodman *Languages of Art* (Bobbs Merrill, 1968) and Douglas and Hull (eds.) *How Classification Works* (Edinburgh, 1993) for the use of the term 'notational scheme.'

¹⁷⁶ Douglas 1997: 23.

¹⁷⁷ See the important methodological considerations of Averbeck 2004.

In my opinion, a problem arises when Douglas relies too heavily on the work of Detienne. She contends that, “Mary Hesse must be taken seriously in valuing analogic thought as inherent in the scientific enterprise”¹⁷⁸ but she supports certain contradictory conclusions of Detienne, claiming that, “Detienne has described for one historic example the social conditions for breaking out of the grip of a microcosmic [i.e., analogical] thought style.”¹⁷⁹ How can a society break out of the grip of an analogical thought style when the point is that the two thought styles operate within the same culture? Further, Douglas claims that “writing in a mytho-poetic style does not give internal evidence of a thought that is hidebound by ancient tradition,”¹⁸⁰ but she seems to be supporting the notion that there is a gradual evolutionary movement from analogical to rational-instrumental.

Also, her contention that, “In practice the movement is from thinking in concentric analogies to thinking in lines of abstract reasoning” seems to me inherently unprovable. Further, she says that, “The main precondition of this movement [from analogical to rational-instrumental thinking] is the liberation of enquiry, a world made open to question and doubt, and the resulting high value set on persuasion,” yet earlier, as mentioned above, she was scathingly critical of Cassirer's insights along the same lines. Note she starts her section entitled “From Analogic to Dialogic” with the contention that, “The lesson is not fully learnt. Even if *not earlier and primitive*, analogy has continued to be seen as inferior and opposite of Aristotelian discursive logic.”¹⁸¹

How is it that analogical and rational-instrumental thought coexist in modern science and “construction of analogies is at the basis of mathematical thought and, against all our expectations, we find that analogy can be made into a precise and powerful tool of scientific enquiry,”¹⁸² but in ancient Israel, “The two kinds of thought and speech and writing are perfectly capable of coexisting

¹⁷⁸ Douglas 1997: 25.

¹⁷⁹ Douglas 1997: 29.

¹⁸⁰ Douglas 1997: 18.

¹⁸¹ Douglas 1997: 20-21; emphasis mine.

¹⁸² Douglas 1997: 32.

so long as the social institutions are sufficiently segregated”¹⁸³ In my opinion, the claim that a social institution, or even an individual, cannot become conversant in both styles of thought and writing is unsustainable given Douglas's earlier conclusions. Not only were both alive and well in ancient Sumer, as will be shown below, but we have the modern examples of Lewis, Tolkien and Eco who all wrote both analogical novels and rational-instrumental scholarly works.

However, I do think Douglas was correct in her disagreement with Detienne on the nature of the difference between analogical and rational-instrumental thought. Rather than an evolutionary development from analogical to rational-instrumental where rational-instrumental is marked by the invention of abstract thought, the difference is in the *kind* or *type* of truth one is seeking to convey. “The [rational-instrumental] questions avoid the moral complications of, 'Why did this happen to me?', they ask, 'What did actually happen?', and 'How did it happen?’”¹⁸⁴ In other words, analogical, according to Douglas, is primarily concerned with 'Why?', and rational-instrumental seeks to address 'What?' and 'How?'.

In my opinion, this distinction does not always hold. For example, in modern science, as we have seen above, analogical models work hand in hand with rational-instrumental discourse to answer 'What?' and 'How?'. However, I do think the distinction holds in ancient Near Eastern mythography. Take again the extreme example of the water vapor canopy given above. Morris's drive to develop the theory is in service to the need to answer the questions 'What?' and 'How?' raised in Genesis 1. What happened? There was a world-wide universal flood that required a volume of water no longer present on the earth. If more water was required than is present, *how* did the universal flood occur? As quoted above, there was a “vast thermal blanket of invisible water vapor that maintained the greenhouse effect in the antediluvian world. These waters somehow were to condense and fall on the earth.” I use this radical example to illustrate the mental gymnastics required to answer 'What?' and 'How?' from texts designed only to address 'Why?'.

¹⁸³ Douglas 1997: 29; emphasis mine. Stated again on p. 41 where she cites Weinfeld's statement of the same opinion.

¹⁸⁴ Douglas 1997: 28.

But there has also been a tendency to read Genesis 1-11 rational-instrumentally by critical scholars and, rather than attempt to creatively answer the 'What?' and the 'How?' of the text they simply assume it is false. In my opinion, this represents a different solution to the same methodological pitfall. Whether one is predisposed to take the text as true, usually as the result of a presupposition based on faith, or false is not the point here. What concerns me is that we assess the right information when we make our judgments of the truth or falsehood of the text. This is what I was arguing for in the introduction when I contend that emic readings must come before etic concerns. We must read the text on its own terms in order to correctly conclude what the text is actually claiming to be true before we engage in the etic tasks of reconstructing the 'What?' and the 'How?' (or the 'How *not*?').

Thus, if one properly assesses the analogic nature of the text and still thinks it to be a fiction it is not nearly as disconcerting to me as improperly and etically reading the text and attempting to defend it through convoluted mental gymnastics that defy common sense, like the water vapor canopy theory.

It must be acknowledged that for an analogy to eventually break down, as all analogies do, does not make the analogy untrue. Here I am thinking of the work of concordists who, although they take the text very seriously and in some cases even from a faith perspective, claim the text is not referentially true because it represents ancient worldviews that we now know to be incorrect. The caveat given is that even though scientific or historical details are wrong, the text is true 'for faith and practice.' It is not my aim to defend or deny the referential truth of the text. Rather, it is my aim to point out the poor method that has leads to this conclusion in texts that are labeled 'mythic,' particularly the narrative portions of Genesis 1-11. In effect, the method I am arguing against looks at the analogy, sees that it is not proper to what we now know based on modern science, and therefore calls the text wrong on that point.

For example, the use of the word רָקִיעַ 'firmament' in Genesis 1 has been a thorny issue for

concordists. The NIV has attempted to get around the issue by translating רָקִיעַ ambiguously as 'expanse.' Others have attempted to make the term scientifically acceptable by translating 'atmosphere.'¹⁸⁵ However, Seely has convincingly shown that the term refers to a solid dome. Rather than simply postulating a denominative from the verb רָקַע which is used of beating something out,¹⁸⁶ Seely undertakes thorough lexical analysis of Old Testament usage of the noun form as well as looking at ancient Near Eastern evidence, particularly the Mul-Apin series of astronomical texts (see below), *enuma eliš*, and the omens of *enuma Anu Enlil* (see below).¹⁸⁷ Since the רָקִיעַ is a solid dome there is no structure to which it can be compared in modern, scientific descriptions of the cosmos. However, rather than attempt to identify the רָקִיעַ scientifically as a concordist would or assume the text is scientifically inaccurate because it reflects ancient world view as Enns does, I see the רָקִיעַ as reflecting an ancient analogy that breaks down upon scientific investigation. As Walton notes, “The text is using ancient conventional thinking about structure to communicate other, more important issues. Nevertheless, it is not accurate to say there is no such thing as a *rāqîa*—there is a *rāqîa*, and it is blue. But it is an observed reality with a function connected to it, not a structural reality.”¹⁸⁸

In my opinion, reading the analogy as reflective of ancient Near Eastern cosmology is better than fixating on where the analogy breaks down and declaring the text false or flawed.

In order to demonstrate the co-existence of rational-instrumental thought and the analogical thought of myths in the ancient Near East, I turn now to the topic of divination.

Divination as Rational-Instrumental Thought

As mentioned in the previous chapter, it was long maintained that rational-instrumental

¹⁸⁵ Walton 2003: 159.

¹⁸⁶ See HALOT 1291-92.

¹⁸⁷ Seely 1991 and 1992.

¹⁸⁸ Walton 2003: 159.

thought used for science was an evolutionary development away from analogical thought. One goal for this chapter is to demonstrate that rational-instrumental and analogical thought coexisted in the ancient Near East. One could easily point to the mathematical texts or to the various feats of engineering performed in the ancient Near East, but I have chosen to examine divination because its use of rational-instrumental thought is not as intuitive to the modern.

Divination is typically divided into “natural” and “artificial” divination, a distinction that goes back to Cicero¹⁸⁹ and was applied by Bottéro in his work on Babylonian divination.¹⁹⁰ Natural divination is direct communication from the deity, usually via dreams or oracles in the ancient Near East.¹⁹¹ Natural divination is sometimes called inspired divination. Artificial divination is divination that requires observation of natural and manipulated phenomena in order to ascertain the will of the deity. It is sometimes referred to as deductive divination or impetrated divination. Examples common in the ancient Near East include astral divination and extispicy.

Inspired divination is attested in the ancient Near East primarily in the forms of prophetic oracles and dreams.¹⁹² Bible scholars are of course more familiar with inspired divination because of the rich prophetic tradition of ancient Israel and because artificial divination was banned in Deuteronomy 18.

Much more common in the ancient Near East, particularly Mesopotamia, is artificial divination. The majority of cuneiform sources concerned with divination or discerning the will of deity take the form of omen compendia. The primary sources of omens are extispicy and astrology, although lecanomancy (observing the patterns oil makes when placed on water), libanomancy (observing smoke rising from a censer), and aleuromancy (like lecanomancy but flour instead of oil) are also attested.¹⁹³ There is even one text, discovered during the German excavations at Aššur,

¹⁸⁹ *De divinatione* 1.11, 2.26.

¹⁹⁰ Bottéro called natural divination *divination inspirée* and artificial *divination déductive*. See Bottéro 1974.

¹⁹¹ Prophetic activity in the Old Testament is considered natural divination in that it consists of messages (oracles) received directly from Yahweh.

¹⁹² See Oppenheim 1956 and Scurlock 2010.

¹⁹³ See Cryer 1994: 168-80.

that attests to psephomancy, the practice of ritual divination using black and white stones.¹⁹⁴ In what follows, I will be dealing exclusively with artificial divination because it allows me to clearly demonstrate the presence of rational-instrumental thought alongside the analogical reasoning done via myth.

Deductive divination is typically divided into two separate spheres of activity. First is provoked divination. This is where the omens are deliberately sought by divinatory professionals via ritual. Extispicy, and in particular liver extispicy, is the most common form of provoked divination in the ancient Near East.¹⁹⁵ Second is unprovoked divination, which is the art of interpreting phenomena, particularly natural phenomena, that occur without human provocation such as ritual. The most common form of unprovoked divination in the ancient Near East, especially in the first millennium B.C., is astrology.¹⁹⁶

Ancient Near Eastern divination, both provoked and unprovoked, was carried out by learned professionals according to systematized regulations. There was no room in the system for random, extraordinary natural events. In other words, no distinction was made between the work of the gods and natural events. Natural events *were* the work of the gods.

The ancients seem to have maintained the distinction between provoked and unprovoked divinatory practices. This distinction is manifest in the various divinatory professions. The *bārû*, typically translated 'diviner,' was a professional in provoked omens, particularly extispicy. The *ṭupšarru*, typically translated 'scribe' or 'scholar,' was learned in the art of interpreting unprovoked omens. This is particularly evident in the title *ṭupšar Enūma Anu Enlil* given to the masters of the omen compendium *Enūma Anu Enlil*.¹⁹⁷ Also belonging to the field of the unprovoked omen was the *āšipu* or 'exorcist.' Neugebauer notes that some of the *ṭupšar Enūma Anu Enlil* of late Uruk

¹⁹⁴ For text edition, see Horowitz and Hurowitz 1992; Finkel 1995. For a convenient translation with discussion of potential biblical parallels, see Hurowitz 1997.

¹⁹⁵ See Goetze 1947a; Jeyes 1989; Koch-Westenholz 2000.

¹⁹⁶ See Koch-Westenholz 1995; Rochberg 2004 and the literature cited there.

¹⁹⁷ Koch-Westenholz 1995: 10.

were also called *āšipu*.¹⁹⁸ The office appears hereditary because some were even noted as being descendants of the famous *āšipu* Ekur-zakir.

Despite the inherent distinction between provoked and unprovoked omens, it must be stressed that the underlying rationale for both was the same. Basically, if a particular sign occurred, whether provoked or unprovoked, then there is some event which correlates to that sign. One could think of it as logically similar to casuistic law: If x occurs, then y.

One simple generalization is often made in regards to all types of artificial divination in ancient Mesopotamia having to do with the combination of signs. If a good sign is combined with another good sign the final outcome will, predictably, be favorable. Also, if a good sign is combined with a bad sign the outcome will be unfavorable. What is less intuitive is that if a bad sign co-occurs with another bad sign the outcome will be favorable. However, this makes sense if one thinks in terms of multiplication rather than addition. A positive plus a negative could be positive or negative depending upon which outweighs the other. But a positive *multiplied by* a negative will always be negative. In the same way, the product of two positives is always positive and the product of two negatives is also always positive.

An often quoted example of this rule is found in the astrological texts: if a well-portending planet is bright: favourable (+ + = +); if it is faint: unfavourable (+ - = -), if an ill-portending planet is bright: unfavourable (- + = -); if it is faint: favourable (- - = +). But the rule might also be illustrated from texts of extispicy or lecanomancy as early as Old Babylonian.¹⁹⁹

Brown offers a description of what he calls the “empiricist position” of divination, whereby omens are linked with real historical events rather than speculation.²⁰⁰ The classic statement of the position is from Finkelstein.

The best insurance for coping with the future is the most reliable and accurate knowledge of the experience of the past—a principle to which any modern empirical science would not take exception. A simple illustration makes the system clear: On the basis of the

¹⁹⁸ Neugebauer 1955: 13.

¹⁹⁹ Koch-Westenholz 1995: 11.

²⁰⁰ Brown 2000: 109 ff.

observations that “The North Wind doth blow,” we make the prediction that “we shall have snow,” with the implied warning to take all expected precautions. For the Mesopotamian meteorologist, however, this nexus would be incomplete. For him, if the north wind blew, and it began to snow, and if, at the same time, let us say, the king went to war and was killed, all three occurrences would forever after be viewed as inextricably bound together. Had there been no previous example of such a moment in his records, the precedent would have been established by the new instance.²⁰¹

The empiricist position has been critiqued from many angles. The most obvious critique is that many of the omens represent impossible situations and are the playground of fanciful speculation. Winitzer notes that “the empiricist position simply cannot admit the possibility of two interpretations existing as alternative to one another” and he notes that the cuneiform writing system itself had a role and effect on the composition of the omen collections.²⁰²

Provoked omens are sought by diviners to answer specific questions, often on behalf of the king, addressed to the gods. Since provoked signs are asked of the gods, by definition they are always sent by the gods. Unprovoked signs, on the other hand, may be sent directly by the gods to communicate to man or they may simply be signs (*ittu*) without a particular deity having sent them. These are sometimes referred to as 'symptoms.' Koch-Westenholz notes that this “ambivalence between a theistic and a mechanistic world view permeates much of Babylonian thought and is duly reflected in the astrological texts.”²⁰³ However, it must be noted that even signs not sent directly by a deity were still considered to be the result of the activity of the gods. “Although phenomena were more often referred to without a hint of divine embodiment, the very idea of an omen serves to remind us that, for the ancient Mesopotamian scholars, all physical existence and the divine sphere of influence were coextensive. Accordingly, all phenomena, including those above (in the sky) as well as those below (on the earth), were subject to interpretation as signs, and such signs, in the Babylonian view, were brought about through divine agency as a manifestation of the gods' concern

²⁰¹ Finkelstein 1963: 463. Also quoted in Winitzer 2011: 78 in his discussion of variable interpretations of the same omens, particularly in the so-called *šanûm šumšu* ('its other interpretation') omens which have the form *šumma* ('if') X, then Y; *šanûm šumšu* ('its other interpretation') Z.

²⁰² Winitzer 2011: 78-79.

²⁰³ Koch-Westenholz 1995: 11.

for human beings.”²⁰⁴ There was no purely secular view of events. Note the conclusion to the section dealing with the mood god Sin in *Enūma Anu Enlil*.

ta-mi-a-tum an-na-a-tum e-nu-ma ^{d30} *mit-lu-uk-ta gar-nu dingir.meš šá an-e u ki-tim ep-šet a-me-lu-ti tu-bu-ul-šú-nu i-ši-im-mu*

These are the oracles when Sin (i.e., the moon) makes a decision, the great gods of heaven and earth decide the doings of mankind...²⁰⁵

Even if the sign was not a direct communication, it was the result of divine machinations, presumably to the benefit of humans. Even in the case of ill omens measures could be taken to avert the impending negative consequences via *namburbû*, apotropaic steps whereby some smaller ill was substituted for the greater ill of the omen. For example, *SAA* 8 250, a report from Nergal-eṭir to Esarhaddon, notes that if an omen dictates a flood will come and break the dikes, “As a substitute for the king, I [Nergal-eṭir] will cut through a dike, here in Babylonia, in the middle of the night.” The most famous example was probably the substitute king. “If there was an eclipse of particular duration and character or some other cosmic sign which was, according to the lore of omenologists, a divine warning that the king was about to die a violent death, a substitute would be chosen to take the king's place. This substitute would wear the royal regalia and otherwise play the part of king while the real monarch continued to operate behind the scenes disguised as an ordinary person.”²⁰⁶

The stars and planets were seen both as manifestations of particular deities and as deities in their own right.²⁰⁷ The assumption of ancient Near Eastern scribal scholarship was “that the gods were not only inseparable from all possible natural phenomena by virtue of their cosmology, but were also responsible for the associations between phenomena in nature and events in human history.”²⁰⁸ The deities were the ultimate arbiters of the 'writing in the sky.'

The collection of omens contained in the literature demonstrated rational-instrumental

²⁰⁴ Rochberg 2004: 36.

²⁰⁵ Translation Koch-Westenholz 1995: 100.

²⁰⁶ Scurlock 1995: 1885.

²⁰⁷ See here the insightful article of Rochberg 2009b.

²⁰⁸ Rochberg 2004: 4.

thought via their principles of organization reflecting the interests and methods of Mesopotamian scholarship. The empirical study of the omens as well as the development of the schematic systems used to interpret the signs were indicative of the method of ordering diverse phenomena, a method common to modern science.

Babylonian astronomy was long thought unscientific because its connection to the will of deities was deemed religious and anything religious was not science, the so-called 'conflict model' of the relationship between science and religion. Rochberg refers to this as 'the pragmatic problem.'²⁰⁹ The matter is complicated by the fact that even a cursory examination of Babylonian omen texts reveals diverse concerns that include divination, magic, ritual, incantation, and medicine. Even the omen compendium *Enūma Anu Enlil*, though primarily concerned with celestial divination, contains varied phenomena within the realm of human experience.

Because celestial and other omen phenomena were viewed in ancient Near Eastern texts as inherently theological, revealing the will of and manifesting deities, scholars of the first half of the twentieth century typically viewed them as indicative of non-rational thought and therefore unscientific or, at best, pre-scientific. Along with the aforementioned conflict model of the relationship between science and religion must be mentioned the evolutionary model upon which those studies were based. As discussed in chapter one, Frazer popularized the notion of social evolution from magic and religion towards science. Since science was a liberation from magic and religion, that which contained religion, such as omen literature, had to be a byproduct of the primitive mind not yet liberated from such thinking. "As long as the study of astrology was regarded as tainted or primitive science, however, our ability to reconstruct and interpret the history of ancient astronomy remained not only partial, *but plainly ethnocentric*."²¹⁰ One of the major flaws of early interpreters was allowing mythic narratives to determine their view of ancient Mesopotamian views of nature. In other words, they read analogical texts rational-instrumentally.

²⁰⁹ Rochberg 2004: 35-42.

²¹⁰ Rochberg 2004: 37, emphasis mine.

“The focus on mythological texts, not surprisingly, supported the idea that 'mythopoeic' thought was characteristic of the ancient Near East, and promoted the image of an ancient Mesopotamian 'mentality' in nonspecialist histories of science.”²¹¹ This outdated methodology has been soundly critiqued by R. Averbeck who concludes:

In the ancient and the modern world we find analogical as well as rational-instrumental thinking. In the ancient Near East mythology served the need for analogical thinking, and rational-instrumental thinking was necessary to accomplish feats such as the irrigation agriculture of ancient Sumer. In our modern world we need models to give direction to scientific inquiry, whether in the hard or soft sciences. In physics, for example, it might be the wave particle model of light, or in psychology it might be the medical model of mental 'illness.' We should not be so foolish as to think that we have left 'mythology' behind either. The only real difference is that we tend to do mythology scientifically, so we have a lot of what we call today '*science* fiction,' which is really scientifically articulated mythology. Furthermore, this mythology has captured the imagination of our culture to such a degree that it even motivates actual scientific inquiry into such things as the quest for life in other solar systems.²¹²

Rochberg also interacts with this methodology as espoused by H. Frankfort.²¹³ Referring to Frankfort's statement that “The fundamental difference between the attitudes of modern and ancient man as regards the surrounding world is this: for modern, scientific man the phenomenal world is primarily an 'It'; for ancient—and also for primitive—man it is a 'Thou,’” she notes that “Frankfort et al. generalized from the evidence of cosmogonic mythology to a cognitive stage of development in human thought, one which could not 'become part of a progressive and cumulative increase of knowledge,' that is, one incapable of producing 'science.’”²¹⁴ As Rochberg rightly observes, the views of Frankfort are in accord with his times, particularly the work of Frazer.

Excursus: Analogical vs. Rational-instrumental Thought in Genesis 4:14

In Genesis 4:14, in response to being told by Yahweh that he will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, Cain says to Yahweh, “You have driven me today away from the ground and from your face I will be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever

²¹¹ Rochberg 2004: 37.

²¹² Averbeck 2004: 334, emphasis his.

²¹³ See the synopsis of the views of Frankfort in Chapter One.

²¹⁴ Rochberg 2004: 39. Quote of Frankfort is from Frankfort 1946: 15.

finds me will kill me.” Often in conservative evangelical circles the question is raised about where the people will come from that will kill Cain. Surely, if Cain is the son of the first man, there is nobody alive that doesn’t know Cain, and who would possibly want to kill him? His father? Not likely. What about his own descendants? Again, not likely.

It is possible, I suppose, to see this as simply a slip of the brain on Cain’s part, or perhaps a later explanatory note inserted by a redactor. It is also possible to sit above the text and claim that the ancients were too stupid or ignorant to realize that they had made a logical fallacy in the story. It is also possible that Cain figures the only way he *can* die is for someone to kill him, since that is the only way anybody actually has died up to this point in the story.

When reading from a rational-instrumental perspective, where the people that are going to kill Cain will come from is a perfectly legitimate question. The point of this section, however, is to show that from a mythographic (i.e. analogical) perspective it is *not* a legitimate question. By legitimate I mean that it is not a question the text seeks to answer nor is it a question we are prompted by the text to ask. In my opinion, the genre clues lead us to the opposite: we are signaled *not* to ask where the people will come from that will kill Cain.

As Hatab notes, “Myth and science do not represent two different worlds or a competition for the proper account of the world but rather different ways of properly disclosing a single, multidimensional world.”²¹⁵ In other words, the tendency is to assume that either the text of Genesis 4 is historiographic, and therefore we need to ask where the killers will come from, or it is myth and therefore fanciful and not subject to the rules of logic. Evangelicals have typically defended the historicity of the text and are therefore forced to attempt to answer the question. What Hatab is observing is that a text does not have to be historiographic, or ‘science,’ in order to make a proper disclosure, to use his term.

Similarly, Long contends that “Mythical thinking is not concerned primarily with logic. On

²¹⁵ Lawrence J. Hatab, *Myth and Philosophy: A Contest of Truths*. LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1990.

the other hand, it is not illogical or prelogical.”²¹⁶ That myth is not prelogical is demonstrated by the fact that the Sumerians were writing myth at the same time they were building canals, doing accounting, inventing writing, and a host of other rational-instrumental tasks. “The mythic and the rational co-exist.”²¹⁷ Raffaele Pettazzoni demonstrated as early as 1954 that mythical thinking can be logical and illogical, rational and irrational.²¹⁸ That is, it can mess with the bounds of the irrational simply because rational-instrumental consistency is not necessary for it to make its point. For example, I might say, “I’m starving” when I’ve missed lunch, despite the fact that I’m clearly nowhere close to starving and am instead only hungry. In the same way, a myth can use a mytheme or can suspend rational-instrumental logic to make a point, or, perhaps more often, for the sake of brevity. In Genesis 4:14 the point is not for the listener/reader to figure out where Cain’s killer will come from but to see the concern over being driven out of the presence of Yahweh.

What I am after here is a functional-typological reading of ancient Near Eastern mythographic writings, including the narratives of Genesis 1-11. The task of functional-typological readings is not necessarily to provide answers, but to give us a fresh set of questions and help us determine what sorts of questions are fair for any given text.²¹⁹ It is too easy to assume that we can ask any question of any given text, but there are questions that are simply not fair for some texts. For example, I don’t pick up the newspaper trying to discover the author’s opinion about an event. However, if I read an editorial over the same event I know that what I am getting is a healthy dose of opinion. I can ask the question, “What does the author think of this?” of the editorial column, but it is not a fair question for the news article. In the same way, expecting the creation account to read like a scientific treatise is simply outside the bounds of the text, and both defending the scientific validity of the text as well as writing off the text for its perceived inaccuracies are inappropriate to the genre of the text. In my opinion, to expect Genesis to reflect scientific clarity is indicative of

²¹⁶ Charles H. Long, *Alpha: The Myths of Creation*. Patterns of Myth Series. New York: Braziller, 1963.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ Raffaele Pettazzoni, *Essays on the History of Religion*. Leiden: Brill, 1954.

²¹⁹ See Christopher Woods, *The Grammar of Perspective: The Sumerian Conjugation Prefixes as a System of Voice*. Leiden: Brill, 2008, p. 17.

“unsympathetic ethnography in which native materials are represented only so far as they meet the standards of the analyst’s own society.”²²⁰ Both critical scholars and conservative maximalists have made a mistake in their efforts to minimize the text because it does not meet the standards of our society (in the case of the former) or by trying to show apologetically that it does (in the case of the latter).

Related to this is the idea of *Vorverständnis*, i.e., unwittingly importing our own prior knowledge and attitudes onto a text. Hatab comments that, “If language is the key to meaning, we must listen to the language of a mythical age to gather its meaning, as opposed to interpretations through post-mythical terminology.”²²¹ In other words, we do an injustice to the text when we import our Enlightenment rational-instrumental view of texts onto Genesis 4:14. Hatab continues, “we must attempt to be faithful by at least screening out extra-mythical assumptions.”²²² Asking where the people would come from that might kill Cain is, in my opinion, a question based on ‘extra-mythical assumptions.’ I align myself with Hatab in my “aim to show the autonomy and meaningfulness of a mythical age on its own terms.”²²³ As Doty contends, “Myth is not unsophisticated science but sophisticated poetic enunciation of meaning and significance.... While facts may well be represented in myths, it is often important to recognize that natural and cultural data may be represented dialectically or paradoxically as often as, or more often than, they are represented with pragmatic exactness.”²²⁴

Omen Bibliography

This bibliography is meant to be relatively exhaustive up to 2011. Obviously, given the introductory nature of the dissertation on the topic of omens, not all the works in the bibliography were cited or used in the construction of my thesis. Nonetheless, this bibliography is provided as a tool for those who may be interested in further research on the topic.

²²⁰ Doty, *Mythography*, p. 91.

²²¹ Hatab, 1990, p. 12.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ *Ibid.* However, I disagree with Hatab's idea of a mythical 'age.' I agree with Eliade that myth is just as much a part of our society as it was theirs.

²²⁴ Doty 94.

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Chapter 3. Case Study: Gilgamesh and Huwawa

Synopsis

In Gilgamesh and Huwawa A, Gilgamesh, the famed king and builder of the walls of Unug (Uruk) sets his mind on the Zagros mountains to the east of Sumer, the place of cedar felling and the place where one attains immortality. Gilgamesh's servant Enkidu advises Gilgamesh that the place of cedar felling is the domain of the sun god Utu and that any plan to journey to the east and harvest cedars needs to receive his blessing.

Upon making the appropriate ceremonial allowances, Gilgamesh approaches Utu and seeks his blessing. In a stunning line that expresses the core concern of the poem Gilgamesh tells Utu that

he cranes his neck over the city wall, the very city wall he achieved fame by building, and the sight depresses him because he sees that the same fate, death, awaits all men. Utu pities Gilgamesh and supports his undertaking by giving him seven heroes to support him on his journey.

Thus Gilgamesh sounds the horn in his city and gathers together 50 men to journey with him. He then heads off to the smithy to have new weapons made for him.

The journey itself is not described in detail and very quickly Gilgamesh finds and begins harvesting cedar at which point he meets the monster Huwawa. Gilgamesh and all those with him fall into a deep sleep. Enkidu is the first to awake and after some coaxing he finally manages to awake Gilgamesh. When Gilgamesh wakes up, he is determined to confront the monster and find out if he is human or deity. However, Enkidu wishes to save his skin by fleeing and Gilgamesh is forced to give Enkidu a rousing pep talk.

When Gilgamesh confronts Huwawa he is seized with terror but the story takes an interesting twist when Gilgamesh begins bargaining with Huwawa and through a series of one-sided deals convinces Huwawa to give up his fearsomeness. Eventually Huwawa submits to the hero Gilgamesh by prostrating himself before him, at which point Gilgamesh takes pity on Huwawa and decides to let him go free. However, Enkidu deems this unacceptable and attacks Huwawa by surprise, decapitating him.

At this point in the story the scene suddenly shifts and Gilgamesh and Enkidu are seen paying homage to the god Enlil. Upon seeing that Huwawa has been slain Enlil is greatly displeased, stating that Huwawa should have been honored. He decrees that the 'fearsomeness' taken by Gilgamesh from Huwawa be distributed to various parts of the cosmos. In this the story functions as an aetiology for the numinous in nature (and prisons).

Translation

Indeed, the lord set his mind on the mountain where the man was living.
The lord Gilgamesh set his mind on the mountain where the man was living.

To his servant Enkidu he speaks...

Enkidu, after a man is finished he cannot come out to live again.
I will indeed enter the mountains; I will indeed establish my name (there).
(If) it is a place where one can establish renown; I will indeed establish my name.
(If) it is a place where a name cannot be established; I will establish the name of the gods.

His servant Enkidu answered...

My king, if today to the mountains you are going, Utu must know from us.
Toward the mountains of cedar cutting we are going...
Utu, the youth Utu, must know from us.
Of the mountains, its deciding is of Utu.
Of the mountains of cedar cutting, its deciding is of the youth Utu; Utu must know from us.

Gilgamesh covered the white goat.

The brown goat as a goat-offering he held to (his) chest.
He paid homage to the holy scepter.
He spoke to Utu of heaven.
O Utu, I will go to the mountains. May you be my helper.
I will go to the mountains of cedar felling. May you be my helper.

Utu answered him from heaven.

Young man, in yourself you are indeed a citizen, in the mountains what will you be?

O Utu, I will indeed speak a word to you. Please listen to me.

I will speak elegantly to you. You should indeed pay attention.
In my city, man dies. The heart is struck.
Man is lost. It is depressing.
I strained my neck over the wall.
The river carries cadavers in the water. This is what I see.
And for me, like so, indeed will happen. This is the way it is.
A tall man is not able to reach heaven.
A wide man does not cover the land.
After a man is finished he cannot come out to live again.
I will indeed enter the mountains; I will indeed establish my renown.
In the place where names are established, I will establish my name.
In the place where names are not, I will establish the name of the gods.

Utu accepted his tears as a gift.

As a compassionate man would do, he showed him compassion.
There are seven heroes, the sons of a single mother.
The first, their eldest brother, has the lion's paws and the talon's of an eagle.
The second, a small snake...
The third, a great horned viper...
The fourth, all the blazing fires...entering...
The fifth, a snake...
The sixth like a battering flood strikes the mountains.
The seventh flashes like lightning; no one can escape.

To all the portage-places of the mountains he will carry them.

The hero youth Utu gave those 7 to Gilgamesh.

The felling of cedars made him very happy.

The lord Gilgamesh was filled with rejoicing.

In his city, like one man, the horn was sounded.

He called out in unity for men in parallel twos.

He who has a house, to his house. He who has a mother, to his mother.

Each man like me do as I (do) and may he act on my behalf

He who has a house to his house and he who has a mother to his mother.

There were 50 individual men like him who gathered to his strength.

He set off toward the smithy.

He cast the 'ashgar' and 'agasilig,' weapons of his warriorhood.

He set off to gardens of deep shade.

He cut down ebony, oak, apple and box trees.

They were sons of his city...

The first, their eldest brother, has lion's paws and the talon's of an eagle.

To all the portage-places of the mountains they will carry you.

The first mountain was crossed. His heart did not find any cedar.

The seventh mountain, in their crossing, his heart found cedar.

He did not ask, he did not have to search.

Gilgamesh was cutting down cedar.

Enkidu trimming their branches...to Gilgamesh...

They were making piles...

approached self...hung...

Gilgamesh... was seized as if asleep.

...He was struck as if by a wave.

They were sons of his city who went with him.

They stumbled at his feet like puppies.

Enkidu awoke from his nightmare.

He rubbed his eyes; it was full of silence.

He touched (Gilgamesh), he could not rouse him.

He shouted, he did not reply.

You who went to sleep; you who went to sleep.

Gilgamesh the junior lord of Kulaba how long will you sleep?

The mountains are becoming blurry as the shadows fall.

Of evening, its brightness is going.

Utu has gone to the bosom of his mother Ningal.

Gilgamesh, how long will you sleep?

The sons of your city who came with you

at the foot of the mountains should not be left standing.

Their mothers should not have to twine string in the square of your city.

He placed (those words) into his right ear.

He covered him with his heroic words as if with a garment.
He gathered in his hand a cloth with thirty shekels of oil on it and covered his chest.

Like a bull on the great earth he (Gilgamesh) stood.

Bending his neck towards the earth, he yelled at him
By the life of my mother Ninsumun and my father holy Lugalbanda
Like sleeping in the lap of my mother Ninsumun shall I indeed be fashioned?

A 2nd time also he spoke to him
By the life of my mother Ninsumun and my father holy Lugalbanda
Until I know if that person is human or a god
My steps (will be) to the mountains, let me not step to the city.

As for the servant, living is good, life was attractive.
He answered his master
“My master, you have not seen that man, you are not terrified.
I have seen that man and I am vexed.
As for the warrior, his teeth are the teeth of a dragon.
His eyes are the eyes of a lion.
His chest is a raging flood.
No man can approach his head, which eats reed.
My master, you travel to the mountains, I will travel to the city.
To your mother I will say you live; she will laugh.
Afterwards I will say you are dead and she will weep over you.

Steady, Enkidu. Two men will not die. A bound boat will not sink.
A 3-ply garment (or rope) no one can cut.
On the wall water cannot overwhelm a man.
In a reed house fire is not extinguished.
You, help me! I will help you. What is it that anyone can do against us?
It sank; it sank
when the magan barge sank
The magilum barge sank.
The life boat that seizes the living did not sink.
Let us go after him and see him

If we pursue him
There will be fear. There will be fear. Return!
There will be blood. There will be blood. Return!
The matter is in your heart. Let us go after him.
A man cannot approach to within ...

Huwawa has reached his house among the cedars.
He looks, it is the look of death.
He shakes (his) head, it is a gesture of reproach.
You are a young man, to the city where your mother bore you, you will return.

Fear and terror spread through his sinews and his feet.
His feet on the ground he could not return.

His foot's big toe stuck to the path.
In his side...

Oh oil-glistening one, adorned with the scepter
Native son, glory of the gods
Angry bull, stationed for a fight
Your mother knew birthing children magnificently well.
Your nurse knew magnificently well feeding children on the lap.
Don't be afraid; place (your) hand on the ground.

He placed the hand on the ground and spoke.
By the life of my mother Ninsumun and my father holy Lugalbanda
Your dwelling in the mountains is not known; your dwelling in the mountains, let it be known.
Enmebaragesi my eldest sister for a wife to the mountains I will indeed bring for you.

A second time he spoke to him.
By the life of my mother Ninsumun and my father holy Lugalbanda
In the mountains your dwelling is indeed not known;
your dwelling in the mountains, let it be known.
My little sister to be your concubine to the mountains I have indeed brought for you.
Your fearsomeness (or your 'self') give to me; let me become your relative.

His first fearsomeness he (Huwawa) gave to him.
The native sons who came with him
they cut off branches and were binding them.
They were laying them at the feet of the mountains.

After he finished his 7th fearsomeness, he approached his sleeping room.
He was going to his back like a snake of the wine quay.
As if to kiss...he struck him on the cheek.

Huwawa bared his teeth.
He took Gilgamesh by the hand.
To Utu I will speak.
Utu, my birth mother I don't know; my father who brought me up I don't know.
Somebody gave birth to me.

Gilgamesh swore on the life of sky,
he swore on the life of ground,
he swore on the life of the mountains.

He seized his hand; he indeed prostrated himself before him.
Then Gilgamesh the native son's heart had pity on him.

To his servant Enkidu he spoke,
"Enkidu, let the captured bird go to its land.
The captured man to the embrace of his mother let return."

Enkidu replied to Gilgamesh,
Oh oil-glistening one, adorned with the scepter

citizenly glory of the gods
 angry bull, standing in a fight
 young lord Gilgamesh, praised of Unug
 your mother also knows well how to bear children
 your nurse also knows well how to nurse children
 exalted without possessing understanding
 Fate will devour the one not knowing fate.
 The seized bird going to its place,
 the seized man returning to his mother's embrace,
 you will not go back to the city of your birth mother.

Huwawa spoke to Enkidu,
 "To me, Enkidu, you speak destruction.
 A hired man, hired food, you follow after his counterpart, you speak destruction."
 He indeed spoke like this to him.

Enkidu in his rage and anger cut his neck.
 He placed his head inside a leather bag.

They entered before Enlil.
 After their kissing the ground before Enlil
 they let fall the leather bag and poured out his head.
 They placed it before Enlil.

When Enlil looked at the head of Huwawa
 he spoke terribly to Gilgamesh.
 "Why have you done this?
 ...you did...
 He should have sat in your presence.
 He should have eaten food that you eat.
 He should have drank the water that you drink.
 He should have been honored."

He gave his first aura to the fields.
 His 2nd aura he gave to the rivers.
 His 3rd aura he gave to the reedbeds.
 His 4th aura he gave to the lions.
 His 5th aura he gave to the palace.
 His 6th aura he gave to the forests.
 His 7th aura he gave to Nungal (goddess of the prisons).

Mighty one...Gilgamesh...
 Nisaba be praised.

Text and Commentary

1	en-e kur lu ₂ til ₃ -la-še ₃ ġeštug ₂ -ga-ni na-an-gub
	Indeed, the lord set his mind on the mountain where the man was living.

	<p>kur lu₂ til₃-la-še₃ refers to the east. ‘to the place where one lives’ or ‘the place of life.’ The lord set his mind to (go to?) the mountain where the man was living. The verb ġeštug₂-ga-ni na-an-gub is also used to begin Inanna’s Descent and Nanna-Suen’s Journey to Nibru. na + ġamtu = affirmative (Thomsen 195, Edzard 119, Falkenstein GSG 181-223; see also Falkenstein 1942). “It serves to draw attention to the importance of something that was there or happened, but is still meaningful for what is to come” (Edzard 119). Jacobsen stated, “As actually used...na-, ‘within him’, seems to present an act not objectively, in itself, ‘he did’, but subjectively, in its psychological matrix of impulse, inner urge, decision to act, in the subject, ‘he saw fit to do’” (1965: 74 n. 4; quoted in Thomsen 196). The verb form na-an-gub always appears with ġeštug₂-ga-ni in the literary corpus (a total of 13 times, five of which could be considered parallel). Gilgameš, Enkidu and the Netherworld ends with the same line as a transition to Gilgameš and Huwawa. Thomsen analyzes the verb as /na-ĩ-n-gub/; Edzard as /na-n-gub/. I take the verb as ġamtu (Edzard conjugation pattern 2b) where the -n- is the marker of the 3rd animate ergative. Edzard has ‘einmal,’ although it is unclear why. Although not relevant to this line, Edzard posits that na can also be the 3rd person dative ‘to him’ (94). Thomsen doubts the existence of the /na-/ dative (as postulated by Falkenstein and followed by Edzard) (196). This contrast of opinion can be seen most clearly in the OS letter opening formula na-e-a. Edzard analyzes [na-b-e-a] and translates, ‘what you will say to him/her (is this),’ where /na-/ is the 3rd sg. person-class dative-locative dimensional indicator ‘to him/her.’ Thomsen analyzes [na-ĩ-e-e-a] and takes /na-/ as the affirmative prefix, even though the verb is maru (according to Thomsen, /na-/ + maru is ordinarily the prohibitive). Beginning in Ur III the letter opening is written na-ab-be₂-a. Contrast to Ishtar’s descent where she set her mind to the underworld. Inana seeks out the land of the dead, but Gilgamesh seeks the land of the living. There is life in the east; people are long-lived in the east (Enmerkar and Lugalbanda). The cedar forest in this text is in the Zagros, not Lebanon.</p>
2	en ^d gilgameš ₂ -e kur lu ₂ til ₃ -la-še ₃ ġeštug ₂ -ga-ni na-an-gub
	<p>The lord Gilgamesh set his mind on the mountain where the man was living. ePSD has GIŠ.NE@s.GA.ME.U.U.U for gilgameš₂ (NE@s is the BIL₃ sign). However, the phonetic complement (EŠ) is not required for the sign to be read gilgameš₂, nor is it present in N3776.</p>
3	arad-da-ni en-ki-du ₁₀ -ra gu ₃ mu-un-na-de ₂ -e
	<p>To his servant Enkidu he speaks... Note the switch from ġamtu to maru (Edzard conjugation pattern 2b to 2a). Verbs of speaking and address are often in the maru. Why mu-un-na-de₂-e instead of simply mu-na-de₂-e? Plene writing.</p>
4	en-ki-du ₁₀ murgu (egir _x [IBxgunu]) ġuruš-e til ₃ -la saġ til-le-bi-še ₃ la-ba-ra-an-e ₃ -a
	<p>after a man is finished he cannot come out to live again. til₃-le-bi-še₃ a maru participle (B-[ed]; Edzard 132)? Woods calls it a future participle with -ed. la-ba = negative; “Before the prefixes /ba-/ and /bi-/ it is changed to la- and li-, respectively” (Thomsen 190). murgu [SIG₄] = shoulder, back This line is probably a proverb. egir = after, later -ra- is the ablative. The ablative enforces the ‘out’ part of ‘come out’ (e₃).</p>
5	kur-ra ga-an-kur ₉ mu-ġu ₁₀ ga-am ₃ -ġar
	<p>I will indeed enter the mountains; I will indeed establish my name (there). May I enter the land, may I set my name. Why -n- in ga-an-kur₉ and -m- in ga-am₃-ġar? Could be phonetic. Cohortatives like hamtu marking, but you get b’s. The standard theory does not account for the cohortative well. Kramer translates kur as ‘land’ rather than ‘mountain’ because of the use of the verb kur₉ rather than e₁₁. See BASOR 96 p. 24 n. 24.</p>
6	ki mu gub-bu-ba-am ₃ mu-ġu ₁₀ ga-bi ₂ -ib-gub
	(If) it is a place where one can establish renown; I will indeed establish my name.
7	ki mu nu-gub-bu-ba-am ₃ mu diġir-re-e-ne ga-bi ₂ -ib-gub
	(If) it is a place where a name cannot be established; I will establish the name of the gods.
8	arad-da-ni en-ki-du ₁₀ -e inim mu-un-ni-ib-ġi ₄ -ġi ₄
	<p>His servant Enkidu answered... Reduplicated forms never add -e for the 3rd person maru.</p>
9	lugal-ġu ₁₀ tukum-bi ud-da kur-ra i-ni-in-ku ₄ -ku ₄ -de ₃ ^d utu ħe ₂ -me-da-an-zu

	<p>My king, if today to the mountains you are going, Utu must know from us. tukum [𒌦𒍪𒌦] = Akk. <i>šumma</i> (Can be either tukum or tukumbi). -me- = 1pl. ‘from us’ zu with -da- = ‘to learn from someone’ (Thomsen 323). Although I am tempted to analyze ku₄-ku₄-de₃ as the <i>marû</i> participle (B-ed) plus the directive (locative-terminative), according to both Thomsen (266) and Edzard (135) the following verb should have the same subject, which is not the case here. [The verb should be i-ni-in-ku₄-ku₄-de₃-en.] ĥa + <i>ĥamtu</i> = affirmative; ĥa + <i>marû</i> = precative (Thomsen 204) Utu is a protector and friend of heroic kings and travelers.</p>
9a	<p>kur-^{gīs}erin⁷-kud-še₃ i-ni-in-ku₄-ku₄-de₃-en</p> <p>Toward the mountains of cedar cutting we are going... I translate ‘we,’ although if the verb is /ku₄-ku₄-ed-en/, then it is ‘you.’ If it is /ku₄-ku₄-enden/, then it is ‘we.’ Thomsen notes that the 1st pl suffix can take the form -de₃-en (153). This line is added in one manuscript.</p>
10	<p>^dutu šul^dutu ĥe₂-me-da-an-zu</p> <p>Utu, the youth Utu, must know from us. Plays on ‘youth’ at the start of the day. Wet lapis beard sometimes seen in the iconography of Utu maybe represents dewy morning.</p>
11	<p>kur-ra dim₂-ma-bi ^dutu-kam</p> <p>Of the mountains, its deciding is of Utu. dim₂-ma = ‘thought, planning, instruction’ (PSD) (not ‘to fashion’; see Kramer JCS 1947:4); Akk. <i>ṭēmu</i>; Nabnitu III (=A) 181f. has dim₂.ma, KA.ĤI = <i>ṭe</i>-[<i>e-mu</i>] (Nabnitu = lexical series SIG₇+ALAM = <i>nabnītu</i>, pub. Finkel, MSL 16); Note that in line 170 one ms has <i>ġalga</i> (‘forethought’ [advice, council] glossed <i>ṭēmu</i> and <i>milku</i>) instead of dim₂-ma.</p>
12	<p>kur-^{gīs}erin⁷-kud dim₂-ma-bi šul^dutu-kam ^dutu ĥe₂-me-da-an-zu</p> <p>Of the mountains of cedar cutting, its deciding is of the youth Utu; Utu must know from us. Reflects geo-political reality of Ur III period. The ‘mountains of cedar felling’ in Ur III times were the Zagros to the east, not the cedars of Lebanon.</p>
13	<p>^dgilgameš₂-e maš₂ babbar₂-ra šu im-mi-in-tag</p> <p>Gilgamesh covered the white goat. Prefix im-mi usually means ‘for oneself’ (middle force). šu...tag ‘to cover, decorate’ often takes -ni-. The object (i.e., the ‘second object,’ the one other than šu) of compound verbs often takes the locative, as here. [More often locative-terminative.] One ms has šu im-ma-an-ti ‘took hold of’; another has [šu]-ni im-mi-in-ti</p>
14	<p>maš₂ su₄ maš₂-da-ri-a gaba-na i-im-tab</p> <p>The brown goat as a goat-offering he held to (his) chest. su₄ can be red or brown. One ms has instead maš₂ su₄-a maš₂ /babbar\ [...] maš₂ šag₄¹ tam⁷ MA-an-DIB</p>
15	<p>šu-ni ġidru kug giri₁₇-na ba-da-an-ġal₂</p> <p>He paid homage to the holy scepter. -da- can make things more transitive. gal₂ exist; da-gal₂ to possess. giri₁₇ (kiri₄/kiri₂) šu...ġal₂ = ‘to pay homage to (dative)’, lit.: ‘to place the hand on the nose.’ See the very common iconography of the worshipper paying homage to the deity by bringing the hand up to the nose.</p>
16	<p>^dutu an-na-ra gu₃ mu-un-na-de₂-e</p> <p>He spoke to Utu of heaven. an-na-(ak-)ra</p>
17	<p>^dutu kur-še₃ i-in-ku₄-ku₄-de₃-en a₂-taĥ-ġu₁₀ ĥe₂-me-en</p> <p>O Utu, I will go to the mountains. May you be my helper. Is “Will you be my helper?” a legitimate translation of the precative? Don’t worry about the -n- before the verb. Seems to be an orthographic hangover (ie, scribal error). See also Delnero 2007.</p>
18	<p>kur-^{gīs}erin⁷-kud-še₃ i-in-ku₄-ku₄-de₃-en a₂-taĥ-ġu₁₀ ĥe₂-me-en</p> <p>I will go to the mountains of cedar felling. May you be my helper.</p>
19	<p>^dutu an-na-ta inim mu-ni-ib-ġi₄-ġi₄</p> <p>Utu answered him from heaven. Why reduplicate the ġi₄? inim...ġi₄ regularly takes -ni- (Thomsen 303). -ni- is the locative prefix, here used to denote the second object</p>

	(‘him’) of the compound verb. It can also be used in a strict locative sense and as a causative (Thomsen 235f.). an-na-ta (rather than an-ta) is odd. Kramer’s translation “assumes that the -ta of the first complex is an error for -ke ₄ ” (1947:32). NiR has an-ta.
20	<p>ġuruš dumu-gir₁₅ ni₂-zu-a ħe₂-me-en kur-ra a-na-bi-me-en</p> <p>Young man, in yourself you are indeed a citizen, in the mountains what will you be? Thomsen translates ‘what are you to the land?’ (lit.: ‘of the land its ‘what’ are you?’) (76). One would expect nam-dumu-gir₁₅ ‘citizenship’ rather than dumu-gir₁₅ ‘citizen.’ (This note is obsolete now that I changed my translation.) The collocation ġuruš dumu-gir₁₅ is also used in administrative texts, so ġuruš may not be the vocative → ‘You are indeed in yourself a fine young male citizen.’ [YES] Westbrook (Wilcke Festschrift 333-339) notes that while dumu-gir₁₅ means ‘city-dweller’ in literary contexts, in legal sources it is used in opposition to slavery and may specifically mean one freed from slavery. Edzard notes that the affirmative serves ‘to remove doubt, on the side of the listener, about what is being said’ (117). Utu’s response seems to indicate that Gilgamesh is something special in the city but has no reputation in the mountains. This makes sense since Gilgamesh is considered the lord of Unug/Kulab. The idea being portrayed here is the further east you go the further back in time you move, and people lived longer in the past—primitive but pristine. ni₂ ‘body’ and me ‘essence’ are played on in the sense that there is duality implicit to the person (connected to use of me and ni₂ (also ni₂-te and me-te) as ‘self.’</p>
21	<p>^dutu inim ga-ra-ab-dug₄ inim-ġu₁₀-uš ġeštug₂-zu</p> <p>O Utu, I will indeed speak a word to you. To my word is your ear. ‘Your ear at my word.’</p>
22	<p>silim ga-ra-ab-dug₄ ġizzal ħe₂-em-ši-ak</p> <p>Healthily I will speak it to you. May you (do hearing =) listen. I will speak elegantly to you. You should indeed pay attention. For ġizzal—ak see PSD A/III 85f. Why ġizzal—ak instead of ġeštug₂—ak? Is there a semantic difference, or is the difference purely orthographic? It likely cannot be purely orthographic due to the difference in pronunciation. In the literary texts, ġeštug₂—ak prefers the prefix /mu-/ whereas ġizzal—ak prefers /ba-/. The -m- of ħe₂-em-ši-ak is considered the ventive element, i.e., motion toward the speaker. The nuance would be, “May you listen to me.” Jacobsen called -m- the “mark of propinquity to (zero mark for collative) the area of the speech situation,” noting that it is “neutral as to direction of motion.” There is debate about whether -m- is related to the conjugation prefix mu-, but at this point it seems to me unlikely. See Thomsen pp. 172-175. Edzard takes -mši- as a terminative variant of the ventive comitative -mda- (p. 105). Both -mši- and -mda- are considered by Edzard third sg. non-person, but he seems to contradict himself with his example when he marks ‘herself’ as <i>non-person</i> ventive: ad im-dab₅-ge₄-ge₄ [i-mda-b-gege] ‘(Nisaba) was consulting with (the tablet) for herself (ventive)’ (p. 105). Regardless, on Edzard’s understanding of -mši- as third sg., ġizzal ħe₂-em-ši-ak should be understood as, “May you indeed listen to it (i.e., what Gilgamesh is about to say).” NiK (YBC 9857; for line drawing see JCS 1: 23) has ħe₂-em-ši-ia-ak. Typically, one would expect the phonetic compliment in the manuscripts from Ur, not Nippur. A similar line can be found in ELA 627; Proverbs (Susa) 622:26:1; ID 31A; LA 212; IŠ 10, 80, 150; EA 70</p>
23	<p>iri^{ki}-ġa₂ lu₂ ba-uš₂ šag₄ ba-sag₃</p> <p>In my city, man dies. The heart is struck. ġa₂ is from ġu₁₀-a ‘in my.’ šag₄...sag₃ almost always takes ba.</p>
24	<p>lu₂ u₂-gu ba-an-de₂ šag₄-ġu₁₀ ba-an-gig</p> <p>Man is lost. It returns a bad heart (ie, it is depressing). Here with ġu₁₀ ‘I am depressed.’ u₂-gu...de₂ = ‘lost, i.e. to die’ Two mss have šag₄ ħul instead of šag₄-ġu₁₀ lu₂ right before a verb is a way of forming the passive. Agent defocusing, impersonal passive.</p>
25	<p>bad₃-da gu₂-ġu₁₀ im-ma-an-la₂</p> <p>I strained my neck over the wall. With im-ma the subject has some force to act. šu ba-ti ‘he received’ šu im-ma-ti ‘he seized’ A similar phrase occurs in Gilgamesh and Agga lines 66 and 89. Karahashi translates, “He leaned over the wall” (Karahashi 2000: 100). Gilgamesh builds the wall of Uruk (king lists, SB and OB Gilgamesh, prologue to SB Gilgamesh), so now he is</p>

	trying to look over the wall. He is a shepherd protector who builds the wall of the city just like a shepherd builds the sheep pen.
26	ad ₆ a-a ib ₂ -dirig-ge igi im-ma-an-sig ₁₀
	The river carries cadavers in the water. This is what I see. dirig is to float something. ‘see in the sense of being affected by it’ = contemplated (taking the im-ma as middle) See translation of these lines in Woods.
27	u ₃ ġe ₂₆ -e ur ₅ -gin ₇ nam-ba-ak-e ur ₅ -še ₃ ħe ₂ -me-a
	And for me, like so, indeed will happen. This is the way it is. nam-ba-ak-e is highly idiomatic. Has <i>marû</i> where we would expect <i>hamṭu</i> . On ur ₅ ‘this’ see Thomsen § 100.
28	lu ₂ suku _x (SUKUD)-ra ₂ an-še ₃ nu-mu-un-da-la ₂
	A tall man is not able to reach heaven. -da- here is the abilitive → ‘to be able’
29	lu ₂ daġal-la kur-ra la-ba-an-šu ₂ -šu ₂
	A wide man does not cover the land.
30	murgu ġuruš-e til ₃ -la saġ til ₃ -le-bi-še ₃ la-ba-ra-an-e ₃ -a
	after a man is finished he cannot come out to live again. cf. line 4
31	kur-ra ga-an-kur ₉ mu-ġu ₁₀ ga-am ₃ -ġar
	I will indeed enter the mountains; I will indeed establish my renown.
32	ki mu gub-bu-ba-am ₃ mu-ġu ₁₀ ga-bi ₂ -ib-gub
	In the place where names are established, I will establish my name.
33	ki mu nu-gub-bu-ba-am ₃ mu diġir-re-e-ne ga-bi ₂ -ib-gub
	In the place where names are not, I will establish the name of the gods. Gilgamesh seems to be interested in spreading the renown of the Sumerian pantheon. This seems to not be too unlike Yahweh’s desire to spread his name among the nations by taking a nation and blessing them.
34	^d utu er ₂ -na kadra-gin ₇ šu ba-an-ši-in-ti
	Utu accepted his tears as a gift.
35	lu ₂ arġuš-a-gin ₇ arġuš ba-ni-in-ak
	As a compassionate man would do, he showed him compassion.
36	ur-saġ dumu ama dili-me-eš 7-me-eš
	There are seven heroes, the sons of a single mother.
37	1(diš)-am ₃ šeš-gal-bi šu piriġ-ġa ₂ umbin ħu-ri ₂ -in-na
	The first, their eldest brother, has the hand of a lion (i.e., lion’s paws) and the talon’s of an eagle. ħu-ri ₂ -in = eagle; umbin = nail, claw The seven are metaphors for specialists of travel, reflecting the reality of traveling in the mountains (here, the Zagros) in the ancient Near East. The first brother represents physical strength and mountain climbing.
38	2(min)-kam-‘ma’ muš-šag ₄ -tur ₃ ka [X X] KU šu ‘UŠ’
	The second, a small snake... muš-šag ₄ -tur ₃ occurs in ur ₅ -ra = ħubullu. Brothers 2 and 3 can slip through difficult spots in the road.
39	3(eš ₅)-kam-ma muš ušum-gal ‘muš’ [...] X RU
	The third, a great horned viper...
40	4(limmu ₅)-kam-ma izi šeġ ₆ -šeġ ₆ [X X] ‘kur ₉ ’-ra
	The fourth, all the blazing fires...entering... This brother is an expert at lighting fires, necessary in extended wilderness travel. Cf. the use of flint in Lugalbanda. Possible that šeġ ₆ -šeġ ₆ be read šeġ ₇ ‘rain;’ cf. GHB (šeġ ₇ = IM). If so, then the idea is that this brother can light fires even in the rain.
41	5(ia ₂)-kam-ma muš-saġ-kal šag ₄ gi ₄ -a ‘UB’ KA X
	The fifth, a snake... It is possible that UB.KA is poison; cf. uš ₁₁ (KAxBAD, also read uḫ ₄) ‘poison’ Akk. <i>imtu</i>
42	6(aš ₃)-kam-ma a-ġi ₆ du ₇ -du ₇ -gin ₇ kur-ra gaba ra-ra
	The sixth like a battering flood strikes the mountains.

	<p>gaba...ra compound verb meaning ‘strike’ Why is there no prefix chain for the verb? Translate as gerund/adj. → ‘beating at the mountains’ One ms (Ki A) has a gul-gul-dam instead of du₇-du₇-gin₇. One ms adds ^{gis}rab₃ ki-bal ħur-saġ ‘IM’ [...] after 6-kam-ma. This brother is one who can cross rivers and mountain torrents.</p>
43	<p>7(umun₇)-kam’-[ma ...] nim’-gin₇ i₃-ġir₂-ġir₂-re lu₂ nu-‘da-gur’-de₃</p> <p>The seventh flashes like lightning; no one can escape. nim = lightning; ġir₂ = to flash One ms adds a₂-bi after i₃-ġir₂-ġir₂-re. Is there no CP on the verb nu-/da-gur\de₃? Is this normal? Two ms add (different) lines here (one of which includes the line 7-dili-dili). Note the frequent use of reduplicated forms in these lines, expressing continuity and plurality. This brother knows how to deal with mountain weather.</p>
44	<p>ma₂-ur₃-ma₂-ur₃ ħur-saġ-ġa₂-ke₄ ħu-mu-ni-in-tum₂-tum₂-mu</p> <p>To all the portage-places of the mountains he will carry them. tum₂ = marû sg. of de₆. The ‘portage-places’ are those places where one has to lift the boat out of the water and carry it around an obstacle such as rapids or a waterfall.</p>
45	<p>7-‘bi-e’-ne ‘ur’-saġ šul^d utu^d gilgameš₂-ra mu-‘un-na-ra-an’-šum₂</p> <p>The hero youth Utu gave those 7 to Gilgamesh. OR Those 7, the heroes, youth Utu gave to Gilgamesh. Three mss have instead ur-saġ šul^d utu en^d gilgameš₂ 7-be₂-e-ne mu-na-ra-an-šum₂</p>
46	<p>^{gis}erin sag₃-ge ħul₂-la-gin₇ im-ma-na-ni-ib₂-ġar</p> <p>The felling of cedars made him very happy. ‘very’ is an attempt to express middle im-ma. ‘The feller of cedars was filled with rejoicing’ is inaccurate because the person made happy always takes the dative. See Woods.</p>
47	<p>en^d gilgameš₂-e ħul₂-la-gin₇ im-ma-na-ni-ib₂-ġar</p> <p>The lord Gilgamesh was filled with rejoicing.</p>
48	<p>iri^{ki}-na lu₂ dili-gin₇ si gu₃ ba-ni-in-ra</p> <p>In his city, like one man, the horn was sounded. This line is difficult to convey in sensible English. The idea is that when the whole city is addressed it is like addressing one man. si = horn, si gu₃...ra always takes ba- I translate passive because of ba-, but maybe the passive should be more lexical (horn is sounded rather than making noise itself) since there is a historic patient gu₃.</p>
49	<p>lu₂ 2 tab-ba-gin₇ gu₃ teš₂ ba-ni-in-ra</p> <p>He called out in unity for men in parallel twos. KA teš₂...ra = ‘call together’</p>
50	<p>e₂ tuku e₂-a-ni-še₃ ama tuku ama-a-ni-še₃</p> <p>He who has a house, to his house. He who has a mother, to his mother. The idea is that the men who will go with Gilgamesh are to be culled from those that have families and those that are not yet of age.</p>
51	<p>ni^{ta}ħ saġ-dili (NITA^ħ.ME.EŠ sag-di-lu-u₂) ġe₂₆-e-gin₇ ak a₂-ġu₁₀-še₃ ħu-mu-un-ak</p> <p>Each man like me do as I (do) and ‘do’ towards my strength, i.e., may he act on my behalf. dili means ‘one’ as in ‘each,’ not unmarried or ‘single’ Four mss add 50-am₃ after ak. ħu- in this line marks foregrounding. Compare with line 53 where ba- marks background information.</p>
52	<p>e₂ tuku e₂-a-ni-še₃ ama tuku ama-a-ni-še₃</p> <p>He who has a house to his house and he who has a mother to his mother.</p>
53	<p>ni^{ta}ħ saġ-dili e-ne-gin₇ ak 50-am₃ a₂-ni-še₃ ba-an-ak-eš</p> <p>There were 50 individual men like him who gathered to his strength. This line is backgrounded by the use of ba-. Cf. line 51.</p>
54	<p>e₂ simug-še₃ ġiri₃-ni bi₂-in-gub (uš-ta-ka-AŠ-[...])</p> <p>He set off toward the smithy. simug = smith uš-ta-ka-AŠ-[...] is an Akkadian gloss.</p>

55	^{urud} a ₂ -aš-ġar ^{urud} aga-silig a ₂ nam-ur-saġ-ni im-ma-ni-de ₂ -de ₂
	He poured (cast) the ‘ashgar’ and ‘agasilig,’ weapons of his warriorhood. The a ₂ -aš-ġar aga-silig are two types of axes. im-ma (the middle) is used here to denote the idea of ‘for his own benefit.’ ni-de ₂ -de ₂ denote the plural object.
56	^{ġis} kiri ₆ -ġi ₆ eden-na ġiri ₃ -ni bi ₂ -in-gub
	He set off to gardens of deep shade. kiri ₆ -ġi ₆ = ‘black garden of the steppe’ i.e., an orchard
57	^{ġis} esi ^{ġis} ħa-lu-ub ₂ ^{ġis} ħašħur ^{ġis} taškarin-na-ka im-ma-ni-sag ₃ -sag ₃
	He cut down ebony, oak, apple and box trees. im-ma (the middle) used here to denote ‘for his own benefit’ (cf. line 55).
58	dumu iri-na mu-un-de ₃ -re ₇ -eš-am ₃ [...]
	They were sons of his city... One ms adds the line ur-saġ dumu /ama\ [dili ...]. am ₃ makes the statement emphatic and subjunctive. -ere- is the ħamtu plural of ġin. -nda- = ‘with him’ (-n- animate)
59	1-am ₃ šeš-gal-bi šu piriġ-ġa ₂ umbin ħu-ri ₂ -in ^{mušen} -na
	The first, their eldest brother, has the hand of a lion (i.e., lion’s paws) and the talon’s of an eagle. cf. line 37
60	ma ₂ -ur ₃ -ma ₂ -ur ₃ ħur-saġ-ġa ₂ -ke ₄ ħu-mu-ni-in-tum ₂ -tum ₂ -mu
	To all the portage-places of the mountains they will carry you. cf. line 44
61	ħur-saġ 1-kam-ma in-di ₃ -bal-lam ^{ġis} erin šaġ ₄ -ga-ni nu-mu-ni-in-pad ₃
	The first mountain was crossed. His heart did not find any cedar. -nda- abilitive (di < da + *i) am ₃ denotes subjunctive first clause. šaġ ₄ -ga-ni could be appositive to erin. -ni- is locative → ‘His heart did not find any cedar <i>there</i> (on the first mountain).’ One ms has nu-mu-[un-na]-šub. The same ms also adds five lines, while a different ms adds four (similar) lines.
62	ħur-saġ 7-kam-ma bal-e-da-bi ^{ġis} erin šaġ ₄ -ga-ni mu-ni-in-pad ₃
	The seventh mountain, in their crossing, his heart found cedar. /-ed/ form (participle) in the first clause makes it subjunctive or relative to the <i>ħamtu</i> of the second? /bal-ed-a-bi/
63	en ₃ nu-un-tar ki nu-un-kiġ ₂
	He did not ask, he did not have to search. en ₃ ...tar = ask (en ₃ = LI); kiġ ₂ = search
64	^d gilgameš ₂ ^{ġis} erin-na al-saġ ₃ -ge
	Gilgamesh was cutting down cedar. al- makes the sentence stative or habitual ‘he was cutting’ rather than ‘he cut.’ See Edzard 111.
65	en-ki-du ₁₀ pa-bi i ₃ -ku ₅ -ru ‘NE’ [(...)] KI TUM [X] X ^d gilgameš ₂ -še ₃ [...]
	Enkidu trimming their branches...to Gilgamesh... One ms has instead en-ki-du ₁₀ ^{ġis} pa-‘bi’ [...] dumu iri-na ‘mu’- [...]
66	gu-ru-‘ma’ [...] X X-‘ma’ im-ma-gub
	They were making piles... gu-ru-ma = ‘pile’
67	ni ₂ ‘te’-[...] ‘mu-na’-ra-an-la ₂
	approached self...hung... There is a play on words here. ni ₂ can be ‘fear or ‘self,’ thus the idea could be ‘He himself came out’ or ‘His fearsomeness came out.’ One ms has four different lines instead of 65-67.
68	^d [gilgameš ₂] [...] X ‘u ₃ ’-sa ₂ -gin ₇ ba-an-dab ₅
	Gilgamesh... was seized as if asleep.
69	[...] kur-ku-gin ₇ ba-an-ġar
	...He was struck as if by a wave.

	kur-ku = ‘wave’
70	dumu ṛir ^{ki} -na mu-un-de ₃ -re ₇ -eš-am ₃
	They were sons of his city who went with him. cf. line 58
71	ur-gir ₁₅ tur-tur-gin ₇ ġiri ₃ -ni-še ₃ šu ba-an-dub ₂ -dub ₂ -me-eš
	They stumbled at his feet like puppies.
72	en-ki-du ₁₀ im-zig ₃ ma ₂ -mu ₂ -da in-bu-luḥ u ₃ -sa ₂ -ga-am ₃
	Enkidu awoke from his nightmare. This is a set expression for waking up from a nightmare. Literally something along the lines of ‘Enkidu arose, shuddering from a dream as he was sleeping.’ zig ₃ = to rise; ma ₂ -mu ₂ = dream; bu-luḥ = shudder; u ₃ -sa ₂ = sleep
73	igi-ni šu bi ₂ -in-gur ₁₀ niġ ₂ -me-ġar sug ₄ -ga-am ₃
	He rubbed his eyes; it was full of silence. niġ ₂ -me-ġar = silence; sug ₄ = usually ‘to place;’ OB Aa 148:6-7 = MSL 2 133 vii 49 has [su-ú] [SU] = <i>me-re-e-nu</i> (<i>mērēnu</i>) [SU] = <i>e-ri-iš-šum</i> (<i>ēriššum</i>).
74	šu mu-un-tag-ge nu-mu-un-na-an-zi-zi-i
	He touched (Gilgameš), he could not rouse him. Taking the direct object (Gilgameš) and putting it into the dative case (-na-) indicates that the object was not really affected. zi-zi is the <i>marû</i> of zig ₃ .
75	gu ₃ mu-un-na-de ₂ -e inim nu-mu-ni-ib-ġi ₄ -ġi ₄
	He shouted, he did not reply.
76	i ₃ -nu ₂ -na i ₃ -nu ₂ -na
	You who went to sleep; you who went to sleep. Taking -na as 2 nd person ending -en plus the nominalizer, although the lack of a main clause to support the subordinate nominative construction leads one to suspect that -na should be understood as a truncated -am ₃ . The translation would then be, ‘you who are sleeping’ and the -am ₃ would make the clause emphatic. Sleep seems to be used in this and the following line as a minor counterpart of death. Note the metaphors for death in the lines following.
77	^d gilgameš ₂ en TUR kul-aba ^{ki} -a en ₃ -še ₃ i ₃ -nu ₂ -de ₃ -en
	Gilgamesh, the junior lord of Kulaba, how long will you sleep? en ₃ -še ₃ appears to be a set phrase meaning ‘how long.’ It is understandably common in laments (15 occurrences) but only appears four times outside of laments, three of those in Gilgamesh and Huwawa (two in version A [lines 77 and 81] and once in version B [line 80]). The other occurrence is Inana’s Descent line 357. It is glossed as <i>a-di ma-ti</i> in OBGT I/1 738. Interestingly, me-na-še ₃ and en-na-me-še ₃ are also glossed <i>a-di ma-ti</i> while adding am ₃ to any of those three phrases yields the gloss <i>a-di ma-ti-ma</i> . I am personally unaware of any occurrences of me-na-še ₃ in the literary corpus. However, en-na-me-še ₃ occurs three times (Lament for Nibru 31; A Man and His God 100; and The Debate Between Bird and Fish 161). The verb i ₃ -nu ₂ -de ₃ -en can be analyzed nud-en (nu ₂ = nud) or nu ₂ -ede-en. Cf. line 76 which does not have the -d- (at least not in a phonetic complement, given that nu ₂ could be read nud).
78	kur ba-an-suḥ ₃ -suḥ ₃ ġissu ba-an-la ₂
	The mountains are becoming blurry as the shadows fall. suḥ ₃ = blur; ġissu = shade See parallel in LSU 82: an ba-suḥ ₃ -suḥ ₃ ġissu ba-an-la ₂ ‘Heaven was darkened, it was covered by shadow.’ Lines 78-80 contain metaphors for death. Note that the metaphors for death are sandwiched in lines 77 and 81 by the minor counterpart sleep: “Gilgameš, how long will you sleep?”
79	an-usan še-er-še-er-bi im-ma-ġen
	Of evening, its brightness is going. an-usan = evening; še-er = brightness; reddening The last rays of evening have come forth. im-ma- in its capacity of middle voice marker indicates ‘to go from there to here.’ im-ma-ġen functions like a Gt seperative and ventive. (Ventive is a term used by Assyriologists for what linguists call the allative. It refers to motion towards the speaker. See Heunergaard) This understanding of the prefix im-ma- works well with verbs of motion but not other verbs. See Woods.
80	^d utu ur ₂ ama-ni ^d nin-gal-še ₃ saġ il ₂ -la mu-un-ġen
	Utu has gone proudly to the bosom of his mother Ningal. ur ₂ = root; bosom

	saĝ il ₂ -la...ĝen = lit. 'go with raised head' i.e., to go proudly Gilgameš is going to the Netherworld.
81	^d gilgameš ₂ en-še ₃ i ₃ -nu ₂ -de ₃ -en Gilgamesh, how long will you sleep? The en- of en-še ₃ could be understood as a homophonous spelling to en ₃ above (line 77) but is more likely a short form of en-na-me-še ₃ . See note under line 77. As noted above, lines 74-81 poetically present Gilgameš as though he is dead through the use of sleep, sunset, and death images.
82	dumu iri ^{ki} -za mu-un-de ₃ -re ₇ -eš-am ₃ The sons of your city who came with you (e)-re ₇ is the <i>hamtu</i> plural of ĝin.
83	ur ₂ ĥur-saĝ-ĝa ₂ -ka nam-ba-e-de ₃ -gub-bu-ne at the foot of the mountains should not be left standing. u-ne < ene 3 rd pl <i>marû</i> ; however, plural form of the verb should be su ₈ (𒍪), not gub (𒍪). na + <i>marû</i> = prohibitive; hence the translation 'should not...' nam-ba- is unusual. Thomsen notes that, 'it is not completely clear whether nam-ba/bi ₂ - represents /na-ĩ-ba(bi)/ or rather /na-ba(bi)/ and thus, in the latter case, replace na-ba-... and na-bi ₂ -...' (p. 194). Diakonoff took the form nam-ba- as an indicator of a form nã- for both the prohibitive and affirmative modal prefixes (referenced in Edzard 1971 p. 219 n. 32 and taken up by Thomsen p. 194 n. 78).
84	ama ugu-bi tilla ₂ iri ^{ki} -za-ka eš ₂ nam-bi ₂ -ib-sar-re Their mothers should not have to twine string in the square of your city. tilla ₂ = town square ama-ugu = lit. 'mother of [your] head' i.e., 'birth mother' Twine string is used as a metaphor for waiting and may be an idiom for weaving. Widows often supported themselves by weaving.
85	ĝeštug ₂ zid-da-na ba-e-sig ₁₀ He placed this into his right ear. The -e- of ba-e-sig ₁₀ seems to be the locative. One would expect -ni-. 2 nd person -e- does not fit the context.
86	inim nam-ur-saĝ-ĝa ₂ -ka-ni tug ₂ -gin ₇ mu-ni-in-dul He covered him with his heroic words as if with a garment. dul = to cover One ms adds linen, ga-da-gin ₇ im-in-ĝar to the end of the line. 'Linen' is usually gada (𒌦) rather than ga-da. NiA has the verbal prefix im-mi- instead of mu-. tug ₂ -gin ₇ ...dul is drawn to the conjugation prefix im-ma- because of its normally middle voice use.
87	tug ₂ 30 giĝ ₄ i ₃ -a šu mu-un-niĝin ₂ -niĝin ₂ gaba-na im-ma-da-dul He gathered in his hand a cloth with thirty shekels of oil on it and covered his chest. Some mss have mu-ni-il ₂ (picked up) instead of mu-un-niĝin ₂ -niĝin ₂ . One ms has ba-an-bur (rubbed) instead of im-ma-da-dul. See Reiner in Speiser Festschrift for explanation of 30 shekels of oil. It is not a large amount.
88	gud-gin ₇ ki gal-la ba-e-gub Like an ox on the great earth he (Gilgamesh) stood. ki-gal can be 'pedestal.'
89	gu ₂ ki-še ₃ bi ₂ -in-ĝar gu ₃ ba-an-da-sig ₁₀ Bending his neck towards the earth, he yelled at him nda = 3 rd sg comitative.
90	zi ama ugu-ĝu ₁₀ ^d nin-sumun ₂ -ka a-a-ĝu ₁₀ kug ^d lugal-ban ₃ -da By the life of my mother Ninsumun and my father holy Lugalbanda Kramer notes that it is possible that a-a (rather than ab-ba or ad-da) is used as an honorific term rather than paternal (1947:3 n.1).
91	du ₁₀ -ub ama ugu-ĝu ₁₀ ^d nin-sumun ₂ -ka u ₃ -sa ₂ dug ₄ -ga-gin ₇ ĥa-ma-dim ₂ -ma Like sleeping in the lap of my mother Ninsumun shall I indeed be fashioned? (OR Shall I behave like I'm asleep...)
92	2-kam-ma-še ₃ in-ga-nam-mu-na-ab-be ₂ A 2 nd time also he spoke to him the -b- before the verbal root is for the implied object inim. Edzard notes the possibility that [inga] should be lexically isolated from the verb as 'also' (126).

93	zi ama ugu-ĝu ₁₀ ^d nin-sumun ₂ -ka a-a-ĝu ₁₀ kug ^d lugal-ban ₃ -da
	By the life of my mother Ninsumun and my father holy Lugalbanda
94	en-na lu ₂ -bi lu ₂ -u ₁₈ -lu ħe ₂ -a im-ma-zu-a-a-aš diĝir ħe ₂ -a(am ₃) im-ma-zu-a-aš
	Until I know if that person is human or a god mu-zu is 'to know very well.' im-ma-/ba-zu is 'to learn.' Some mss have -am ₃ instead of -a-aš.
95	ĝiri ₃ kur-še ₃ gub-ba-ĝu ₁₀ iri ^{ki} -še ₃ ba-ra-gub-be ₂ -en
	My steps to the mountains, let me not step to the city.
96	arad zi ba-an-dug ₃ nam-til ₃ ba-an-ku ₇ -ku ₇
	As for the servant, living is good, life was attractive
97	lugal-a-ni-ir inim mu-ni-ib-gi ₄ -gi ₄
	He answered his master
98	lugal-ĝu ₁₀ za-e lu ₂ -ba igi nu-mu-ni-in-du ₈ -a šag ₄ nu-mu-ni-dab ₅ -be ₂ -en
	"My master, you have not seen that man, you are not seized of heart (i.e., terrified).
99	ĝe ₂₆ -e lu ₂ -ba igi mu-ni-du ₈ -a šag ₄ mu-ni-dab ₅ -be ₂ -en
	I have seen that man and I am vexed.
100	ur-saĝ ka-ga ₁₄ -ni ka ušumgal-la-kam
	His lion's mouth is the mouth of a dragon. As for the warrior, his teeth are the teeth of a dragon.
101	igi-ni igi piriĝ-ĝa ₂ -kam
	His eyes are the eyes of a lion.
102	ĜIŠ.GABA-a-ni a-ĝi ₆ du ₇ -du ₇ -dam
	His chest is a raging flood. -dam from -ede + the copulative. ĝiš-gaba may be 'breast plate' rather than 'chest.'
103	saĝ-ki-ni ĝiš-gi bi ₂ -gu ₇ -a lu ₂ nu-mu-da-teĝ ₃ -ĝe ₂₆ -e-dam
	No man can approach his head, which eats reed. The imagery may be of a fire 'consuming reeds.' One ms has nu-mu-un-da-kar-re-de ₃ . Two mss add the line uš ₁₁ -da-a ur-maḥ lu ₂ gu ₇ -a uš ₂ nu-ra-gid ₂ -de ₃ . One mss adds five lines.
104	lugal-ĝu ₁₀ za-e kur-še ₃ u ₅ -a ĝe ₂₆ -e iri ^{ki} -še ₃ ga-u ₅
	My master, you travel to the mountains, I will travel to the city.
105	ama-zu-ur ₂ i ₃ -til ₃ -zu ga-na-ab-dug ₄ zu ₂ -zu ₂ ħe ₂ -li ₉ -li ₉
	To your mother I will say you live; she will laugh.
106	eĝer-ra ba-uš ₂ -zu ga-na-ab-dug ₄ er ₂ -zu ħe ₂ -še ₈ -še ₈
	Afterwards I will say you are dead and she will weep over you. er ₂ ... še ₈ -še ₈ is always reduplicated (probably due to the iterative nature of weeping). One ms has er ₂ gig 'bitterly' instead of er ₂ -zu. One ms adds the line [...] mu-na-ni-ib-gi ₄ -gi ₄ .
107	ĝar-ra en-ki-du ₁₀ lu ₂ 2-e nu-uš ₂ -e ^{giš} ma ₂ -da-la ₂ nu-su-su
	Steady, Enkidu. Two men will not die. A bound boat will not sink. Lines 107-115 contain proverbs. The bound boat represents Gilgameš and Enkidu bound together.
108	tug ₂ 3 tab-ba lu ₂ nu-kud-de ₃
	A 3-ply garment (or rope) no one can cut. tug ₂ should perhaps be read eš ₂ 'rope.'
109	bad ₃ -da a lu ₂ nu-šu ₂ -šu ₂
	On the wall water cannot overwhelm a man.
110	e ₂ gi-sig-ga izi nu-te-en-te-en
	In a reed house fire is not extinguished. Here izi...te-en. Cf. nu ₂ ...te-en 'to relax, cool off.'
111	za-e ĝe ₂₆ -e taḥ-ma-ab ĝe ₂₆ -e za-e ga-ra-ab-taḥ a-na-me lu ₂ ba-an-tum ₃
	You, help me! I will help you. What is it that anyone can do against us?
112	ba-su-a-ba ba-su-a-ba

	It sank; it sank Lines 112-115 seem to be a proverbial song.
113	ud ^{gis} ma ₂ ma ₂ -gan ^{ki} ba-su-a-ba when the magan barge sank
114	^{gis} ma ₂ -gur ₈ ^{gis} ma ₂ -gi ₄ -lum ba-su-a-ba The magilum barge sank.
115	^{gis} ma ₂ -da-la ₂ ^{gis} ma ₂ zi-šag ₄ -ġal ₂ -la-ka šag ₄ ġal ₂ -la i ₃ -in-dab ₅ The life boat that seizes the living did not sink. One ms has la-ba-ni-ib-su instead of šag ₄ ġal ₂ -la i ₃ -in-dab ₅ .
116	ġa ₂ -nam-ma ga-an-ši-re ₇ -en-de ₃ -en igi ħu-mu-ni-ib-du ₈ -ru-en-de ₃ -en Let us go after him and see him
117	tukum-bi in-ši-re ₇ -en-de ₃ -en If we pursue him
118	ni ₂ i ₃ -ġal ₂ ni ₂ i ₃ -ġal ₂ gi ₄ -a there will be fear. There will be fear. Return!
119	umun ₂ i ₃ -ġal ₂ umun ₂ i ₃ -ġal ₂ gi ₄ -a There will be blood. There will be blood. Return!
120	niġ ₂ šag ₄ -zu ġa ₂ -nam-ma ga-an-ši-re ₇ -en-de ₃ -en The matter is in your heart. Let us go after him.
121	nitaḥ 60 nindan la-ba-teġ ₃ -ġe ₂₆ -e-da-aš A man cannot approach to within
122	ħu-wa-wa e ₂ ^{gis} erin-na-ka-ni in-ga-an-dab ₅ Huwawa has reached his house among the cedars.
123	igi mu-ši-in-bar igi uš ₂ -a-kam He looks, it is the look of death.
124	saġ mu-un-na-an-bul-bul saġ nam-tag-/ga\ sug ₄ -ga-am ₃ He shakes (his) head, it is a ‘hand touching’ (a gesture) of reproach. One ms adds the line gu ₃ mu-un-na-de ₂ -a inim nam-ma-sud-[su ₃]-ud
125	ġurus ba-da-me-en-na iri ^{ki} ama tud-da-zu nu-ub-ši-in-gur-ru-de ₃ ? You are a young man, to the city where your mother bore you, you will return.
126	sa-na ġiri ₃ -na ni ₂ ba-an-ri ni ₂ te-a-ni ba-an-ri Fear and terror spread through his sinews and his feet. One ms adds ^d gilgameš ₂ to the beginning of the line.
127	ġiri ₃ -ni ki-a li-bi ₂ -in-’de ₃ ’-gi ₄ His feet on the ground he could not return.
128	ġiri ₃ umbin gal-a-ni ‘ġiri ₃ ’ [(X)] ba-an-us ₂ His foot’s big toe stuck to the path.
129	zag-na NU ₁₁ -na ba-ni-ri? In his side...
130	i ₃ -a lum-lum u ₃ -luḥ-ḥa sud-sud Oh oil-glistening one, adorned with the scepter Marchesi (followed by Frayne) translates “adorned with shoots.” Frayne connects this line to a cylinder seal that shows vegetation arising from the shoulders of a figure clad in a lion's pelt (no. 213 in D. Collon 1982). He goes on to say, “The glistening oil involved was conceivably used to prepare the hero for combat, perhaps alluding to the story of the <i>mikkû</i> and <i>pukku</i> games found in the Sumerian and Akkadian material, and if so, would be reminiscent of the Olympic contests in ancient Greece, where the basic equipment of an athlete comprised of an oil and unguent jar (<i>aryballos</i>) and a scraping instrument (<i>strigil</i>) for anointing and cleaning himself. The shoots shown adorning the hero in the seal art, according to our interpretation, would be a forerunner of the wreaths accorded to the Olympic victors” (Frayne 167). Incidentally, this is the opening line of GHB.
131	dumu-gir ₁₅ giri ₁₇ -zal diġir-re-e-ne Native son, glory of the gods

132	gud lipiš-tuku me ₃ -a gub-ba
	Angry bull, stationed for a fight
133	ama-zu dumu tud-da maḥ-bi in-ga-an-zu
	Your mother knew birthing children magnificently well.
134	emeda(UM.ME)-ga-la ₂ -zu dumu ur ₂ -ra ga gu ₇ maḥ-bi in-ga-an-zu
	Your nurse knew magnificently well feeding children on the lap.
135	ni ₂ na-an-teḡ ₃ -ḡe ₂₆ -e-en šu ki-a sig ₁₀ -bi ₂ -ib
	Don't be afraid; place (your) hand on the ground.
136	šu ki-a bi ₂ -in-sig ₁₀ inim mu-na-ab-be ₂
	He placed the hand on the ground and spoke.
137	zi ama ugu-ḡu ₁₀ ^d nin-sumun ₂ -ka a-a-ḡu ₁₀ kug ^d lugal-ban ₃ -da
	By the life of my mother Ninsumun and my father holy Lugalbanda
138	kur-ra tuš-a-zu ba-ra-zu kur-ra tuš-a-zu ḥe ₂ -zu-am ₃
	Your dwelling in the mountains is not known; your dwelling in the mountains, let it be known.
139	en-me-barag ₂ -ge ₄ -e-si nin ₉ gal-ḡu ₁₀ nam-dam-še ₃ kur-ra ḥu-mu-ra-ni-kur ₉ -ra
	Enmebaragesi my eldest sister for a wife to the mountains I will indeed bring for you.
140	2-kam-ma-še ₃ in-ga-na-mu-na-ab-be ₂
	A second time he spoke to him.
141	zi ama ugu-ḡu ₁₀ ^d nin-sumun ₂ -ka a-a-ḡu ₁₀ kug ^d lugal-ban ₃ -da
	By the life of my mother Ninsumun and my father holy Lugalbanda
142	kur-ra tuš-a-zu ba-ra-zu kur-ra tuš-a-zu ḥe ₂ -zu-am ₃
	In the mountains your dwelling is indeed not known; your dwelling in the mountains, let it be known.
143	MA-tur nin ₉ ban ₃ -da-ḡu ₁₀ nam-lukur-še ₃ kur-ra ḥu-mu-ra-ni-kur ₉ -ra-am ₃
	My little sister to be your concubine to the mountains I have indeed brought for you.
144	ni ₂ -zu ba-am ₃ -ma-ra su-za ga-an-kur ₉
	Your fearsomeness (or your 'self') give to me; let me become your relative.
145	ni ₂ te-a-ni 1-am ₃ mu-na-ra-an-ba
	His first fearsomeness he (Huwawa) gave to him.
146	dumu iri ^{ki} mu-un-de ₃ -re ₇ -eš-a
	The native sons who came with him
147	pa-bi i ₃ -ku ₅ -ru-ne zu ₂ ba-an-keše ₂ -re-ne
	they cut off branches and were binding them.
148	ur ₂ ḥur-saḡ-ḡa ₂ -ka mu-ni-ib-nu ₂ -u ₃ -ne
	They were laying them at the feet of the mountains. Several mss from Ur preserve a more complete, highly repetitive narrative built on the pattern of lines 145-148. Some preserve the repetitions in an extremely abbreviated form. No ms known to be from Nibru preserves the additional lines. One ms of unknown origin adds at least 53 lines (and another fragmentary ms of unknown origin gives an abbreviated version of these, always replacing ni ₂ te by me-lem ₄).” For the additional 53 lines, see also Ellis, “Gilgamesh’ approach to Huwawa: A New Text.” See also van Dijk TIM 9 47 and TLB 2 nr. 4.
149	ni ₂ te-a-ni 7-kam-ma mu-un-na-til-la-ta da-ga-na ba-te
	After he finished his 7 th fearsomeness, he approached his sleeping room.
150	muš gar ₃ ḡeštin-na-gin ₇ murgu-na im-ta-du-du
	He was going to his back like a snake of the wine quay. One ms has šu im-ta-du ₇ -du ₇ instead of im-ta-du-du.
151	ne mu-un-su-ub-ba-gin ₇ te-na tibir-ra ba-ni-in-ra
	As if to kiss...he struck him on the cheek.
152	ḥu-wa-wa zu ₂ ba-an-da-zalag
	Huwawa bared his teeth. One ms adds saḡ-ki ‘ba-da’-guru ₅ -‘uš’. Two mss from Ur add eight lines, while two other mss add different lines (see ETSCL).

153	^d gilgameš ₂ šu ba-am ₃ -tuku ₄
	He took Gilgamesh by the hand. Four mss have šu ba-am ₃ -mu-u ₈ .
154	^d utu-ra inim ga-mu-na-ab-dug ₄
	To Utu I will speak.
155	^d utu ama tud-da-ĝu ₁₀ nu-um-zu a-a buluĝ ₃ -ĝa ₂ -ĝu ₁₀ nu-um-zu
	Utu, my birth mother I don't know; my father who brought me up I don't know.
156	kur-ra mu-un-tud-de ₃ -en za-e mu-un-buluĝ ₃ -e
	Somebody gave birth to me.
157	^d gilgameš ₂ zi an-na ma-an-pad ₃ zi ki-a ma-an-pad ₃ zi kur-ra ma-an-pad ₃
	Gilgamesh swore on the life of sky, he swore on the life of ground, he swore on the life of the mountains.
158	šu-še ₃ mu-un-dab ₅ ki za nam-ba-an-tum ₃
	He seized his hand; he indeed prostrated himself before him. One ms adds [^d hu-wa]- ^r wa [?] to the beginning of the line.
159	ud-ba ^d gilgameš ₂ dumu-gir ₁₅ -ra šag ₄ -ga-ni arĥuš ba-ni-in-tuku
	Then Gilgamesh the native son's heart had pity on him.
160	arad-da-ni en-ki-du ₁₀ -ra gu ₃ mu-un-na-de ₂ -e
	To his servant Enkidu he spoke, Three mss have ^d gilgameš ₂ instead of arad-da-ni.
161	en-ki-du ₁₀ mušen dab ₅ -ba ki-bi-še ₃ ĥa-ba-du
	"Enkidu, let the captured bird go to its land.
162	ĝuruš dab ₅ -ba ur ₂ ama-na-še ₃ ĥe ₂ -gi ₄ -gi ₄
	The captured man to the embrace of his mother let return."
163	en-ki-du ₁₀ -e ^d gilgameš ₂ -ra inim mu-un-ni-ib-gi ₄ -gi ₄
	Enkidu replied to Gilgamesh, Two mss have arad-da-a-ni en-ki-du ₁₀ -e instead of en-ki-du ₁₀ -e ^d gilgameš ₂ -ra.
164	i ₃ -a lum-lum u ₃ -luĥ-ĥa sud-sud
	Oh oil-glistening one, adorned with the scepter
165	^r dumu ^r -gir ₁₅ giri ₁₇ -zal diĝir-re-e- ^r ne ^r
	citizenly glory of the gods
166	gud lipiš-tuku me ₃ -a gub-be ₂
	angry bull, standing in a fight
167	en TUR ^d gilgameš ₂ unug ^{ki} mi ₂ dug ₄ -ga
	young lord Gilgamesh, praised of Unug
168	ama-zu dumu u ₃ -tud maĥ-bi in-ga-an-zu
	your mother also knows well how to bear children
169	emeda(UM.ME)-ga-<la ₂ >-zu(source: ĝu ₁₀) dumu ga gu ₇ «zu» maĥ-bi in-ga-an-zu
	your nurse also knows well how to nurse children
170	suku _x (SUKUD)-ra ₂ dim ₂ -ma nu-tuku
	exalted without possessing understanding One ms has ĝalga instead of dim ₂ -ma (see line 11).
171	nam-tar i ₃ -gu ₇ -e nam-tar nu-ub-zu-zu
	Fate will devour the one not knowing fate.
172	mušen dab ₅ -ba ki-bi-še ₃ du-a-bi
	The seized bird going to its place,
173	ĝuruš dab ₅ -ba ur ₂ ama-na-še ₃ gi ₄ -gi ₄ -dam
	the seized man returning to his mother's embrace,
174	za-e iri ama tud-da-zu nu-ub-ši-gur-ru-de ₃ -en
	you will not go back to the city of your birth mother. One ms adds five lines.

175	ḥu-wa-wa en-ki-du ₁₀ -ra gu ₃ mu-un-na-de ₂ -e
	Huwawa spoke to Enkidu,
176	ġa ₂ -ra en-ki-du ₁₀ inim mu-na-ab-ḥul-ḥul
	“To me, Enkidu, you speak destruction. One ms adds kur ₂ before the verb.
177	lu ₂ ḥuġ-ġa ₂ šag ₄ -gal im-ma-ḥuġ eġer gaba-ri us ₂ -sa inim mu-na-ab-ḥul-ḥul
	A hired man, hired food, you follow after his counterpart, you speak destruction.” Two mss have a-na-aš-am ₃ inim mu-/na-ḥul\-[ḥul] instead of inim mu-na-ab-ḥul-ḥul.
178	ur ₅ -gin ₇ ḥu-mu-na-ab-be ₂ -a-ka
	He indeed spoke like this to him.
179	^d en-ki-du ₁₀ ib ₂ -ba lipiš bal-a-ni gu ₂ -ni im-ma-an-kud
	Enkidu in his rage and anger cut his neck. Two mss from Nibru have instead gu ₂ -ni im-ma-an-ku ₅ -re-eš.
180	šag ₄ ^{kuš} a-ġa ₂ -la ₂ -še ₃ mu-un-da-ġar
	He placed his head inside a leather bag. Instead of mu-un-da-ġar, one ms has im-da-šub and the two Nibru mss of line 179 have im-ma-ni-in-ġar-re-eš.
181	igi ^d en-lil ₂ -la ₂ -še ₃ i-ni-in-kur ₉ -re-eš
	They entered before Enlil.
182	ṛigi ^d en-ṛlil ₂ -la ₂ -še ₃ giri ₁₇ ki su-ub-ba(source: DA)-ni-ta
	After their kissing the ground before Enlil
183	^{tu} g ₂ a-ṛġa ₂ -ṛla ₂ bi ₂ -in-šub saġ-du-ni bi ₂ -in-ed ₂ -de ₃
	they let fall the leather bag and poured out his head.
184	igi ^d en-lil ₂ -la ₂ -še ₃ im-ma-ni-in-ġar-re-eš
	They placed it before Enlil.
185	^d en-lil ₂ -le saġ-du ^d ḥu-wa-wa igi ba-ni-in-du ₈ -a
	When Enlil looked at the head of Huwawa
186	inim ^d gilgameš ₂ šag ₄ bi ₂ -in-ṛdab ₅
	he spoke terribly to Gilgamesh. One ms has a variant to lines 181-186.
187	a-na-aš-am ₃ ur ₅ -gin ₇ i ₃ -ak-en-ze ₂ -en
	“Why have you done this?
188	[X X] X-am ₃ i ₃ -ak-en-ze ₂ (source: de ₃)-en [X (X)]
	...you did... One ms has instead the line ba-dug ₄ -ga-ke ₄ -eš mu-ni ki-ta ḥa-lam-ke ₄ -eš.
189	igi-zu-ne-ne-a ḥe ₂ -en-tuš
	He should have sat in your presence.
190	ṛnindaṛ gu ₇ -zu-ne-ne-a ḥe ₂ -gu ₇ -e
	He should have eaten food that you eat.
191	a naġ-zu-ne-ne-a ḥe ₂ -na ₈ -na ₈
	He should have drank the water that you drink.
192	[X]-ṛzuṛ-e-ne-ka me-te-aš ḥe ₂ -im-mi-ṛġal ₂
	He should have been honored.” One ms has the line [^d ḥu]-wa-wa e-ne me-ṛteṛ [...], another has ^d en-lil ₂ ki-tuš-a-ni-ta me-lem ₄ an-na-ni mu-na-[X X]-ba.
193	me-lem ₄ -a-ni 1-am ₃ a-šag ₄ -še ₃ ba-an-šum ₂
	He gave his first aura to the fields. Different mss have different orders for the distribution of the auras.
194	me-lem ₄ -a-ni 2-kam-ma id ₂ -da-še ₃ ba-an-šum ₂
	His 2 nd aura he gave to the rivers.
195	me-lem ₄ -a-ni 3-kam-ma ġiš-gi-še ₃ ba-an-šum ₂
	His 3 rd aura he gave to the reedbeds.

196	me-lem ₄ -a-ni 4-kam-ma ur-maḥ-še ₃ ba-an-šum ₂
	His 4 th aura he gave to the lions.
197	me-lem ₄ -a-ni 5-kam-ma e ₂ -gal-še ₃ ba-an-šum ₂
	His 5 th aura he gave to the palace. One ms has za-aš ₂ -da-še ₃ instead of e ₂ -gal-še ₃ .
198	me-lem ₄ -a-ni 6-kam-ma tir-tir-še ₃ ba-an-šum ₂
	His 6 th aura he gave to the forests. One ms has ḥur-saḡ-še ₃ instead of tir-tir-še ₃ .
199	me-lem ₄ -a-ni 7-kam-ma ^d nun-gal-še ₃ ba-an-šum ₂
	His 7 th aura he gave to Nungal (goddess of the prisons).
200	[...]-‘ma’ ni ₂ te-a-ni ba-an-TI
	One ms has instead ib ₂ -taka ₄ me-lem ₄ -‘ma’ X [^d]gilgameš ₂ X X DU AB DA DU X X.
201	kalag-ga ^d gilgameš ₂ mi ₂ dug ₄ -ga
	Mighty one... Gilgamesh... One ms has za ₃ -mi ₂ ^d en-ki-du ₁₀ [za ₃ -mi ₂] instead of mi ₂ dug ₄ -ga.
202	^d nisaba za ₃ -mi ₂
	Nisaba be praised. Instead of 201-202, one ms has the two lines (201) ^d ḥu-wa-wa [...] (202) mi ₂ dug ₄ -ga en-ki-du ₁₀ za ₃ -‘mi ₂ ’ [...]

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Chapter 4. Analogical Thought and Genesis 11:1-9

It is not the goal of this short, concluding chapter to produce a thorough commentary on the text of Genesis 11:1-9. Rather, after providing the philological basis for my conclusions, I hope to show the hermeneutical implications of reading the story as reflecting analogical rather than rational-instrumental thought.

Synopsis of the Passage

The opening, introductory statement of the Tower of Babel story takes us back to before the time of the dispersion of the language groups as delineated in the Table of Nations in chapter 10. One is struck by the contrast between vv. 1 and 9. In v. 1, there is but one language in all the earth. By verse 9 Yahweh has confused the languages of the entire earth. Given this bracketing of the story, one could claim that it is essentially a story about the movement from one language to many. However, the issue of language seems to be ancillary to the greater issue of the desire for renown

and the resistance to scattering. One wonders if there is not some sort of anti-urbanization polemic in the text.

The Text of Genesis 11:1-9

Limits of the Passage

I take the passage to be Genesis 11:1-9. What comes before is set off by topic and syntax. Topically because there is a change from the genealogy of the nations to the story of the tower; syntactically because of the switch in grammar from genealogy to narrative and the use of וַיְהִי as a narrative introduction. Genesis 11:1-9 is set off from what follows by a *tôledot* formula.

Text Critical Issues

Genesis 11:1-9 presents very little difficulty text critically. The LXX adds $\pi\alpha\sigma\iota\nu$ 'all' to the end of verse one (cf. v. 6). This does not change the meaning of the verse as a whole and I therefore disregard it as a late interpolation for the sake of clarity. However, Westermann claims "It is quite possible that the Gk preserves the original text here; the effect would be a smoother rhythmic parallelism."²²⁵ It is the smoothing effect that leads me to reject it as late. See below (v. 8) for the comments on the LXX tendency to smooth the text of Genesis.

In verse eight the Samaritan Pentateuch inserts the direct definite object marker before the word העיר. While this perhaps adds clarity, I do not consider it to be original (or necessary) because it is not present in any other Hebrew manuscripts of which I am aware.

A slightly more complicated text critical issue occurs at the end of verse eight, although it is not one that alters the meaning or interpretation of the passage. Both the Samaritan Pentateuch and the LXX have ואת-המגדל (αὐτὸν πύργον in the Greek). One could make the case that the LXX is merely smoothing out the text to match verses four and five which both have city and tower: ומגדל

²²⁵ Westermann 1994: 534.

עיר in verse four and ואת־המגדל ואת־העיר in verse five. This smoothing tendency is consistent in LXX Genesis. See for example the LXX of Genesis 1:9; 1:20; 1:28; 5:22; 7:1; 7:17; etc. However, one could also make the case that the LXX reflects the original and the absence of ואת־המגדל in the MT is a haplography.

There is to date no known manuscript evidence for Genesis 11 from Qumran of which I am aware.

Translation

- 1 ויהי כל־הארץ שפה אחת ודברים אחדים: Now the entire earth was a single language and a common speech.
- 2 ויהי בנסעם מקדם And in their setting out from the east/from of old
וַיִּמְצְאוּ בְקֵעָה בְּאֶרֶץ שִׁנְעָר they came to a valley in the land of Shinar
וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם: and they settled there.
- 3 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ And each one said to his neighbor,
הָבָה נִלְבְּנָה לִבְנִים “Come, let us make bricks
וְנִשְׂרָפָה לְשִׂרְפָה and fire them
וְתִהְיֶה לָהֶם הַלְבָנָה לָאֶבֶן and they will be bricks for building
וְהַחֲמֹר יִהְיֶה לָהֶם לְחֹמֶר: and bitumen will be for building material.”
- 4 וַיֹּאמְרוּ And they said,
הָבָה נִבְנֶה־לָנוּ עִיר וּמִגְדָּל “Come, let us build for ourselves a city and a tower
וּרְאֲשׁוּ בַשָּׁמַיִם and its top will be in the sky
וְנַעֲשֶׂה־לָנוּ שֵׁם and we will make for ourselves a reputation
כִּי־נִפְּוֶץ עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ: lest we be scattered upon the face of all the earth.”
- 5 וַיֵּרֶד יְהוָה לִרְאוֹת אֶת־הָעִיר וְאֶת־הַמִּגְדָּל And Yahweh came down to see the city and the tower
אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ בְנֵי הָאָדָם: which the sons of men built,
- 6 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה and Yahweh said,
הֵן עַם אֶחָד וּשְׂפָה אַחַת לְכָלָם “They are one people with one language for all of them
וְזֶה הָחֵלָם לַעֲשׂוֹת and this they have begun to do
וְעַתָּה לֹא־יִבְצֵר מֵהֶם and now nothing will be impossible for them
כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת: all which they consider to do.
- 7 הָבָה נֵרְדָּה וְנִבְלָה שָׁם שְׂפָתָם Come, let us go down and confuse there their

language

אשר לא ישמעו איש שפת רעהו: so that a man will not understand his neighbor.”

8 ויפץ יהוה אתם משם על-פני כל-הארץ And Yahweh drove them out from there upon the face of the entire earth

ויחדלו לבנות העיר: and they ceased to build the city.

9 על-כן קרא שמה בבל Therefore the place is named 'Babel'

כי-שם בלל יהוה שפת כל-הארץ because there Yahweh confused the language of the entire earth

ומשם הפיצם יהוה על-פני כל-הארץ: and from there Yahweh drove them out upon the face of the entire earth.

Text Notes

v.1 Interestingly, the phrase כל-הארץ is used five times (vv. 1, 4, 8, and 9 [2x]) in this short story. In vv. 4, 8, and 9 it is used to refer to the earth and in vv. 1 and 9 it refers to the people. An etic reading of the phrase would suggest כל-הארץ refers to the entire globe, i.e., the earth as we know it. However, כל-הארץ can be used to denote a limited region. For example, the summary report at the end of Joshua 6 reads: ויהי יהוה את-יהושע ויהי שמעו בכל-הארץ. Obviously, כל-הארץ is here used to denote the land of Canaan.²²⁶ Upon detailed consideration of the use of the phrases הארץ, כל-הארץ, כל ישראלי, and כל עמי-הארץ in the Hebrew Bible, Walton concludes, “The range of these various phrases precludes an unconsidered conclusion that the use of כל-הארץ in Gen. 11:1 necessarily implies that the entire population of the world was considered to be involved in the event there described.”²²⁷ In my opinion, it is difficult to ascertain whether the author of the Babel story had the entire earth or a limited region in view, although the etiological nature of the story could lend itself to understanding the entire known world to be in view.

אחד is here used as an attributive adjective.²²⁸ I am taking דברים as a collective. The pointing of אחת (אחת) rather than אחת (אחת) is the result of pause. Cf. אחי → אחי and see Joüon 2005: 86, 322. The interpretation of the phrase דברים אחדים is not without problems. It is easily understood that the

²²⁶ For further discussion and examples, see Walton 1981: 5-7.

²²⁷ Walton 1981: 7.

²²⁸ Joüon 2005: 525.

sentence as a whole is describing a situation of unity of language, to be contrasted with the diversity of language at the end of the story, but exactly what information דברים אחרים is adding is subject to debate. Rashi believed it to mean that the builders were unified in their plan to build. Later commentators (most notably Driver followed by Skinner) understand דברים אחרים as delimiting the phrase שפה אחת such that there was not only one language but only one dialect of that language. Other interpreters such as Cassuto take שפה אחת and דברים אחרים as a synonymous parallelism. In this view there is no significance to the use of the plural in the phrase דברים אחרים. Walton examines biblical (particularly the phrase ימים אחרים typically translated 'a few days') and Akkadian (*ištēnūtu*, the abstract plural of *ištēn*) parallels to דברים אחרים and concludes, “Neither the Hebrew nor the Akkadian data provide sufficient basis for coming to any conclusive interpretations of דברים אחרים. ...we feel that דברים אחרים should be understood to express something similar to, but slightly different than שפה אחת.”²²⁹ Thus he translates “one language and a single dialect (i.e., one set of words).”

v. 2 Note the unusual use of ויהי in two consecutive verses. Westermann contends that the second is the “real beginning of the narrative, while v. 1 is a prelude to it describing the situation.”²³⁰ In my opinion, the purpose of the first is not merely a prelude describing the situation but also serves to mark the narrative technique of backtrack and overlap. The events of 11:1-9 come before the dispersion narrated in chapter 10. A similar use of ויהי occurs within J at Gen 12:10-11. Elsewhere, see, for example, the beginning of Ruth. In my opinion, it is a mistake to see the repetition of ויהי as evidence of sources.²³¹

There is debate about whether מִקְדָּם should be translated 'from the east' (Westermann) or 'eastwards' (Jacob). The versions are consistent in translating 'from.' Others have translated 'from

²²⁹ Walton 1981: 9-10.

²³⁰ Westermann 1994: 534.

²³¹ See Baden 2009: 217 n. 28.

Qedem' or 'from of old.' Using Gen 13:11 as his primary evidence, Kraeling argues that the difference between 'from the east' and 'eastward' is to be based on whether the verbal action is performed by the subject or directed towards the subject.

ויבחר לו לזוט את כל ככר הירדן ויסע לזוט מקדם

He notes that in this verse Lot must have travelled 'eastward' because of the geography given in the context (i.e., ככר הירדן is east from their current location). Since the action (נסע) is performed by the subject (Lot), the destination is specified by מקדם and should therefore be translated 'eastward.'

I must admit that I am skeptical of this understanding of מקדם because it seems to defy the lexical data for the preposition מן. However, most commentators translate מקדם 'eastward' in Gen 13:11.

Returning to Gen 11:2, Childs, *contra* Kraeling, argues that מקדם should be translated 'from the east.' He suggests that the verb נסע “is followed more naturally by a determination of the starting point than of the goal.”²³² I would ask, “More natural for whom?”, and Walton has quite convincingly undermined Childs' argument through an examination of the use of נסע in the Old Testament, showing that נסע can be used with starting point, destination, or a generic act of moving.²³³

In terms of deixis, it seems clear that מן is going to mark the starting point. The direction travelled from that starting point is not contained in the lexeme. So, in Gen 13:11, Lot is traveling eastward from the east. מקדם marks his starting point and context allows us to determine that he moved still further east. It simply goes against the lexical evidence to translate 'eastward' in Gen 13:11 or here in Gen 11:2.

It should be noted that מקדם can be a temporal rather than spatial indicator. For example, Ps 74:12 reads, ואלהים מלכי מקדם פעל ישועות בקרב הארץ (And God is my king from of old...). See also Ps 77:6; 77:12; 143:5; Is 45:21; 46:10; Mic 5:1; Hab 1:12; and Neh 12:46.

²³² Childs 1955: 96.

²³³ Walton 1981: 10-11.

בקעה HALOT glosses 'valley-plain' and further specifies 'wide U-shaped valley with gentle sides'.²³⁴ This description obviously fits the land of Shinar between the Tigris and Euphrates nicely. In my opinion, the Ugaritic evidence for בקעה is not very helpful. *bq* occurs in an economic text and could be 'valley' or a toponym and *bq* is clearly a toponym.²³⁵

v. 3 The phrase איש אל-רעהו is also used in the Siloam Tunnel inscription:

*b*wd [*.hḥšbm. mnpm. t*] *hgrzn. š l r*w.

While [the excavators were wielding] their pick-axes,
each man towards his co-worker...²³⁶

v. 4 One should note that the *waw* on the cohortative (וַיַּעֲשֶׂה) is disjunctive, tying back to the beginning of the statement and denoting the purpose or the result of the building program.

Although grammatically it is difficult to tell if the *wa* clause ties back to the making of a name or the building, it is probably best to not be so atomistic and take the building and making of a name as one collective activity that will prevent scattering.

v. 5 Although tempted to take the perfect here as 'were building' rather than 'built' or 'had built' because of v. 8 which indicates they ceased building the city, I think the perfect is here indicating that enough was actually completed to call it a city, even though the continued building of the city is interrupted by Yahweh in v. 8.

v. 7 Gunkel claims, "the story of the erection of the tower exhibits multiple obscurities: in 11:7 YHWH speaks to other divine beings, without it having been said "to whom" that may be; v. 5

²³⁴ Koehler & Baumgartner 2001: 150.

²³⁵ del Olmo Lete & Sanmariín 2004: 234-235. HALOT, apparently unaware of the use of *bq* in KTU 4.247, only notes the *bq* toponym cognate.

²³⁶ Following Younger's translation and restoration of *.hḥšbm. mnpm. t*. See Lawson Younger, "The Siloam Tunnel Inscription: An Integrated Reading," *UF* 26 (1994): 534-35.

reports that YHWH has descended to earth; v. 6 reports that YHWH is once again in heaven without in the meantime having reported that he again went up thither.... Thus it follows that the primal legends, all together, present us with traces of a long tradition. They must have been narrated orally for a long time before their having been written down in Israel.”²³⁷ While his observations are good, I disagree with the conclusion he draws from those observations. In fact, I contend that his conclusions are typical of reading mythic literature through a post-mythical lens. As noted above, it is typical of ANE myths to have jumps of scene via telescoping of the narrative, what LaCocque calls “a minimizing process of geography and history that fits the mythic.”²³⁸ There may or may not have been a “long tradition” where the stories were “narrated orally for a long time.” I am not arguing for or against that point. What I am arguing against is using telescoping, a technique typical of ANE myth, as support for the claim.²³⁹

Excursus: The Supposed Mesopotamian Background of Genesis 11:1-9

In 1943 Samuel Noah Kramer published a fragmentary tablet of fourteen lines²⁴⁰ which form the beginning of the 'spell of Enki' contained in the epic tale 'Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta.'²⁴¹ Kramer claimed that the text “presents for the first time the Sumerian concepts of man's golden age, when fearless and unrivalled [*sic*] he lived in a world free from war and want.” He went on to say that the text demonstrated “that the Sumerians, like the later Hebrews, believed in the existence of a universal language and universal faith prior to the period of the diffusion of languages,” that the text gave a Sumerian explanation for the current diversity of languages in the world, and that “we have here the first inkling of a Sumerian parallel to the 'Tower of Babel' story of Genesis XI. 1-9,

²³⁷ Gunkel 2006: 98.

²³⁸ LaCocque 2010: 70.

²³⁹ See the similar conclusions in Baden 2009: 217 n. 28, although he goes on to just as hypothetically propose two separate *traditions* rather than sources, as originally proposed by von Rad in his commentary.

²⁴⁰ CBS 29.16.422.

²⁴¹ Kramer was able to identify CBS 29.16.422 as belonging to Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta because the first five lines are present in *SEM* 14 ii 10-15.

although it must be stressed that to all indications the Sumerian explanation of the distribution of mankind into peoples speaking diverse languages was quite different than the Biblical.”²⁴²

Kramer read and translated the relevant lines as follows:²⁴³

136. u₄-ba muš nu-gál-la-àm gír nu-gál-la-àm
137. ka nu-gál-la-àm²⁴⁴ ur-maḥ nu-gál-la-àm
138. ur-zír ur-bar-ra nu-gál-la-àm²⁴⁵
139. ní-te-gá su-zi-zi-i nu-gál-la-àm
140. lú-lu₆ gaba-šu-gar nu-um-tuku-àm
141. u₄-ba kur-šubur ki-ḥé-me-zi
142. eme-ḥa-mun ki-en-gi kur-gal-me-nam-nun-na-kam
143. ki-uri kur-me-te-gál-la
144. kur-mar-tu-ú-sal-la-ná-a
145. an-ki-nigin-na uku-sag-si-ga
146. ^den-líl-ra eme-aš-àm he-en-na-da-[si-il]²⁴⁶
147. u₄-ba a-da-en a-da-nun a-da-lugal
148. ^den-ki a-da-en a-da-nun a-da-lugal

136. In those days there was no snake, there was no scorpion,
137. There was no hyena, there was no lion,
138. There was no wild dog, no wolf,
139. There was no fear, no terror,
140. Man had no rival.
141. In those days, the land of Šubur, the place of plenty, of righteous decrees,
142. Harmony-tongued Sumer, the great land of the decrees of princeship,
143. Uri, the land having all that is needful.
144. The land Martu resting in security,
145. The whole universe, the people in unison,
146. To Enlil in one tongue [gave praise].
147. In those days the...lord, the...prince, the...king,²⁴⁷
148. Enki, the...lord, the...prince, the...king,

Of particular import for the parallel to Genesis 11 is the phrase eme-ḥa-mun ki-en-gi contained in line 142. Kramer (in 1943) originally translated it 'Harmony-tongued Sumer' and took it to be indicative of a time in the distant past where all mankind, despite the designation 'Sumer,' spoke the

²⁴² Kramer 1943: 191-2.

²⁴³ Using line numbering of the epic as now known rather than of CBS 29.16.422 which Kramer uses in his article.

²⁴⁴ The phrase ka nu-gál-la-àm is broken off of CBS 29.16.422 but restored from duplicates collated since Kramer 1943.

²⁴⁵ Lines 136-8 only take up two lines on CBS 29.16.422.

²⁴⁶ Later discovery (Ash. 1924.475) showed the verb to be dug₄. See Kramer 1968: 109.

²⁴⁷ Kramer originally thought a-da was short for ad-da 'father' (see Kramer 1952: 15). This view came under critique and he left it untranslated in his 1968 article (see Kramer 1968: 109 n. 8). There is slim lexical evidence that a-da means 'riddle' (OB Kagal lines 451-52). More recently, a-da is thought to mean 'fight,' 'contest,' or 'ambition.' See Klein 2000: 568 n. 29 and Civil 1987: 18.

same language. He called the apposition to ki-en-gi 'incongruous' and noted that his translation 'remains doubtful,' but went on to claim that from the contents of CBS (UM) 29.16.422, "meager as they are, it is not unreasonable to deduce that Enki was displeased with this universal sway of Enlil and that he took action to disrupt it, action which led perhaps to the dispersion of mankind and the diffusion of languages."²⁴⁸

The evidence Kramer used in arriving at the translation 'harmony-tongued Sumer' is as follows. The noun eme means 'tongue' and by extension 'language.' This is uncontested. Ħa-mun can be an adjective meaning 'harmonious,' thus the literal translation 'harmony-tongued.' Kramer noted the occurrence of the phrase eme-ħa-mun in IV R² 19.2 45-6 being used as a descriptor of Anunnaki speech. For Ħa-mun he noted two occurrences in Gudea. The first is šir-ħa-mun (Cyl. A XXVII 12) and the second is im-ħa-mun (Cyl. A XXVII 20). Kramer believed a translation 'harmonious' or 'soothing' fit the context of Gudea.

A complete review of the literature on Gudea is outside the domain of this paper. Suffice to say that Kramer is correct in stating that 'harmonious' fits the context. Jacobsen thought Ħa-mun should be translated 'conflicting' or 'mutually opposed.' This is reflected in Averbeck's translation of šir-ħa-mun as 'antiphonal songs'²⁴⁹ Edzard translated it 'harmonious hymns.'²⁵⁰ As for im-ħa-mun, Averbeck unhelpfully (but perhaps wisely) translated 'ħa-mun clay' and Edzard rather creatively came up with '[clay]...artfully applied.' The most recent monograph devoted to the cylinders does not cite the relevant passage.²⁵¹

In 1946 Thorkild Jacobsen critiqued Kramer's supposed parallel between Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta and Genesis 11 in a lengthy review article of Kramer's *Sumerian Mythology*.²⁵² Jacobsen's methodological critique of Kramer centered on Kramer's search for biblical parallels.

²⁴⁸ Kramer 1943: 194.

²⁴⁹ Averbeck 1987: 674.

²⁵⁰ Edzard 1997: 86.

²⁵¹ Suter 2000.

²⁵² Samuel Noah Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology: A Study of Spiritual and Literary Achievement in the Third Millennium B.C.* (Philadelphia, 1944).

Jacobsen believed the Sumerian material was not yet sufficiently understood on its own terms to be claiming that “the form and contents of the Hebrew literary creations and to a certain extent even those of the ancient Greeks were profoundly influenced by them [Sumerian compositions].”²⁵³ Jacobsen went on to say that CBS 29.16.422 “would have been differently interpreted by Dr. Kramer if he had sought Mesopotamian rather than biblical parallels for its phraseology.”²⁵⁴ In addition to IV R² cited above, Jacobsen noted the use of *eme-ḥa-mun* in the bilingual V R 50 i 79-80 where the divine judge Utu is being addressed:²⁵⁵

eme-ḥa-mun mu-aš-ge₁₈ si ba-ni-ib-sá-e
li-šá-an mit-ḥur-ti ki-i iš-tin šu-[me tuš-te]-šir

Mutually opposed testimonies thou dost straighten out as (were they but) one single statement.

At this point, Jacobsen's argument is worth repeating in full:

The reference is to the judge's task of finding the facts of a case. In the phrase *lišan mithurti* (*lišan*, sg. with collective force [see Delitzsch, *HW*, pl 386], is in the construct state before the genitive of characteristic *mithurti* [Inf. I.2 of *m-ḥ-r*; the -t- has reciprocal force]), the word *mithurtu* is used in its original meaning of “being mutually opposed” and not in its derived meaning of “matching one another,” “corresponding to one another” (this latter shade predominates in the related adjective-adverb *mitharu* and *mithariš*), as may be seen from its Sumerian counterpart *ḥa-mun* which denotes “conflicting,” “mutually opposed” (cf. *ri-ḥa-mun*, “whirlwind” [Akkadian *ašamšutu*, Deimel, *ŠL*, 86.103], literally “(a) mutually opposed blowing” [cf. *ri*, translated as *zīq šabri*, *ibid.*, 86.16], a clashing of two winds blowing in opposite directions).

On this basis, then, *eme-ḥa-mun* in the passage under consideration would seem to mean not “harmony-tongued” but “(of) mutually opposed tongues” in the sense of “comprising people of widely different opinions.” In corresponding sense, as equivalent to “expression of opinion,” one will naturally interpret “tongue” also in the last line of the passage and translate: “to Enlil *with* one tongue gave praise.” The line then expresses that on one thing the motley of countries and people mentioned could all agree: praise to Enlil. It is unity of mind, not unity of language, with which the ancient poet is concerned.²⁵⁶

In 1952, Kramer changed his translation of *eme-ḥa-mun* from 'harmony-tongued' Sumer to

²⁵³ Kramer 1944: viii quoted in Jacobsen 1946: 148.

²⁵⁴ Jacobsen 1946: 148.

²⁵⁵ Note that Jacobsen mistakenly identifies the lines as 69-70, perhaps because line 69 begins with *eme* and 70 begins with *li-šá-nu*. A quick glance at the cuneiform to check line numbering could easily result in this mistake. Regardless, one should note that V R 50, a copy of K 4872, is actually quite broken at this spot. All that is clearly legible is ...[n]i-ib... of line 79 and ...[i]š-tin šu-m[e]... of line 80. Jacobsen was able to quote the lines because of joins made later. See Borger 1967.

²⁵⁶ Jacobsen 1946: 148.

'many-tongued' Sumer. He did not give a full explanation for his translation but simply stated, "For the 'golden age' passage, cf. Jacobsen, *JNES* 5: 148 and *JAOS* 68: 7, note 47."²⁵⁷

The issue of the Mesopotamian background to Genesis 11:1-9 took an interesting turn in 1964 with the publication of the influential Anchor Bible *Genesis* commentary by E. A. Speiser.²⁵⁸ Speiser claimed literary dependence on the part of J, but he did not use Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta to make his point. Rather, he turned to *Enuma Eliš*. "What inspired the present biblical theme in the first instance was not monumental architecture [i.e., a ziggurat] but literary tradition. We need look no farther than the account of the building of Babylon and its temple that is given in *Enūma eliš* VI, lines 60-62."²⁵⁹ The relevant lines with Speiser's translation are as follows.

šat-tu iš-ta-at li-bit-ta-šú il-tab-nu
šá-ni-tu MU.AN.NA ina ka-šá-di
šá é-sag-il mi-iḫ-rit ZU.AB ul-lu-u re-ši-šú

The first year they molded its bricks.
 And when the second year arrived
 They raised the head of Esangila toward Apsû.

Speiser mistakenly claimed, "Apsû is, among other things, a poetic term for the boundless expanse of the sky conceived as one of the cosmic sources of sweet water."²⁶⁰ This misunderstanding of Apsu derives from his mistranslation of the phrase '*mi-iḫ-rit* ZU.AB' as 'toward Apsû.' Better is the translation 'the counterpart to Apsu.' Speiser took *mi-iḫ-rit* to be from *maḫru* 'toward,' whereas the *i*-class vowel clearly indicates *miḫru* 'counterpart.'²⁶¹ He went on to claim that since Apsu is the boundless expanse of the sky, when the text says, 'They raised the head of Esagila toward Apsu' what they were claiming is that the head/top of the tower was raised to the sky/Apsu. It was this

²⁵⁷ Kramer 1952: 49. Kramer's statement has the potential to be misleading since *JAOS* 68 is actually an article by Speiser, not Jacobsen. Speiser's comments, while pertaining to the so-called 'spell of Nudimmud,' are not relevant to the translation of *eme-ḫa-mun*.

²⁵⁸ Speiser actually published his argument eight years earlier in *Orientalia*. However, it was the publication of the Anchor Bible commentary that allowed the idea's entry into the mainstream of biblical scholarship. See Speiser 1956.

²⁵⁹ Speiser 1964: 75.

²⁶⁰ Speiser 1964: 75.

²⁶¹ See CAD M I s.v. *maḫru* and CAD M II s.v. *miḫru*. Also note Jacobsen's discussion of the related *mithurtu* quoted above.

concept that the biblical author supposedly borrowed for the phrase *וראשו בשמים* in Genesis 11:4.

Aside from the fact that the analogy breaks down when the text of *Enuma eliš* is properly understood, it seems a bit far-fetched to assume that claiming a tower has its top in the sky is automatically an instance of literary borrowing. Many people look at the Sears Tower in Chicago and claim its top is in the sky. They are not imitating *Enuma eliš*. As Edzard says, “these comparisons simply tend to impose themselves on us.”²⁶² In fact, if 'top in the sky' is sufficient evidence to deduce literary borrowing, then why did the author of Genesis 11:1-9 borrow from *Enuma eliš* and not Warad-Sin's building inscription, which reads, “He [Warad-Sin] made it [the temple E₂-eš-ki-te] as high as a mountain and made its head touch heaven”?²⁶³

In 1968 Kramer essentially republished his arguments from his 1943 article arguing for the Mesopotamian equivalent of a 'golden age,' this time equipped with a tablet from the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. He opened his article by stating his desire was to bolster Speiser's argument for the Mesopotamian background of Genesis 11:1-9.

Modern commentators have for the most part followed the line of reasoning in Kramer and Speiser *via* Westermann. Arnold claims, “*Esagil* was described in the *Enuma Elish* as built with its top raised as high as Apsu [heaven].”²⁶⁴

Even though there are ancient Near Eastern parallels to certain motifs of Genesis 11:1-9, Gordon Wenham has noted, “no good Near Eastern parallel to the tower of Babel *story* is known.”²⁶⁵ However, I would like to take this opportunity to point out a poignant yet neglected parallel to the motif of making a name.

In Gilgamesh and Huwawa (see chapter three of this dissertation), a Sumerian story dating to the Ur III period (2114-2004 BC), Gilgamesh, the famed king and builder of the walls of Unug

²⁶² Edzard 1987: 11.

²⁶³ Frayne 1990: 208.

²⁶⁴ Arnold 2008: 120.

²⁶⁵ Wenham 1987: 236 (emphasis mine).

(Uruk),²⁶⁶ sets his mind on the Zagros mountains to the east of Sumer, the place of cedar felling and the place where one attains immortality *by making a name for oneself*. Gilgamesh's servant Enkidu advises Gilgamesh that the place of cedar felling is the domain of the sun god Utu and that any plan to journey there and harvest cedars needs to receive Utu's blessing.

Upon making the appropriate ceremonial allowances, Gilgamesh approaches Utu and seeks his blessing. After reporting his plan to make a name for himself by felling cedars, Utu asks Gilgamesh why he is concerned about making a name for himself since he's already quite famous. In a stunning line that expresses the core concern of the poem, Gilgamesh tells Utu that he cranes his neck over the city wall—the very city wall he achieved a name for himself by building—and the sight depresses him because he sees that the same fate, death, awaits all men.²⁶⁷ From an ancient Near Eastern perspective, making a name for oneself, i.e., achieving fame, is how one achieves eternal life. Utu pities Gilgamesh and supports his undertaking by giving him seven heroes to support him on his journey.

It seems to me that the Mesopotamian's viewed making a name for oneself honorable, whereas the Bible views making a name the work of Yahweh, unfit for humans to do on their own. Note the contrast between Yahweh's response to the city builders of Genesis 11 and his promise to Abraham in the very next chapter. Yahweh thwarts the efforts of the city builders but tells Abram that if he is obedient to go to the land he calls him to then Yahweh will make his name great. Recall that making a name is viewed as a means to eternal life in the ancient Near East. If the Genesis story ended at Babel there would be no hope of eternal life. We need the story to go on so that we are not left with a sense of nihilistic hopelessness, like Gilgamesh craning his neck to look beyond his own achievements. Eternal life is possible, but it is the work of Yahweh.

Conclusion: Viewing the Babel Story as Reflecting Analogical Rather than Rational-

²⁶⁶ Unug epics typically show the city at enmity with foreign, national enemies rather than local enemies. This leads Berlin to conclude that, *contra* Renger, that Unug was used to symbolize the entire nation. See Berlin 1983: 17.

²⁶⁷ GHA 25 bad₃-da gu₂-ĝu₁₀ im-ma-an-la₂

Instrumental Thought

This dissertation has sought to propose that ancient Near Eastern myth serves the function of providing a vehicle for 'speculative philosophy via analogy.' There are three components to that statement:

First, myth works by analogy. Analogy uses models and metaphor. If I say my wife is a ray of sunshine, you don't expect that you can analyze her emanations of photons. When Jesus says, "I am the gate," we don't expect him to be made out of wood with hinges. In the same way, when Genesis 1 presents the cosmos as a tabernacle or temple, we don't expect to find evidence of a solid roof in the sky, even though that's the very word used in the text.

Second, myth is speculative. By 'speculative' I do not mean that it is highly subjective or opinionated guesswork. Rather, it theorizes and hypothesizes on topics of interest to the author. The fact that those topics are often universally pondered contributes to the appeal of mythic works, even in a heavily 'scientific' age. My use of the word 'speculative' is not a statement against (or for) the truth of the material, just as the phrase 'theoretical physics' does not mean 'false physics' to modern physicists.

Third, myth is philosophical. It is not mere fancy or whimsy. It takes a very serious and rigorous approach to its analysis of the issues. But it is philosophy done via analogy, which is different than the discursive philosophy more common to westerners.

In some ways the need to read analogically is an issue of focus. For example, Walton has gone to great lengths to demonstrate that the first creation narrative is concerned with functional rather than material origins.²⁶⁸ By changing the focus from material to function the emphases of the story change as well. Naming becomes more important than making something out of nothing. Ordering becomes more important than the process (the *how*) used to order. Whether or not one agrees with Walton's conclusions, it is easy to see how changing the *focus* has altered interpretation.

²⁶⁸ See John Walton *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011) and his earlier literature cited there.

Another way to say the same thing is to address what questions are being answered. In rational-instrumental discourse the question more often being addressed is *how*. In analogical (mythic) discourse the question of paramount concern is *why*. I am making a generalization to which there are of course exceptions, but the generalization still holds. To return to Walton's example, the emphasis of Genesis 1 is not *how* God created the cosmos. Instead the emphasis is *why*, and Walton's answer is divine rest. This is a perfect example of how popular (not scholarly) interpretation, largely ignorant of comparative materials, has largely missed the main point of the passage by asking the wrong questions of the text as a result of reading it rational-instrumentally rather than analogically.

Moreover, the reader of an analogical narrative is supposed to see himself in the story. The danger of reading an analogical text rational-instrumentally is that we turn a text that is supposed to be about 'us' into a text solely about 'them.' History by its very nature is a text about the other that allows us a certain objectivity of distance from the events. Even if we accept Huizinga's definition, that history is about 'our' past,²⁶⁹ we are still allowed to view the story as an etiology of how we got where we are rather than a story in which we take part. Myth pulls us in and demands that we realize we are as much a part of the story as the tower builders *בְּקִדְםָּה*. Past interpreters have intuitively grasped this; my goal is to provide scholarly justification for doing so.

Reading the Babel story analogically allows us to see that the primary point is not the etiology of the diversity of languages, although that etiology is certainly present in the story. The primary focus of the story is our own tendency to erect towers, monuments reaching to the sky that perpetuate our own name because somehow we believe that is from whence our worth, value, and, ultimately, our eternal life will derive. Yahweh thwarts those purposes of man because ultimate

²⁶⁹ Huizinga defines history as "the intellectual form in which a civilization renders account to itself of its past." Joahan Huizinga, "A Definition of the Concept of History," in *Philosophy and History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer*, ed. Raymond Klibansky and H. J. Paton (Harper & Row 1936, repr. 1963), 9. Although historiographers have moved beyond Huizinga, I cite him here because of the popularity of his definition to bible scholars. See, for example, John Van Seeters *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

worth is to be derived solely from him, only he can make a name for us. Important here is the comparison of the tower builders, who desire to make a name for themselves, and the beginning of the Abraham narrative recorded in the following chapter, where Yahweh declares the *he* will make Abram's name great.

There has been much discussion on the 'problem' of myth in ancient Near Eastern historiography in general and the bible in particular.²⁷⁰ In my opinion, realizing the mythic nature of the story is a positive, not a problem. I agree with LaCocque, who calls the elevation of the story to myth a *promotion*.²⁷¹ Viewing myth as a problem is ethnocentric unless we realize that the problem is a western one, not an ancient Near Eastern one.²⁷² Early discussions on the topic tended toward the ethnocentric but of late there has been more of a realization that the problem is for us, not for the ancients.

In sum: “Israel used ancient Near Eastern mythical categories to state its theology, convinced as she was that the only appropriate language for theology is analogical.”²⁷³

²⁷⁰ As exemplified by Sparks 2000.

²⁷¹ LaCocque 2010: 69.

²⁷² See the discussion on myth versus history in the Introduction.

²⁷³ LaCocque 2010: 70.

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